

## Prayer

Thank You, great and merciful Lord God; for You have broken the power of evil on the cross, before the eyes of the whole world! We rejoice in all you have done through Jesus Christ, through His death upon the Cross, His removal from the Cross to the tomb, and His departure from the tomb in glorious life-affirming victory! All praise be to You, great and mighty God! AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Ask the Holy Spirit to come on you in fire and like a dove; ask Him to give you those gifts he has prepared for you.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the organisation of the church:** *Pray for those who seek the unity of God's church. Pray that they will have understanding and discernment*
- *Pray about the television programmes you watch. Ask the Lord, whether you are right to watch as much as you do.*
- *Give thanks to God for the children you know, in church and family*

## Meditation

Lord God Almighty:

Grant us days of joy;  
when we are happy with life and content.

Grant us days of mercy;  
when our hearts go out to all who need Your love;

Grant us days of faithfulness;  
when we will not let other people down;

Grant us days of grace;  
when we look with favour on those around us;

Grant us days of kindness;  
when our actions speak louder than our words;

Grant us days of patience;  
when we know we can trust You, come what may;

Grant us days of blessing;  
when we are a help to others, and they to us;

Grant us days of peace;  
when all is well with us, and we may rest in You;

Lord God Almighty;  
Grant us knowledge of true godliness,  
so that we live it, every day.

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## Bible Study - Jonah 4:6-11

<sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day, God sent a worm which attacked the plant, so it withered up. <sup>8</sup> Then, when the sun rose, God dispatched a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and he wanted to die. He said, " I might as well be dead as go on living."

<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Do you have any reason for being angry about the plant?" And he said, "Yes I do, I am angry enough to die."

<sup>10</sup> Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the plant, for which you did nothing and which you did not grow; it grew in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> However, consider that great city of Nineveh with more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and all their animals; should I not be concerned about them?"

## Review

Jonah was angry with the Lord for sparing the lives of the Gentile people of Nineveh for whom he did not care. They had responded to his message of doom in all honesty, and their King had demanded that everyone repent, including all the domestic animals living in Nineveh (3:7)! After his argument with God in which Jonah clearly showed his more unworthy and bigoted attitudes (4:1-5 – see yesterday's study), the prophet sat down to the east of the city in the hope that the Lord would fulfil his prophecy of destruction (4:5).

As we read yesterday, the Lord helped Jonah and had pity on him, despite his rebellion and his desire for the destruction on Nineveh. As Jonah sat overlooking the city, a plant grew up around to form a shade, but after one good night's sleep, the plant that had afforded him so much shade was eaten by worm and died. Jonah was furious with the Lord, and he complained to God that without his protection, he might as well be dead (4:8).

The source of Jonah's anger was his complaint that God was more interested in the people of Nineveh than he was of him. In this, Jonah was right back where he started. At the beginning of the book of Jonah, he had been reluctant to do what God wanted, and fled from Him out to sea. Later, he had experienced the benefits of God's mercy and compassion when being saved from the whale, and praised God for his deliverance before submitting to his prophetic task. Yet none of this dealt with the same deep seated problem within his soul. Jonah remained a selfish man, unable to see beyond his own self interest.

His conversation with God was sharp. He was weary to the point of death (4:7), and said so, but God would not let him get away with such self-centredness. He asked Jonah why he was angry (4:8), and pointed out his self-interested blindness. He had only been interested in the plant as long it lived to serve his own purposes, and this was no way to behave towards part of God's creation. In a sweeping final statement designed to show the sheer extent of his love, God spoke of his concern for all the people of Nineveh, that is 120,000 people, and also all their animals (4:11). This is a remarkable end to the book of Jonah, and it highlights more than this, for His desire was that His people share His concern. In the light of this, Jonah's self-centredness seems ridiculous. He was a prophet who did what God asked of him, but clearly struggled both to understand this and to accept what God truly wanted to do in the world.

It is important that we remember this part of the book of Jonah. The prophet is often remembered as the man who ran away from God and eventually preached his will. Of itself, this can be a useful message for God's people. However, the story of Jonah's inability to rise above his own selfishness gives us a further message which cannot be ignored, which is about human frailty before God's will. The most faithful servant of God can still be affected by the sinfulness of the world. We normally associate this message with the New Testament, which calls on God's people to look Christ, and judge all things against the standards of his purity and love, and it is good to find it in the Old.

In addition, there is no escaping the fact that the very last sentence of Jonah is remarkable. It is one of only a very few passages in Scripture that speak directly of God's care for animals. Isaiah is the only other prophet who shows the same interest. These writings challenge us to remember that God is concerned for all of his creation, not just part of it.

Jonah was a deeply flawed character who was used by God to convey some very powerful scriptural messages. We should remember not to be satisfied merely by the interesting story at the beginning of Jonah, and read the whole book, including its end.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Is it possible that Jonah really did have a grievance against the Lord? Try to put yourself in Jonah's place as an Israelite. What did he really feel?
2. Make a list of the main things you have learned from your study of the prophet Jonah.
3. If the Lord loves the whole of His Creation, what does this say today about the task of the church in the world?

# Discipleship

## Personal comment:

*I do wish that more people would work their way through Jonah, and read its end as well as its beginning! The stubborn will of God's people in Old Testament times was the downfall of Israel, and in some cases the stubborn will of God's people today can be their downfall as individual churches or congregations. However, the Lord will not relent from His love and His plan for all creation, and whatever happens to individual people, even prophets whom He uses, He will fulfil His purposes.*

## Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read this passage carefully, and see whether you can find within it something of what you have seen within the life of the church today, perhaps stubborn religious attitudes unrelated to the Gospel. Pray about these things.*
- *Pray for all God's prophets today that they may be faithful to the message they have to proclaim, and stand the judgement of God's people by The Word.*

## Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus Christ. You hold the secrets of the whole world, and You have revealed them to us through Your life and death. We look for the physical secrets of the world, its artistic richness, and the psychological complexity of your creation; but You have revealed yourself to us spiritually by love; and we are content with this amazing revelation! Thank You Lord God; AMEN

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