

Jonah 4:1-11 CC 9am 16th Aug 09

As we draw to the end of P Factor have thought about the message of the Prophet and the opposition to the Prophet this morning we look at how the prophet's message or work was fulfilled in Jesus. Now in P Factor both Jeremiah and Elijah have been voted out leaving Daniel, Isaiah and Jonah to fight it out.

As we think of Daniel the great man of prayer who stood against the culture of his day we can see real echoes in the life of Jesus. As Daniel spoke of the vision where he saw, "there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven"(Dan 7:13), we are aware how Jesus used those words to describe himself and his return.

Then we think of Isaiah and the prophecy of the child to be born to be called, "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God". We think of the great Servant songs and not least Isaiah 53, and the description of the suffering servant, the one who "was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities," (Isa 53:5).

These show clearly how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy. However it is not that clear with Jonah in fact just the opposite and so, being perverse, I want this morning to look at Jonah and see how his prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus.

Jonah is different from the other prophetic books in the OT in that we don't actually have much of the message of Jonah, it's more a narrative of what he did and from what he did we see a marked contrast with Jesus.

We are aware of Jonah's disobedience from Chap 1, how God called him to go to Nineveh and he went to Tarshish. We read how he was caught in a storm, thrown overboard and swallowed by the big fish. Three days later he came alive out of the fish, and there we have a link with Jesus who spoke of "the sign of Jonah", looking to Jesus' own coming back to life and coming out of the tomb. Finally Jonah went to Nineveh and preached. Now in Chap 4 we see Jonah twice get angry He got angry v1 when God has had compassion on the people of Nineveh when they repented. Then v8&9 he got angry because the vine under which he had been sheltering was destroyed. Both were indicative of Jonah's attitude towards Nineveh and its people.

Let me ask when you think of Basingstoke and its people how do you react – what goes through your mind?

I was in London some time back. Let me think with you about some of the people I saw. I went into a pub for lunch. In one corner there were about eight young men off a building site or such like drinking, playing cards, very noisy and swearing a lot. At the bar I ordered a drink and a meal from a barmaid who wasn't really interested. It was all she could do to take the order and when she finally brought the food it was almost slammed down in front of me. Later I sat for a while in a Square and watched people go past. So many people of different sorts, none of whom I knew. I went into Selfridges and as I was looking at a display of electrical equipment, the salesman asked if I needed help. I said I did and he advised me was very helpful and sold me something I wanted and was suitable and not something that was most expensive. I think back now about those people. Some I didn't identify with, one I took a positive dislike to, many who drifted past me and one who helped me. If I were in the city when it comes to sharing the gospel it doesn't take too many minutes to think whom I would share it with. Not the young men, they were not my sort. Not the barmaid, she was rude and deserves all that is coming to her. Not the people walking past, I have no contact with them but with the one who helped and seemed decent.

For Jonah thinking of Nineveh all he seemed to be able to think was a pagan people who were not his sort and who did not deserve anything from God. When you think of Basingstoke and its people do you perhaps think something not dissimilar?

Jonah was detached from Nineveh – it didn't mean anything to him and so while he could get angry over the demise of a vine that had been giving him shade he couldn't feel anything for a city and its people. How different the action of Jesus who as he approached Jerusalem wept over the city.

Jonah was angry because he was detached from the city of Nineveh. Jesus wept because he was attached to Jerusalem and its people. Perhaps if Jonah had been sent here he would have had the same reaction – I don't know. Perhaps he would because Jerusalem held the people of God while Nineveh was full of gentiles, of pagans.

Jonah's anger in the first instance was because God had acted in mercy.

It is almost unbelievable isn't it? In 3:4 he has preached and, 3:10, in response to his preaching he has not been hung drawn and quartered, nor has he had that even worse response of "Lovely sermon vicar"! No he has seen the word taken by God and worked in people's lives and the whole city turned round. The people heard accepted and repented. The great King of the Assyrian empire got up from his throne laid aside his royal robes covered himself with sackcloth and ashes. He repented. He took himself off, not just the throne of Assyria, but the throne of his own life and he put God there instead. We speak with amazement at Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and how 3,000 were saved that day. There may were more than 120,000 in Nineveh who were saved that day because God had compassion and removed the threat of his wrath from them. It must have been one of the greatest evangelistic missions of all time. We read that the angels rejoice over one sinner that repents there must have been the party to end all parties in heaven that night.

Yet Jonah was angry. Jonah knew what God was like and he didn't like it. He knew God was merciful. He knew God would forgive the people of Nineveh and that was why he didn't want to go to Nineveh. Here he is saying "I knew you'd do this to me God. I knew that if I came here and spoke your word of judgement you'd act to bring these people to repentance and then you'd forgive them. I know what you are like. Your word God said go to Nineveh but my word was that if I did this would happen and this is why I didn't want to come. I said it would happen over my dead body and now I wish I were dead." It is an amazing prayer isn't it?

It is the prayer of someone steeped in their Jewish identity, who cannot see anything good in the gentiles – they are not worth saving.

