

‘Calling, Sin, Mission, Love, Conversion.’

Jonah 1:3-16. Also Luke 15:12-32.

*Lord, before your eyes, everything is uncovered and laid bare: speak your word – living and active, sharper than any double edged sword; let it penetrate our souls and spirits: Examine our thoughts, and by your Holy Spirit renew the attitudes of our hearts, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.*

Jonah. He was to go to a great city with a message from a great God. He refused and so a great wind came. God will not let him go. Similar to the story of the lost son. The son leaves the presence of the Father – he goes to a distant country – and the Father, waits and wants him to return. God who calls Jonah – is the same God as the Father whom Jesus described – a gracious and compassionate God.’

The story of Jonah also echoes Phil 1:6, “<sup>6</sup>being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

What God begins God finishes, was one of the soundbytes from that first session of Discipleship Explored. God began something with Jonah, and as we see, God will finish it with him...

### **RUNNING - Calling**

*3 But Jonah got up and went the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God. He went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board, joining those going to Tarshish—as far away from God as he could get. (The Message translation).*

Three times the place Tarshish is mentioned. Repetition to the Western eye is often feels, boring. Get to the point we feel in

scripture sometimes. To the Hebrew eye, it catches attention, it emphasis a point. Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty, is not just saying 'holy' three times, it says to the Hebrew – Yahweh, God **is that holy**. Tarshish is mentioned three times -= to underscore, Jonah just isn't going to Nineveh.

Why Tarshish? He is running away from the presence of Yahweh – the Covenant God of Israel. He wants to go to a place where he hopes and does not expect there to be fellow believers, so God's word cannot come to him again.

Joppa was never part of Israel's kingdom, until the days of the Maccabbeans and Jonathan. He chose a port where the people he is likely to meet, the ship he is trying to hire, are likely not to be Israelite. Jonah 'He does not want to preach against Nineveh, to give them any chance of repentance, and he thinks he has a chance to avoid the restatement of the divine call by running'.

Jonah knew it was a golden age for prophets in Israel. There were plenty about. Did he say to himself: "For me, [this] goes against all I stand for. If I withdraw from my people, and exile myself, in distant lands, surely God will appoint another prophet, surely he will prefer a willing prophet instead of me now. I won't have to see something I've worked against all my life, come to pass...' Was he saying – what God began, he will finish with someone else, like Moses asked God 'please send someone else!'

God's call is much broader than to a ministry. Often it is said 'a person is called to ordained ministry'. A friend of mine and Jolanda, Matthew, who is ordained, married to Jo, with two daughters. Matthew worked in the same area as I did, Said: he felt he had at 4 callings. He was called to be ordained yes. But he was called to be a husband. He was called to be a father. He was called to be a

Christian – a follower of Christ. These three callings came above his calling to be ordained and the call to follow Christ, above them all.

God's will for us can be understood in two parts. His revealed will. His secret will. The revealed will of God is the Bible. To know the will of God – the call of God - we read the Word of God.

There is also the secret will of God. The *secret will* refers to his infinite wisdom, his yet unrevealed vast loving profound plans for you and us, where you or I may be in 5 years, the exact date of the second coming, what our career should be and so on.

There is *his revealed will* in the Bible; there are the times, through scripture, the voice of the Spirit, the counsel of the saints, circumstances, common sense – his previously *secret will* is revealed to us.

Mark Twain. "It isn't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." At times we know people like Jonah. Maybe **we** are like Jonah. God has called you to a ministry, an action, and you are resisting it. This is not me putting ideas in your head. You know if you are resisting him. Or you are running. You know the call, yet you don't want it. The direction, the movement, the person - you know what God is asking of you. You are not alone. Plenty have been in a place such as this. Myself, I remember I said in my heart, when the idea began to stir, that I may have a calling to be ordained, I said, to God over my dead body – and I guess something in me had to die ...

## **STORM - SIN**

'Then the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea and such a violent storm arose.' He and everyone goes into a great storm. Sin does have ramifications. To be clear. It does not mean that all problems, suffering, difficulty is due to our sin. No. The story of Job knocks

that on the head, and Jesus declares that point again when he is asked why is the man born blind in John 9.

But sin does have ramifications. People can say – we can treat our bodies as we like, and we expect to have good health. We can't treat people – spouses, children, friends – as we want or treat them indifferently, and expect the friendship / intimacy to remain.

We can't each live selfishly and expect society to flourish – a lesson we have learned in this pandemic, we act as we do, socially restricting, even if we may not agree with it, but we do it for the benefit of others as well ourselves...

Jonah's ramifications for his sin are seen immediate and clear, and others are affected. Often sin's ramifications are more like a dose of radiation. In the superb series Chernobyl, about the terrible nuclear disaster, there are tragic images in the first episode as people stand on a bridge near by watching the pollution go up, not knowing what they are breathing in, as ash falls on them, the fire crews who go in to put out a fire not knowing it is a reactor venting to the atmosphere. Sin can be like that – it is like the dose of radiation that only later do we see the symptoms, the ramifications within us or around us. Sin has ramifications.

### **The Boat - Mission**

Jonah is with a crew of people who are racially and religiously different from him. There were storms and there were STORMS. The ship crew are afraid. . 'each cry out to their own god'.(v5).

The Jewish religious teachers were trying to understand what it meant to practically follow God. One statement was – love God and love neighbor. Another statement was from Leviticus. "Be holy as I am holy." And that led them to reflect – what does God do, and therefore to follow God, means to do what he does or do it in

the way he does. The entire book of Jonah is a theological reflection upon the missionary, loving and compassionate character of God, and a reflection on Jonah (and therefore us),

how does our character reflect the compassion of God, how do we reflect our missionary God – do we want to be vehicles of his compassion in a dark, painful, struggling world which is full of idols and false gods being worshipped?

