

JONAH—A REAL-LIFE FISH STORY

Presented by

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As most of you in the audience today know, I love to fish. In fact, there are times when I think that I would rather fish than do almost anything else in the world! Whenever I go fishing, sometimes I catch a lot of fish, and sometimes I catch almost nothing. Then, of course, there are times when I catch fairly small fish, and times when I catch really big fish. In fact, not long ago I caught a 5-pound bass. I know that fishermen sometimes tell “fishy fish stories” about what **BIG** fish they supposedly catch. But my 5-pound bass was no fish story. I really **did** catch a fish that big.

Did you know, however, that there is a fish story in the Bible that sounds “fishy,” but isn’t? Let me tell you about it. I think you will find it fascinating. Nineveh was a large and important city, but it was filled with people who were very wicked. They did not love or obey God. But God loved **them**. So He decided to send a preacher by the name of Jonah to warn them to repent. God told Jonah, “Cry out against Nineveh, because their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2). Jonah, however, did not **want** to preach to the people in Nineveh. So, instead of doing what God told him, he went to Joppa and got on a ship to sail away. Jonah thought that he could run and hide from God. But he was in for a **big** surprise!

The Bible says that God “sent a great wind, and there was a mighty tempest, so that the ship was about to be broken up” (Jonah 1:4). Jonah knew that **he** was the reason why God had sent the terrible storm. He did not want the people on the ship to be hurt, so he convinced them to throw him overboard. When they did, the Bible says simply, “the sea stopped its raging” (Jonah 1:15). The storm was over.

But Jonah’s troubles were not! The Bible says in Jonah 1:17 that God “prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.” Jonah was in the belly of this giant fish three days and three nights, and finally realized that he had made a terrible mistake by not obeying God. So, he prayed to God to forgive him. God heard Jonah’s prayer, and Jonah 2:10 tells us that God “spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.” Then, God once again told Jonah to go preach to the people of Nineveh.

This time, Jonah did what God said. And guess what happened. Jonah 3:5 says that “the people of Nineveh believed God.” They repented of their wickedness and God forgave them. Jonah’s trip to Nineveh had been a **huge** success! But that is not the end of the story. You may find this hard to believe, but Jonah actually **got mad** when the people repented! In fact, Jonah 4:1-3 tells us that he got **so** mad that he asked God to strike him dead! When God refused to do that, Jonah went outside the city to go pout. As he was sitting on the ground in the hot Sun, God caused a plant to grow big and tall to give Jonah some shade. But the next morning when Jonah awoke, God had sent a worm to eat the plant and kill it, which took away Jonah’s shade. Now, Jonah was **really mad** because his shade plant had died. So God said to him, “You had pity on **a plant**.... Should **I** then not have pity on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand people?” (Jonah 4:10-11).

How bad Jonah must have felt when God showed him that he cared more for **a plant** than he did for the souls of **over 120,000 people!** Jonah had made two terrible mistakes. First, he had tried to run away from God in order to keep from doing what God told him to do. But that did not work. Second, when God blessed Jonah's preaching efforts and an entire city was saved, instead of being happy that God had allowed the people to repent and be forgiven, Jonah got mad about it. It seems to me that spending three days and three nights in the belly of a big, slimy fish would have taught Jonah a lesson. But Jonah was so hard-headed and stubborn that he didn't learn what God wanted him to learn. And that, my friends, is no "fish story." Instead, it is just really, really sad. I sure hope that none of us turns out to be like Jonah, don't you?