Yet we must note the words he spoke there in v2, "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." It is here we see Jonah being fulfilled in Jesus because Jonah had got it right – he didn't act in a right way on what he knew, but what he knew and said was right. God is a God of grace and this act of grace towards Nineveh shows the nature of God and more was a precursor of a greater act of salvation, for God so loved not just Nineveh but the world and would send not a disobedient prophet but his obedient son into the world, who came "proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15). The same message but with a different attitude.

Here is the key to how Jesus fulfilled Jonah and the key is that word love. Jonah went and preached because he was almost forced to. He went

with reluctance because he knew the nature of God and didn't want to see that love shown towards these pagans who meant nothing to him. Jesus came in love to a hostile world and in love died for that world. Jesus did the same as Jonah and preached a gospel of repentance but Jesus did it because people mattered to him which they didn't to Jonah.

God's question to Jonah as a result of his anger in v4 is left in the air as Jonah went and sat down outside the city ready to see its destruction, v5. In v6 we see this vine grow which provided Jonah with shade as he sat and waited but the vine withered and Jonah suffered and again he's angry. Then in v10 and 11 God used that anger over a vine which Jonah had neither planted nor tended to explain why God was concerned for a people he had made and who we were lost – the love of God for the world he has made but which has turned away from him.

It was that concern and God's grace which moved God to send Jonah to the people of Nineveh and that concern and grace which moved the Father to send the Son into the world as a rescuer. So we see the fulfilment of Jonah in Jesus.

But we can't stop there because this has something to say to us.

The question God asked at the end of the book, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (4:11) demands the answer yes. The city was full of people God had made and as their creator he was concerned for them.

The other day I was cycling by a pebble beach. On it I saw a small cairn of stones. What is it with us that when we see something like that we revert to being a child and want to knock it over. I resisted the temptation because I thought that it would sadden whoever had made it. How much greater would God's sadness have been over Nineveh and 120,000 people he had created?

Well we don't get the answer from Jonah because the point is not Jonah's answer but ours.

Yes God should be concerned for the world he has made and we know that he is. He showed it by sending Jonah to Nineveh and he has shown it in a greater way by sending Jesus into the world. The question is do we share God's heart for his world?

Back in April we had that drama presentation of the life of James Hudson Taylor. As part of the drama we were told how Hudson Taylor was addressing a Christian conference. He explained to the listeners how once, while travelling in a boat from Shanghai to Ningpo he heard a splash and a shout that meant a man had fallen overboard. Getting on deck he saw his friend Peter was missing. "Yes," exclaimed one of the boatmen unconcernedly, "it was over there he went down." They stopped the boat and he found some fishermen with a net and asked for help. "It is not convenient," was the reply. "We are busy fishing." "Never mind your fishing. Come, only come at once," Taylor urged them. "I will pay you well." "How much?" "Five dollars." "Too little," was the reply, "we will not come for less than 30 dollars." "But I haven't got that much with me. I'll give you all I have." "How much is that?" "Fourteen dollars". With that they came and one the first time of passing the net through the water they came up with the missing man. But all of Taylor's efforts at resuscitation were useless. Life had been sacrificed to the callous indifference of those who might have saved it. As Hudson-Taylor told the story a burning sense of indignation swept over the audience. But as he went on conviction struck home all the more deeply. "We condemn those heathen fishermen. We say they are guilty of a man's death because they could easily have saved him and did not do it. But what of the millions whom we leave to perish and that eternally?

Equally we can condemn Jonah's attitude and his anger at God's grace. However the question is are we not the same?

Over the last two weeks we have seen the message of the prophets. We looked at Isaiah and saw his message to a people who had turned away and forsaken God calling them to repent and return. Last week we saw the opposition the prophets faced and we looked at how Elijah faced really opposition from Jezebel and more insidious opposition from Ahab but how Elijah stood and spoke the truth.

Today we see through Jonah and Jesus how, in a world that has forsaken God and is opposed to the gospel of salvation, God looks to his church to stand and speak the truth and how he looks to his people to feel with his heart for those who are lost and be willing to speak to that world the gospel message. But are we doing that?

Are we following the pattern of Jesus, obedient to the Father and willing to sacrifice all that people may know the love of the Father? Or are we like Jonah detached from people and ultimately indifferent to the fact that they are lost? As we look at Basingstoke and its people do we feel a bit like Jonah detached – they are nothing to do with me?

We are called as disciples to follow Jesus in every way and Jesus parting words to his disciples and through them to us was to go and make disciples. Actually no it wasn't was it? It was "Go and make disciples *of all nations*."

I think that pretty much includes everyone.

God's grace and compassion knows no bounds and the gospel is the gospel for all the message of the angels at the birth of Jesus, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you." (Luke 2:10) Jesus came as a Saviour a rescuer for all people's and as such fulfilled the work of Jonah and sets the pattern for us.

No one is too bad for the gospel, no one doesn't deserve the gospel and certainly there is no one who doesn't need the gospel. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son. He so loved Chineham, Lychpit, Old Basing and Basingstoke that he sends you and me. The question for us is do we love people as God did? Does it matter to us that our neighbours are lost and facing the wrath of God?