Jonah appears to be totally unconcerned for others, yet the crew are the ones interested in saving everyone's lives. 'But Jonah had gone below deck'. Even when the captain asks him to pray – it appears that he does not. The Captain comes "how can you sleep, get up and call on your god!" the captain in the Hebrew uses two words – ARISE CALL. The SAME words that God had said to Jonah – 'Arise, call Nineveh to repentance.' God sent his prophet to point the pagans to himself, yet now it is a pagan who points the prophet to God. 'Why aren't you using your faith for the public good?' the captain asks him.

Where we live, we are all in the same boat. We struggled with corona. We all live with crime in a town, experience poor health, loss of job, we are all in the same boat with non Christians. For these hours, Jonah is in the same neighbourhood with these sailors – yet while Jesus, moved into the neighbourhood and acted with grace and compassion - Jonah isn't interested in those around him where life has taken him and his choices have placed him. Jonah fled because he did not want to work for the good of the non believers. He wanted to serve exclusively the interests of believers. He is still acting in this way on the ship. He will not share what he says in his fish belly prayer: 'those who cling to worthless idols, forfeit the grace that could be theirs.' (2:8). Jonah had forgotten God's will for Abraham, of land, of offspring, **and of blessing** to the nations and families of the world. (Genesis 12).

Keller says: "Jonah does not bring the resources of his faith to bear on the suffering of those around him." (Keller, Jonah p.38). He does not share about the Creator of heaven and earth. He does not seek to love his neighbor using his time, skills, energy. God commands both. Jonah does neither. To love others, can be costly, time consuming, disruptive to meet personal or emotional needs. Jonah seems to act opposite to the good Samaritan. Can that be like a church or an individual Christian. Sleeping, unaware of the needs in a community or city around it? When we become aware, what difference do we make? How can our private faith help the public good... Mission is about Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

### **Love - Sacrifice**

'What should we do to you?' They asked Jonah. 'pick me up and throw me into the sea'. His attitude becomes: 'You are dying for me but I should be dying for you.' (Keller, p 60). 'It will become calm'. He knows God is gracious and compassionate, he will not punish these innocent sailors for their actions. The storm will stop. This time Jonah speaks relying and shaped by the character of God he knows.

The sailors ignore him! They try to row back - and when they see no other way to do it, in fear, and after prayer, they throw him in...

'Pick me up and throw me in'. A true pattern of love is sacrificial.. You take the burden so another does not. You do what needs to be done for the other, at cost to you. Jonah says 'I will take the fury of the storm, the waves, so you don't need to.' A modern day example is parenting. For our children to develop successfully, their social skills, their emotional well being, is shaped by the time we give. It means years of sacrifice on the behalf of parents. As parents, "we must lose much of our freedom now or they will not

become free, self sufficient adults later.” (Keller, p61). Sometimes, we may set a time in our minds – when they go to school, then I get my old life back or my time. Parents watching know it isn’t like that – parenting means **years** of sacrifice. For many of you as parents, this Corona period, has been costly juggling your work, other commitments and also becoming the home teacher, doing what needs to be done so your children benefited.

But know, in this costly parenting, you follow the example of Jesus and you following his footsteps. Jesus came into our world. He went to the cross, he who had no sin became sin for us, he became the greatest example of sacrificial love. He was innocent, he took what we were to face. A God who substitutes himself, who sacrifices himself and suffers so we can go free. Sacrifice.

### **Sailors - Conversion**

‘The raging sea grew calm’. They were seized by a new fear. Fear of the Lord. Vows were made, sacrifices made. The words echo Psalm 50. Are they converted? Well you can turn to God when you are in danger. Yet after the danger has gone, the religion goes. These men made their vows and sacrifices *after* the danger had passed. It suggests it is out of worship they do it – they do not seek God for what they need. They worship him for his greatness and power.

What is conversion? What was the last time you were converted? In 2012 in the UK, 250000 people stopped smoking through the help of the NHS Stop Smoking Service. They converted from being smokers to being non smokers. Between 2005 and 2013, in the UK, 1.5m people took up a sporting activity they did at least once a week. They were converted from sofa sitters to sportspeople. We know they were converted because we see a change in their behavior, in their pattern of life, of what they do or didn’t do. The sailors. There is a changed understanding about God, followed by a change in actions. They do not sacrifice to their gods. Changed

thinking leads to changed doing. Daniel Timmer writes: Jonah's anti-missionary activity has ironically resulted in the conversion of non-Israelites." (Timmer, A Gracious and Compassionate God, p75)

There are consequences for people who decide to follow Jesus and convert to Christianity. Jesus talked about a wise man who builds his house on a rock – hears his teaching and puts it into practice. In the Great Commission he says: 'Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them and **teaching them** to obey everything I commanded you'. Jesus expects his followers to put what he teaches into practice – to love neighbours and enemies, to love God, to forgive others, to serve the poor, to pray for the sick, to be faithful, to be holy, to be generous with time and money.

This reminds us. When we reach out to people with the good news of Jesus – we have to be clear with people that Jesus does not just invite us to agree in our heads that we believe something. Instead he challenges us to change the way we live. These changes may not be comfortable and may well lead us into conflict with people we love and who love us. The strength to make the changes come from the Holy Spirit – the very presence and power of God. Converting to Christianity means changing the way we live, and we need to be up front and clear about this with people who are exploring and what it means to follow Jesus.

Calling,  
Sin,  
Mission,  
Love  
Conversion.'

Then Yahweh assigned a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish's belly three days and nights.

Lord,  
To whom shall I go, send me.  
My sin, heal the wounds I have caused in others  
Open my eyes to the needs and struggles around me  
Help me love like you loved me  
Convert me each day afresh to you and your ways.  
Amen.