

Sermon – Jonah Sulks

Jonah 3:10-4:11

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I grew up in a time when westerns were popular on TV and in films, stories about cowboys & Indians, and about outlaws and bold sheriffs upholding law and order in the Wild West. These were stories of goodies and baddies and you always knew that the goodies would win in the end.

Last year a new version of *The Lone Ranger* was released. Looking at the posters for the film you can see immediately that the Lone Ranger is a goodie - he has a white hat! And you can tell that Cavendish is a baddie - he has a black hat. That was always the way. The goodies had white hats, they did good and you knew they would win. The baddies had black hats and did evil and they would lose. We like to cheer the goodies and hiss the baddies.

We know that God loves goodies, and that the baddies will get it in the neck. It is easy in life to think of people as goodies or baddies.

1. Jonah's goodies and baddies

What about the story of Jonah? Jonah was one of God's chosen people, Israel. He is a prophet, a man chosen to speak God's word. Is he a goodie? No, he runs away from God. He doesn't obey God's word.

People of Nineveh are pagans, they worship idols. They are a violent nation. In Nahum 3:1-4 woe is declared for Nineveh, "*Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!*" ² *The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots!* ³ *Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses,* ⁴ *all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft."*

They were the enemies of God's people. They destroyed Israel and took all the people into exile. They must be the baddies!! But they repent in response to God's word and God spares them. They don't get it in the neck!

We can't think in terms of goodies and baddies. In fact we are all sinful. We all deserve God's judgment. We have seen throughout the whole book of Jonah that God is a God who saves.

God saved: The sailors from the storm, Jonah from drowning in the sea, Nineveh from his judgment, and in this chapter he saves Jonah from the heat of the sun by providing a leafy plant.

2. Jonah's reactions

BUT look at Jonah's reactions in each case of being saved:

The sailors no reaction

Jonah Very happy! (2:9) *But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, "Salvation comes from the Lord."* 😊

Nineveh Very unhappy. *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.* (4:1) ☹

Now we find out why he ran away in Chapter 1:

² *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. ³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'* (4:2-3)

Jonah knew how God had revealed his nature to Moses. God showed himself as:

'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.' (Ex 34:6-7)

Israel rejoiced in this gracious nature of their God, but Jonah doesn't want that grace to be shown to their enemies! He is very angry.

He goes out of the city to a lookout, waiting, hoping God will destroy them.

Jonah Very happy about the plant that gave shade. *Jonah was very happy about the plant.* (4:6) He is happy to be saved from the heat of the sun. 😊

But when God takes the shade away he is angry. ☹️
'It would be better for me to die than to live.'
(4:8) He is so angry he wishes himself dead!!

God rebukes him twice: *"Is it right for you to be angry?"* (4:4, 9)

These are extreme reactions, aren't they? Jonah's reactions are obviously central to the book. So what is the message of this book? The book shows God is a God of salvation, a compassionate God, but Jonah's reactions show there is something more.

3. Israel's reactions

Think of goodies and baddies again. Israel thought of themselves as goodies. They were God's chosen people. They had the Scriptures, the Laws of Moses, and God's temple. Surely God should bless them.

But 2 Kings 17:11-14 tells us the exile was because Israel *"did wicked things that aroused the LORD's anger."*¹² *They worshipped idols, though the LORD had said, 'You shall not do this.'*¹³ *The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.'*

¹⁴ *But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God."*

Because they were unfaithful God judged Israel. He sent them into exile. They were not spared.

But the people of Nineveh, surely they were baddies! They were evil idol worshippers who had been so violent towards God's people. Surely they should be destroyed!

But unlike Israel they responded to God's warning. They listened to God's word. So they were not destroyed. Nineveh became richer and more powerful.

It seems that Israel's reactions were similar to Jonah's. Israel was surprised and angry at God's actions. The way God had punished them but spared their enemies

The message of Jonah was a challenge to them not to think in terms of goodies and baddies. There are no goodies - only baddies who have been saved by grace. They must stop thinking of themselves as goodies who could do no wrong and realise that they had failed to listen to God's warnings.

They needed to realise that God cared for all people not just them. He had made the 120,000 people of Nineveh and he could choose to have compassion on them.

4. Our reactions

The trouble with thinking in terms of goodies and baddies is we think of ourselves as goodies. We assume that we deserve God's love. We don't see our faults and seek to change.

We can then think of others as baddies: Terrorists, Asylum seekers, Bikies, Muslims, Homosexuals, Aussie pagans, or people who have hurt us in some way. We think God could never love them. We perhaps get angry with God when they succeed, when they do better than we do.

Jonah watches - he wants Nineveh destroyed. What do we want for those who hurt us?

But we have seen that God is a God who saves. Look at the gulf between Jonah's anger and God's compassion. Do we reflect God's attitudes to people? He is a *"gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love; a God who relents from sending calamity."* This is the nature of our God.

His is an undeserved love for baddies. All of us have black hats! It is a love that has reached out and saved you and me. But it is a love for each person he has made in world.

Two questions to ask ourselves:

Do you need to change your attitude to your own salvation? Do you need to admit your failings and deal with them? Do you need to understand you are saved only by grace?

Do you need to change your attitude to other people? To forgive them, wish good for them and pray for them for God to bless them? Are there any particular people you need to change attitude towards?