

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon

The Book of Jonah
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 28th February 2009

Historicity

- Jonah also mentioned in 2Kings 14:25. Story of Jonah quoted as fact by Jesus (Mt 12:38-41; 16:4,17; Lk 11:29-32). Very important- a 'type' for Christ's resurrection.
- Supernatural sign- God either kept him alive, or resurrected him. We do not need verification from other sources which may be spurious (e.g. James Bartley urban myth). Sperm whale?/great white shark?/dinosaur?- we do not know. The sign was powerful enough to cause an empire to repent.
- Nineveh- capital of the Assyrian Empire- fell to Babylon in 612BC but was excavated in 1845 by Sir Henry Austin Layard- found the circuit of it's walls to be 7.5 miles. Found 2 huge mounds in the city (one called by the locals 'Nebi Yunis'='prophet Jonah'). The other mound Sennacherib's palace, full of winged bulls (cherubim) and sculptured panels containing cuniform writing. Also excavated the royal library. Later Harmuzd Rassam excavated the palace of Ashurbanipal there and found over 100,000 tablets of records including their own accounts of the flood and creation. Much found at Nineveh now in the British Museum.

Introduction

- Jonah had a destiny from God to fulfil. In order to fulfil this destiny he needed 1. great courage, 2. to make sacrifices and 3. to be motivated by love. We also will need these qualities if we are to fulfil the destiny that God has for our lives.

1. Courage- Jonah 1:1-2

- Matchbox illustration of facing our fears.
- Assyrians masters of warfare- especially psychological. Impaling, skinning alive, collecting heads, putting rings and cords through people's lips to control them and putting out their eyes. Propaganda and psychological pressure, tribute.
- Jonah had to face the enemy- 'living with the enemy'- the equivalent of challenging Sadam Hussein or Hitler to their face. Would we have done it?
- Who/what is your Hitler you have to face in order to fulfil your destiny and be used effectively by God? Work colleagues/peers/family? Fear of failure? Crowds? The microphone? The unknown? Rejection?
- Me- was afraid of public speaking, but overcame my fears to obey God. You can do same.
- Our verse for the year Joshua 1:6-'Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.'

2. Sacrifice- Jonah 1:3

- If God spoke to you and said 'I am calling you to move to North Korea as an Evangelist' I wonder if the thought of a well earned holiday to sunny Spain might be more attractive. Tarshish- thought to be Tartessus in Spain (opposite direction to Nineveh), near straight of Gibraltar. Obedience would mean sacrificing own desires to obey God. Also Jonah had no desire to dwell in the enemy's company- he was famous for predicting blessings for Israel (see 2Kings 14:25)- Israel was home to him- this was outside his job description.
- How many sacrifices are you prepared to make to obey God? Jonah was trying to bury his head in the sand by running away from God's call- even the desire to die

was a form of running away from the responsibility God was giving him (see Jonah 1:12, 4:3, 8)

- Me- God gave me story of Jonah when He called me to move to Wales away from my 'comfort zone'. What are your comfort zones- entertainment, TV, home etc. Jesus said 'not my will but yours be done' and called us to pray regularly that the Father's 'will be done'. Our comfort ultimately is knowing we are ultimately in God's will, no matter how uncomfortable His will appears at times.

3. Love- Jonah 4:10-11

- The message of Jonah is the sanctity of life- all people are important in God's eyes. Jonah had his priorities wrong- he was more concerned about a plant than 120,000 people who did not know right from wrong (this is what the saying regarding left and right hands meant). The sailors in Jonah 1:13-16 were more concerned about the sanctity of life than Jonah and the situation caused them to fear God and repent. Nineveh was more concerned about the sanctity of life than Jonah and repented at the message.
- Where are our priorities? Does evangelism to us seem to be a chore? Does our heart break for the lost just as God's heart does? How far are we prepared to be inconvenienced for those who do not know God? Who are we praying for?
- Jesus was criticised by Pharisees and teachers of the law for hanging out with the 'sinners'. Could we be accused of the same?
- Nineveh was transformed by the message (the gospel really, because Jesus was 'one greater than Jonah'). Sadly, about a century later they hardened again and Nahum the prophet prophesied their end- so finally that the city would take 25 hundred years to be rediscovered.

God wants to use us to bring about community transformation, just as happened at Nineveh. If we are to see this we need to be people of courage, sacrifice and love.