

## Prayer

Father in heaven, mould us day by day into the likeness of Your Son Jesus Christ, and deepen His life within us. Send us as witnesses of the Gospel into a fragile world of tragedy and strife, and through our witness touch the hearts of people with Your love so that their lives may be transformed. AMEN

## ***Prayer Suggestions***

### Prayer ideas

*Remember that Jesus died on a Cross; ask Him to forgive your sins, and bless you*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray this week** about political parties. Pray for your political parties. Ask the Lord to bless those who seek to serve you through them
- Pray about the threat from nuclear armaments and work to reduce it
- Give thanks for any successes you have been blessed with today

## Meditation

You are everything to me, Lord Jesus Christ;  
May I never turn away from Your faithful love.  
And life to receive the benefits of Your grace:

Teacher of Life;  
teach me love, and test my skills;

Divine Physician;  
heal my body, and strengthen my bones;

Perfect Friend;  
stay with me despite my misdemeanours;

Supreme Leader;  
guide me through the paths of life;

Holy Comforter;  
calm my spirit, and grant me peace;

Great Preacher;  
challenge and inspire me again and again.

Lord Jesus Christ; You are everything to me;  
My faith is in the Cross and the empty tomb;  
And the power of Your Holy Spirit, released.

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## **Bible Study - Jonah 3:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> Now, for the second time, this Word of the LORD was given to Jonah; <sup>2</sup> "Get up, go to that great city Nineveh, and preach to it the message that I will give you." <sup>3</sup> So Jonah did as he was told by the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city, requiring a journey of three days. <sup>4</sup> So Jonah began to walk around the city on the first day and shouted out, "In only forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed!" <sup>5</sup> Then the people of Nineveh believed this was from God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.

### Review

When the Word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, it came after the whole experience of being thrown overboard from the boat, swallowed by a whale and then deposited unceremoniously back on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea! During that time Jonah had heard the Lord speak to him and he had been snatched away from the gates of Hades (or the 'jaws of death' as we might say, today) by the Lord so that he

could once again fulfil the call that was placed upon his life. As many others have, before and since, he was saved for a purpose, which is part of the point Jesus was making when He spoke about the 'sign of the prophet Jonah' (Matt. 12:39, 16:4f.) and the purpose that lay behind His own life and ministry.

It was not surprising that Jonah should run away from the call of God to go to one of the largest known cities of the day, and one that was considered a dangerous enemy of the state of Israel. To go to the capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, was a frightening prospect for an Israelite. Certainly, if Jonah had thought he could escape from God by sailing out to sea, he was hardly likely to be confident that God would be with him if he travelled to Nineveh, many miles in the opposite direction, to preach the word of God to this vast pagan city! The word of the Lord to Jonah this second time had not changed, however, and sobered by the experience of God's deliverance, Jonah was obliged to follow what the Lord said, but the Lord did not tell Jonah exactly what he had to say until he arrived there! You can imagine understand what it must have felt like for Jonah to approach Nineveh, the great sinful city (1:2) and sworn enemy of the state of Israel.

Fascinatingly, scripture describes Nineveh as being so large that it would take three days to travel through (3:3). This sounds very large indeed, but the Hebrew expression may in fact refer to the time it would have taken to explore the place, rather than to either walk around or go from one side to the other (as is sometimes suggested). This is only a rough guide to the size of this large ancient city, and whichever way we interpret the text, we are intended to know that this was no small assignment! Jonah walked through the city for one day by himself and shouted out (literally) the message that came to his lips from the Lord (3:4). It was to be the only prophecy he uttered in Nineveh and is one of the briefest of all the Old Testament Prophets, being only eight words long! 'In only forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed!'

The remarkable thing about this message is that although Jonah only managed to get around a third of the city, and in addition, he spoke as a foreigner, all the people of Nineveh responded immediately to Jonah's message immediately! This may be hard for us to understand, but in the ancient world where prophets were heard more frequently and were listened to with interest, it wrong of us to dismiss this possibility out of hand. The remarkable thing as far as scripture is concerned is that anyone responded to this message at all, because it was a foreign city. It appears that not only did a remarkable thing happen when these people repented of their sin, but their response was a sign for Jonah, who, as a faithful Jew, would have found it hard to believe that the Lord was interested in the repentance of pagans!

We realise that the story is only just beginning to 'warm up'! All manner of things were beginning to happen with all kinds of implications, and the Lord was just beginning to do an important and powerful work. This is what the Lord sometimes does to us; He performs the totally unexpected. Now, the question raised by the story is this: why should the Lord be interested in the repentance of large numbers of non-Jewish people? We will have to read on to find out in detail, but we must surely realise almost immediately, that the Lord God has been interested in the eternal fate of all people since the beginning of time. Jonah only knew about God's interest in his own people and he needed to know that God was bigger than that, and so did God's people. This is why Jonah is a prophet not so much of the people of Israel, but to the people of Israel.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Are there times when you have been frightened by the prospect of sharing the Gospel? Why has this been so?
2. Look up 'Nineveh' in a Bible Dictionary or other resource, and find out what you can about this city.
3. Before reading the rest of the prophet Jonah, can you answer the question about why the Lord might have been interested in the repentance of pagans?

## Discipleship

### Discipleship issue in this text

- *Being obedient to God*
- *God's interest in the whole of humanity*
- *God's concern to call all to repent*

### Personal comment:

*Jonah was right to be scared. So might we be. As a teenager, I recall attending a mission in an English town, and whilst there I was thrust onto a soap box near the market place by the clergyman organising the*

event, being told without warning "tell them the Gospel, son"! I was petrified! Nevertheless, I did what was asked of me, and it was an important part of my journey towards preaching the Gospel.

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Take this opportunity to find out some more about mission organisations that work both in your own cities and towns and throughout the world. You can find many of them by using the internet. Most will be attempting to bring God's word to people who do not know the Gospel, some will be more concerned about speaking out the Gospel others less so. Try and find out why.*
- *Pray for people who for whatever reason, feel like Jonah being somewhat isolated in Christian witness and scared of their responsibilities before God.*

## **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; may we live in the confidence and peace of our faith in You, reconciled to Your will and untroubled by the cares of this world; through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN

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