

Scripture Text

Jonah 1:4-17

Context

Jonah, a renowned prophet of God (2 Kings 14) is sent to preach against Nineveh, the capital of the brutal and oppressive Assyria. The Assyrians were the cruel enemies of God's people. Jonah would reasonably have had two good reasons to not go to Nineveh: Firstly, it would have understood to be a suicide mission to go and enter Nineveh and declare God's judgment upon them. Secondly, should God be merciful to them, Jonah might well be seen as a traitor to his own people.

Observation and Meaning

- How do the sailors respond to the storm? Consider their emotions, actions, and interaction with Jonah.
- How effective are the prayers of the sailors? Why weren't their prayers effective?
- Where is Jonah through all this? What does this tell us about Jonah's love and care for the pagan sailors? How does the sailors care for Jonah in v13 compare with Jonah's lack of care for them? What is surprising about this?
- When the sailors hear from Jonah what they must do to be saved, how do they respond? With faith, or by trusting in their own (hard) works? How effective are their good, hard works?
- What is the only way that they can be saved?
- The sailors end up worshipping God at the end of the chapter. Why is their response so surprising compared to Jonah's response to God throughout the chapter?

Big Idea

Only through the preaching of the Gospel can people far from God be saved. God's people have been entrusted with this word for the salvation of the nations.

Connecting to the Bible's storyline

God's people (Israel) have received grace in order that they might be a light to the nations. Whilst they never perfectly fulfill this call, Christ comes as the true Israel in order that the nations might see his light and be saved by Him.

Sermon Outline

1. The perishing sailors' fear (v5-6)
2. The sleeping prophet's indifference (v5-6)
3. The sailors' futile efforts (v5-6, 11-14)
4. Salvation by grace alone (v11-15)

Application

- What is the news that you have for other people who are desperately looking for good news and to save themselves? How are people in your life trying to save themselves?
- How does the desperation of the sailors and the futility of their prayers to pagan gods help you to understand the importance of sharing the Gospel with those in your life, even with those who seem to be good and moral people?
- The irony of the passage is that the person who should have worshipped God (Jonah) didn't, and the pagan sailors come to faith. How does this encourage you to share the Gospel with people who you would naturally think are very unlikely to come to Christ?
- Who has God put in your life that you are meant to share the Gospel with? Pray and ask God to empower you to share Christ with them.

Guide for Study Leaders

Use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text.

Context

Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.

Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation & Meaning

Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. "for", "if", "therefore"), repetition, dialogue, narrative, OT quotations, etc.

To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author's purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?

Helpful questions to ask include:

Who is writing and to whom?

What is the situation of the author and of the readers?

Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?

Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application

Apply God's word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviour by asking good "heart" questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?

Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?

Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.