

## Prayer

We thank You, O Lord, for all the good things in the world; save us from being ungrateful, or from making too much of our troubles and forgetting our blessings. Give us a true strength of spirit, so that by Your help we may learn to live as those who trust in the promises of God, incarnate in Jesus. Grant us the assurance of faith by which we know that in the end, love must conquer all. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Look in a mirror, and thank God for the fact that He loves you and gave His life for you*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray this week** about witness. Ask the Lord to bless any programme of witness being used by your church; pray for all involved.
- Seek forgiveness for the sins of God's people in the world today
- Pray for those who are exploring the seas in a quest for knowledge

## Meditation

I was wondering when the Lord might speak to me,  
and then it happened:

I was working at my desk,  
and He said 'Follow me';

I was in the middle of a meal,  
and He said 'Share with the poor';

I was thinking about myself,  
and He said 'Love your neighbour';

I was checking my bank balance,  
and He said 'Give sacrificially';

I was telling a friend about my work,  
and He said 'Share the Good News';

I was relaxing at home watching the news,  
and He said 'I am the truth';

I was enjoying a drive in my car,  
and He said 'I am Lord of all';

I was living life to the full,  
and He said 'I died for you';

I suddenly came to a stop,  
and He said 'follow me' ... again.

---

## Bible Study - Jonah 1:7-10

<sup>7</sup> The sailors said to each another, 'Let's get on with it and cast lots, and then we will know who of us is responsible for the disaster that has come on us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> So they said to him, 'Speak to us; why has this calamity come on us. What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? And what is your nationality?' <sup>9</sup> 'I am a Hebrew,' he replied. 'I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.' <sup>10</sup> This terrified them, and they said to him, 'What is it you have done!' (the men knew that he was fleeing from the LORD's presence, because he had told them so).

## Review

Jonah had fled from the Lord's call on his life by seeking to travel as far away from the land of Israel as he could. He boarded a ship in order to travel by sea to Tarshish, and this was either on the North African coast beyond Egypt or as far away as Spain, depending upon which archaeological evidence you are prepared to believe! Whatever the destination, Jonah planned a long journey and was set against doing the Lord's declared will for him to preach against the sins of Nineveh (see yesterday, 1:1-6).

The first thing that the fleeing Jonah discovered was that the Lord was in control of the sea as well as the land of Israel, and this is the message of our passage today. A storm had raged on the sea, and the people of that day would have attributed this to the action of the 'gods'. The captain of the boat found Jonah sleeping in the hold, or possibly hiding, and challenged him; the pagan captain and his god-fearing sailors were intent upon discovering the reason behind their misfortune (1:6), and their suspicions were aroused by one who ignored what were to them, clear signs that 'the gods' were at work.

Our passage today begins with the sailors casting lots. This was their means of identifying the source of their troubles, and confirming what they thought about their passenger; he was quickly identified by lot as the source of their trouble. To us, casting lots may seem to be a rather peculiar manner of discerning God's will, but it was commonly used in Old Testament times (see Leviticus 16:8, 1 Chron 24:5f, Psalm 22:18). Today, we might regard such activity as something akin to divining (a word that means 'predicting the future by means of magic'), but the ancients of the Old Testament believed that God was as much able to influence such random acts as perform any miracle. Indeed, the priestly practice of discovering God's will by 'Urim and Thummim' is an example of this (Ex 28:30; 1 Sam 14:41); in this instance, one of two stones was taken from the vestment of the high priest in order to indicate a 'Yes' or a 'No' answer from God to a particular question. In our story, the casting of lots was used to correctly identify Jonah as the cause of the storm raging around the ship.

Jonah's saving grace was that he accepted the accusations made against him by the drawing of lots, and he was ready to confess what he had done to the sailors. By now, he also recognised that God was following him even as he travelled, for he confessed belief in 'the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land'. By his very confession, he acknowledged the stupidity of his actions, but this did not deal with the fear lying deep in his heart; he was still afraid of doing what the Lord required of him, and there are no signs that Jonah was ready to do what God wanted of him and preach against Nineveh.

In this part of the story a contrast is clearly drawn between the sailors and Jonah; the sailors were in awe of God because of the power of the storm, but Jonah, an Israelite who believed in God, was able to declare his faith (1:9) but not demonstrate it, such was his fear. Something similar can sometimes be true today. When faced with difficult circumstances, those of other faiths or of no faith will sometimes look at the behaviour of Christians and be mystified as to why they do not appear to be obedient to the God they say we believe in. It is a serious accusation, and proved to be so for Jonah. He himself had to go through much more than the ridicule of the sailors before he faced up to the consequences of disobeying God, as we shall find out next time we study Jonah.

If something of Jonah's story is true of us, then hopefully, we will learn to turn to the Lord before we face dire consequences of an equivalent kind!

---

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Would you feel comfortable with casting lots to determine some matter to do with God's will? If not, why not?
2. Jonah declared a brief confession of faith to the sailors (1:9). Can you put a declaration of your faith into one sentence?
3. How far have you managed to try and escape the Lord's will before He has brought you back into His paths again?

## Discipleship

### Discipleship issue in this text

- *Christian testimony before others in the world*
- *Confession of faith and identity*

### Personal comment:

*Like many other Christians, I have sometimes been in the position where people of no faith have acted with more discretion and understanding of a situation than other Christians; it is embarrassing. The fact that this scenario is recorded in scripture is something of a comfort, and we can be assured that the rest of the story of Jonah records his journey from disobedience to obedience; but it goes further than that, as well!*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Are there any circumstances in which you would find it difficult to identify yourself as a Christian? This is a tough question, but it may be pertinent. The Lord may be asking us to identify ourselves even though we are reluctant; it can make the difference between His will being done or not done.*
- *Pray for missionaries you know who face the constant challenge of doing God's will through their work. Pray that the Lord will strengthen them for what they do.*

## **Final Prayer**

Lord, teach us to be wise, knowing that our days are numbered. You are the Author of our lives and our Saviour from death, and in that confidence may we live in peace, reconciled to Your will and untroubled by the cares of this world; through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN

---