

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

20 September 2020

ried off into exile; Judah fared a little better yet under continued threat from the Assyrian aggressor. In consequence the prophet Nahum's message from God to Nineveh is unequivocal: 'Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength!' They have been warned. God has spoken. 'I am against you... I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard.' The description of Nineveh's destruction is graphic, with chariots, spears, flowing blood, and devastation everywhere: 'She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale.' The whole account echoes both a warning before the event, and then events as they unfold around 612BC as Nineveh falls to the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians.

A Tale of Possibilities. God's people read the prophets, particularly Jonah, in very different ways. There is no doubt, however, that Jonah and Nahum stand in contrast to one another and give us the opportunity to explore the various options and possibilities. What if? What if Nineveh should repent? Well, despite Jonah's protestations, they will certainly be saved. But what if Nineveh should not repent? This was the far more likely scenario of course. Then they will be utterly destroyed, as indeed happened.

This is not just a warning to Israel's enemies; this has long been an agreement that God has had with his own people too. At the dedication of the Temple, God addressed King Solomon about this very issue: 'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' (2 Chron 7:14) Solomon's own father, King David, had affirmed that 'The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.' The grace and forgiveness of God is the Good News that flows throughout the whole of Scripture towards those who repent, now fulfilled by faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God and his offer to us of everlasting life.

SUGGESTED SONG

Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYL_-D_2sk

BLESSING

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. (Ps 145:3-4)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>

Dear Friends,

We are now into the second half of September and Autumn is becoming more colourful day by day. Gardens are still being fruitful, and it will soon be time to celebrate the harvest, but many things are starting to die back as an important part of their annual seasonal cycle. Similarly, we are in the second half of the story of Jonah, but here things appear to begin again as Jonah gets another chance to go and do what God had called him to do the first time. 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' How will he respond, given that he has been rescued from certain drowning? How do we respond when we are given a fresh opportunity to start all over again?

In our readings this month we are faced with two seemingly contradictory sides to the nature of God. The side we find easiest to understand, because we benefit from it so much, is the love and mercy of our heavenly Father. Yet there is the other side too. God's message to Nineveh through Jonah is that if they don't change their wicked ways they will be destroyed. Jonah takes up his second chance to serve God and from the middle of the enormous city proclaims,

'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.' It is the love and mercy of God on one hand, and his anger on the other—what is traditionally referred to as God's wrath, often characterised by apparent violence and destruction—that many people find extremely difficult, even impossible to reconcile.

Rev Dr Helen Paynter, a Baptist minister and tutor at Bristol Baptist College, works extensively in this area and has written an excellent book posing the question: 'God of Violence Yesterday, God of Love Today?: Wrestling Honestly with the Old Testament.' One of the difficulties is that the ancient writings and culture of the Old Testament world is so very different from our own.

Sin has its consequences and love has its responsibilities; justice has its necessary demands, and evil cannot coexist alongside a Holy God. In the end it is not for us to reconcile any of these things, for God has done this himself by giving us his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour. Graham Kendrick masterfully sums this up in the chorus of his song: 'We worship at his feet, Where wrath and mercy meet, And a guilty world is washed By love's pure stream. For us he was made sin—Oh, help me take it in...'

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet during this time, and will continue to be the main way we will meet for some time to come, with increased Covid-19 precautions being put in place. Our Zoom Sunday Morning Fellowship Meeting is at 10.30am, and our Monday Prayer Meeting is at 7.00pm—following [Pray For Ryde](#) which finishes this week. If you are able to join us, you will be welcome. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs. There is more at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

PRAY FOR RYDE 2020

Launched on 1 July 2020, the themes for prayer are published daily. Visit prayfor-ryde.org for more information, videos and the link to the daily 7pm Zoom prayer meeting. On 23 September the final Zoom prayer meeting will be at 1.45pm. Last week's themes: 13 September, Independent Shops; 14 September, Charity Shops; 15 September, Communications Engineers; 16 September, Vets & Rescue Centres; 17 September, Landlords & Estate Agents; 18 September, Holiday Makers; 19 September, Respect Ryde. We are updating this list each week.

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 145:1-8](#)

[Jonah 3:1-10](#)

[Nahum 2:1-13](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever... The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.' (Ps 145:1-2,8)

SUGGESTED SONGS

Come Now Is The Time To Worship
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USQn4IUmS20>

You're The Word Of God The Father
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVpkR4gYTIg>

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have called us to follow you and to be your disciples. We thank you too that you call us to go out into all the world sharing your Good News, and making more disciples who follow you. Help us to hear you clearly, and to know your Spirit with us and around us, so that we might not be fearful or disobedient like Jonah. May we respond to your call at the first asking. But if we do not hear, or when we deliberately ignore your voice and your instruction, thank you that you keep on calling us. Thank you that you give us another chance when we mess up. Thank you that it is in your nature to forgive. Thank you that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Amen.

TO PONDER

For a while now, the numbers of Covid-19 infections have been rising, and the Prime Minister has just been announced that a second peak is expected. Are we ready to respond appropriately, or are we naively expecting things to return to how they were? At the online Baptist Assembly last Wednesday we were challenged to make the most of all the opportunities that these rapid changes in society bring, and also the huge potential of digital and online communications for worship, prayer, fellowship, outreach, teaching and training, and so on. If we do not make use of these new ways, what does that say about our commitment or willingness to participate in the life of Christ and his church, and the mission to which he calls us, no matter how different or new the circumstances? When printing was invented there were those who would not allow people to read God's Word for themselves; when television was invented there were those Christians who would not watch it. How much are we in danger of missing out on or neglecting in this era of digital communications?!

SUGGESTED SONGS

Great Is The Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H561IFJ7pUw>

Christ Is Enough
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7hy6WBI7TM>

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Nineveh According to Jonah. So Jonah headed off to Nineveh after all, and he had barely got to the heart of the city before beginning to issue God's warning. There is a hint that the three days journey in v3 reflects the three days and nights in the big fish's belly. Others suggest that the three days represent the stages of a diplomat (and a prophet is a diplomatic representative of God) approaching the king: day one you would enter the city, day two you would introduce yourself at court, day three you would be invited before the throne. Here it didn't take that long. As soon as word reached the unnamed king (further evidence that this might not be a fully historical account), he repented with sackcloth and ashes, and ordered that all the city's inhabitants fast and likewise repent. There was a glimmer of hope that 'God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.' This all led to God calling off the destruction he had threatened, as the king had hoped.

Nineveh According to Nahum. The background to Nahum is of course a much later period than Jonah's setting. Nineveh represents the Assyrian empire, which had by now ransacked Israel: 'destroyers have laid them waste and ruined their vines.' The northern kingdom of Israel had suffered badly, with much bloodshed and many people car-