

## Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, save us from ourselves, we pray, for we can often be our own worst enemy. Teach us that love is more powerful than the gates of hell, that grace is more beautiful than power or prestige, that faith is rooted in Christ and nothing else, and that hope is found in You alone. Lead us on the path of your narrow way, we pray; AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Pray about your work. Pray about the people with whom you work, and what is done each day.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the organisation of the church:** *Pray for the Christian denomination to which you belong, or the church group or organisation you attend. Bless those who work to maintain its discipline.*
- *Give thanks to God for the children you know, in church and family*
- *Praise God for the way he has guided his people in times past*

## Meditation

Why is everything so complicated?  
Is it because we fail to see simplicity?  
Bound, as we are, by human limitations,  
Having left the Creator out of His Creation?

Why is everything so pressured?  
Is it because we take things on ourselves?  
Afraid to let the Spirit really take control,  
Cautious about trusting Him for all, at all?

Why is everything so demanding?  
Is it because we let things take control of us?  
Instead of giving them over to our Lord  
And receiving His help to achieve our goals?

Jesus, let us find our rest in You ...  
You who controls all the world around us!  
You whose Spirit breathes the fresh air!  
You, who gives Yourself to us, completely!

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## Bible Study - Jonah 4:1-6

<sup>1</sup> But Jonah was extremely unhappy with this, and he became very angry about it. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD and said,

'O LORD! This is exactly what I said would happen while I was still in my own country! This is why I ran away from You to Tarshish in the first place. I knew You to be a God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, full of great love, and ready to put a stop to just punishment. <sup>3</sup> So now, O LORD, take my life away from me, I beg you; for I might as well be dead as go on living.'

<sup>4</sup> And the LORD said, 'What reason do you have for being angry?'

<sup>5</sup> Then Jonah left Nineveh and sat down on east of the city. There, he made himself a shelter, and sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would happen to the city. <sup>6</sup> The LORD God provided Jonah with a gourd plant, and He made it grow right over him to give his head some shade and to relieve his distress. Jonah was very happy about the plant.

## Review

Now we know the truth! Jonah was unwilling to go to Nineveh because he knew something of the true generous nature of God (4:2), and he feared that by preaching repentance God would indeed be merciful to the hated people of Nineveh! In this passage, Jonah is clearly the reluctant messenger, and having delivered his message and seen that it was accepted (3:6-10), he was now angry with God for 'using' him. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, the most dangerous of all Israel's enemies, and Jonah was utterly confused to see God save people who were the enemies of his own people. How could he return home and say he had done such a favour to Israel's enemies? Jonah was angry, and he strongly objected to God acceptance to Nineveh's repentance.

What could be in the heart of one who complained in this way? And was it true that God could treat His own people in this way? It would be very easy for us to smile a little as we read this, for Jonah knew nothing of what we now think of as mission or evangelism. The Gospel was many years ahead of his time, and he knew nothing of God's latent desire to be known to all humanity. How could poor old Jonah know anything better?

However, the point is more complicated than this. God was indeed revealing to Jonah his love for all humanity, but Jonah did not understand this because he believed that Israel had a special relationship with God. Jonah was unnecessarily prejudiced, and God had to be very careful with Jonah. His method was to challenge Jonah with some questions, as we find in our passage today, in order to help him see things from a different view point. For example, He challenges Jonah with the question; '*What reason do you have for being angry?*' (4:4), because there was no reason for him to be angry. For if God saved the Assyrians, then they would surely cease to be a threat to God's people. Jonah's anger showed simple religious and racial bigotry, and God challenged that sin.

All too often, we find that racial and religious bigotry remains deep seated, even within God's people. Today, the church is called to preach the God of Love, but worldly attitudes such as racial prejudice raise their heads and create trouble. The message of Jonah is this, God's people must stand clear of such things, we are called to abandon the ways of the world and accept God's ways. Surely, we can see in this prophecy a message of God's love for all people, and it is a message that must be taken around the world, whatever personal attachments are held for country, region, town or village. Certainly, if we become angry when people of other faiths and nations begin to respond to God's love, then He will challenge us. God has the sovereign right to do as He chooses, and to be generous with His love to others despite our fallen tendency towards suspicion, bigotry and un-generosity.

At the very end of the passage, the book of Jonah introduces a brief story about Jonah and a plant, which continues in tomorrow's reading. The story begins by Jonah being pleased with the shade offered by a plant that God made grow next to him in the hot desert (4:5,6). In this way, the Lord began to reach out to Jonah in his anger in order to try and show him the true nature of his love. Jonah built a shelter for himself in order to watch the city, hoping against hope that it would be dramatically destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. Of course, God knew that he would do no such thing, but He still loved Jonah, and controlled nature to his advantage, so as to give him shade.

The Lord loves His people even in their rebellion, but as we will find out tomorrow, they still need to repent. We will find that this is the theme of our passage tomorrow, which is the very last section of Jonah. This prophecy is remarkable for everything it says about repentance. It raises huge questions about how and why people respond to God's love, whether or not they are His people.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group, whether Jonah was justified in being angry.
2. What extremes of bigotry are exposed by this passage Scripture? How do they affect the church?
3. Why did God asked Jonah to sit and wait to see what would happen to the city? What might be about to happen?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The whole passage is something of an enigma, and the story jumps from one thing to another with a degree of unpredictability. At least we can say that this prophecy, of all the books of prophecy in the Old Testament, warns us about the human consequences of following the Lord. The prophet is not one who just delivers the Lord's word and walks away unaffected. The prophet must cope with the consequences of the Word*

*personally, as Jonah has to here. Sometimes he comes under God's scrutiny, and this is an unnerving prospect.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Are there times when you have been unhappy with God because He has done something you did not expect or you feel was at odds with your beliefs? These things are worth thinking about carefully, for they often tell us a great deal about ourselves and what the Lord is saying to us.*
- *Pray for those who preach God's word but find it hard to cope with the consequences. Far more preachers have spiritual difficulty after preaching than people imagine, or preachers confess!*

## **Final Prayer**

Great and mighty Lord; You are the most amazing, the most thrilling, the most enthralling, the most inspiring and the most empowering person we know. Move our stubborn hearts to be free agents of both the Gospel and the grace of the Living God, so that we may be liberated in our service of You, to Your glory; AMEN

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