

Home Group study: week beginning 4th October 2020

Jonah: God Cares

Tim started his sermon on Sunday with a question: 'what are you like when you don't get your own way? So: What are you like when you don't get your own way?

Read: Jonah 4: 1-11

Discovery

We've seen some fairly strange events in the Book of Jonah, but this last chapter seems to be the strangest of the lot! As a recap, Jonah was so determined not to give the evil Ninevites the chance to repent that he dashed off to the opposite end of the known world. God brought him back to Nineveh (by a slightly unconventional means!), Jonah warned the Ninevites, as instructed by God, that their city would be destroyed in 40 days and the Ninevites, instead of rejecting Jonah's word, immediately (and miraculously) repented.

Although Chapter 4 is only a short chapter — indeed Jonah is a very short book — it breaks down into four sections: what are they?

(Crib sheet! 1-4: Jonah is angry with God; 5-6: Jonah goes off in a huff and God provides a vine for shelter; 7-8: God takes away the vine and instead provides a scorching east wind; 9-11: God confronts Jonah).

Understanding

Verses 1-4

Why is Jonah 'greatly displeased' and 'angry'? How might we sum up his prayer? (*'Told you so!' might be a good answer!*) What does verse 3 suggest to you about Jonah's character?

Look at **Exodus 34: 6-7**. Here God is speaking to Moses. Do his words in verse 6 sound familiar? As well as Jonah, these words are quoted by Nehemiah, Joel and Nahum and occur three times in the Psalms. How does God intend us to take those words? How does Jonah use these words? Does this seem to us a perverse way of thinking about God's love and mercy?

What do we think of the words in the second part of Exodus 34: 7? In verse 4 of the Jonah passage, God asks Jonah if he has any right to be angry. Do you think he has? Does Exodus 34: 7 justify his anger? If not, why not?

Verses 5-6

Why do you think Jonah took himself away? Might there be more than one reason?

What is he hoping to see?

Jonah has taken himself off in a bit of a strop and is still hoping God will act in the way Jonah thinks he should. How does God react to this rebellious behaviour (v6)?

What is Jonah at last happy about? What does that say about his priorities?

Verses 7-8

Years ago we used to sing a song, 'Jehovah Jireh, my provider'. 'Jireh' is one of the many Hebrew names for God, meaning provider, and the song was, not surprisingly, a very joyful song of praise. We love thinking of God as our provider. God provides four times in Jonah, once in Chapter 1 and three times in this passage (the original Hebrew word for 'provide' was the same in all four instances). What does God provide in Jonah 1: 17? And what did he provide in verses 6-8? Was each occasion a reason to rejoice?

Discuss whether God's provision can be both a positive thing and a negative thing.

Verses 9-11

We've already seen in verse 6 how delighted Jonah is that God has provided him with a vine to shade his head. Now in verse 9 he's hopping mad because God has taken it away! Why do you think he is so cross at the loss of the vine? What is the lesson that God is teaching Jonah through the vine in verses 10-11?

Application

In the first sermon in this series Tim gave us some idea of how thoroughly evil and vile the Ninevites were. Was Jonah right to want to see them punished?

Jonah's desire to see the Ninevites punished blinded him to the true purposes of God, to forgive and save them. What sort of things make us angry and judgemental? Can our righteous anger blind us to the true purposes of God?

In verse 10 God puts his finger on Jonah's character. God's concern is for the 120,000 people of Nineveh; what is Jonah's concern? God had provided Jonah with a nice little personal comfort. Jonah, God points out, hadn't lifted a finger to receive that comfort: then God chose to remove it. What sort of little comforts do we allow to get in the way of fulfilling God's purposes? Have we earned a right to those things, or could God decide to take them away? How can we put them in the right perspective?