

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## IN THE BELLY OF A FISH

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19TH MARCH 2021

I've been thinking about the story of Jonah this week and how it relates to us. Let's look at the story of Jonah and what we can bring out of it. This is about God's will being done. Full stop.

The story starts with a man called Jonah being told to go to a town that he really didn't like and preach to them. He was to tell them that they should repent or else the town would be destroyed. Jonah decides that this isn't such a good idea and tries to run away in a boat. The Lord sends a storm and the sailors try all their gods to save them. Eventually they draw lots to find out whose fault the storm is and find that it is Jonah. Then they ask what they should do to stop the storm.

Let's read from Jonah 1:11 "The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him."

So my first point is that even when we try to go against what God wants, God will still use it for good. Those sailors began to praise God because Jonah had been on the boat. If Jonah had chosen to do what God had wanted, He may have saved the sailors in another way, but the point is that God will use whatever we do for His glory. Even when we disobey.

However, Jonah's disobedience, and similarly ours, had consequences. The storm wasn't an easy thing to go through and neither will our storms be easy to

go through. Not that all of our storms will be our fault but sometimes there is a consequence to what we do. Further to that Jonah was then trapped inside a fish for three days which I imagine would not be pleasant. Then after that Jonah was thrown up on a beach. Now I personally have never been vomit but I have thrown up. I can imagine that being in it would not be particularly fun.

Jonah was brought round to doing what God wanted him to do, but because he disobeyed the journey wasn't an easy one. God gives us the opportunity to choose to go another way, but His way is always best. What He wants to happen will happen anyway, whether it be by our actions or another. God knows His plan and He wants us on board, but He won't force you. We need to have the courage to follow what He wants to do.

So Jonah spends these uncomfortable days and nights in the stomach of the fish and during this time he repents. He turns his face back to the temple, or back to the way that God wants him to go and God allows Jonah to get out of the fish. From that point on Jonah goes and does what God had asked him to do. Jonah goes to Nineveh and preaches that God will destroy the city unless they repent.

And the almost unbelievable happens. What we would always want and hope for with those around us who don't know God actually happens. The king orders a decree to be sent out that all the people are to follow God's way. More than that the king orders the people to fast and mourn and repent. The people follow the decree and God doesn't destroy them.

Then comes what I think is the funniest complaint in the bible. Jonah is upset because God did not destroy them. This is in Jonah 4: But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, \* and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more

than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

This is how the book of Jonah finishes. Jonah was very angry about God being merciful. I guess some of us might have been like this when we have seen people we think deserve to get punished and they get good things instead. This has definitely been the case for me in TV programs. I hate seeing the people that I don't like getting a happy ending. There's something in us that wants good people to get good things and bad people to get bad things.

But God's point is that it's His choice. At the end of the day none of us are truly good people. None of us deserve the salvation that we are given. God chooses to save us out of His bountiful love, mercy and grace. It's His choice and His will to save whoever turns to Him. \* So we should pray for and love both our friends and our enemies, both those who do good to us and those who do evil. They are all God's children and we should rejoice when anyone repents and turns to God.

I hope that Jonah eventually saw that. I hope he repented of his ungraciousness towards his brothers and sisters in Nineveh. And I hope as we go forward that we get on board with what God wants us to do. I hope that we follow His will and take the pleasant route that He has planned for us rather than choosing the belly of the fish.



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## BEKAH BAKER



*Coach House Church*

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn