

AN INCREDIBLE FISH TALE THAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

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INTRODUCTION: (ADOPTED FROM A LESSON BY LARRY ROUSE)

A. One thing that you can almost count on universally among fisherman is their “fish tales”

1. Fisherman are as known for making up or embellishing fish tales as sailors are for their language!
 - a. Where do you think the idea of mermaids originated? Sailors & fisherman who had been at sea for long lengths of time, around a bunch of smelly men, dreamed them up
 - b. Fishermen often embellish the size of their catch, amount of fish, or even if they caught anything at all! They also tend to embellish stories of what took place while fishing
2. Growing up one of my favorite things to do was fishing with my dad... went every chance we got!
 - a. I remember seeing some alligator gar for the first time, coming home, & telling mom just how big the gar were! Of course by the time I got home they were the size of sharks!
 - b. I also remember the monster fish who got away – You know, the fish you catch but breaks your fishing line. You never see it and you could have just been snagged on a log!
 - c. Wading in water fishing & a water moccasin getting scared toward me... Walked on water!
3. It seems like every time a fishing story gets told, it only gets bigger and more incredible!

B. In the Old Testament we find an account of a fish tale... But here the story and the details are all true!

1. Imagine a guy comes running up to you saying, “You won’t believe what I just saw! A huge fish just swam up to the shore and spit a guy out of its mouth and the guy is still alive!”
2. Sounds like another “fish tale” but as many of you know this is exactly what happened with Jonah!
3. The story of Jonah isn’t just about this incredible event, but it is a wonderful account of a prophet of God preaching to a greatly unrighteous city & bringing about an amazing spiritual revival!
4. The book of Jonah is extremely important because it teaches some needful lessons about the Lord and about people... These lessons are still in need of being learned today! **(Romans 15:4)**

I. THE BACKGROUND AND ACCOUNT OF JONAH:

A. Before we look at the book of Jonah in depth, let’s get a good understanding of it’s background:

1. Jonah was a prophet of God during the days of king Jeroboam II of Israel (800 bc) **(2 Kgs 14:23-27)**
 - a. The enemies of Israel had taken over part of their land. Although Jeroboam was a wicked king, God used him to restore Israel’s borders – It seems Jonah helped in that effort
 - b. Jonah had seen personally the great affliction Israel suffered at the hands of their enemies
 - c. Israel’s number one enemy was Assyria – Jonah not only knew the great misery this nation brought upon Israel but also how they had done the same to other nations as well!
 - d. The book of Jonah presents him as being a very zealous patriot and prophet, one who was jealous for God, and who wanted all of the enemies of God’s people to be destroyed!
2. God gives Jonah a specific mission – Go and preach to the great city of Ninevah **(Jonah 1:1-2)**
 - a. Ninevah was one of the oldest existing cities of its time. It was built by Nimrod, a mighty warrior and a mighty hunter, shortly after the flood **(Gen 10:8-12)**
 - b. It was located on the Tigris River (very close to where the Garden of Eden likely was) and was a walled city about 8 miles in circumference - 1800 acres (3 days walk around)
 - c. During the days of Jonah, Nineveh was one of the capitals of Assyria. It was well known for its wickedness and the cruelty of its people! It was often referred to as “The Robber City” because it overran and robbed other countries in order to make itself rich!
3. Whether Jonah knew it or not, it would be the Assyrians whom God would use to attack Israel and

carry them into captivity as punishment for their continual rebellion against Him!

B. Let's refresh our memories about how God used Jonah and a great fish to change such an ungodly city!

II. IMPORTANT LESSONS WE LEARN FROM THE BOOK OF JONAH:

A. First of all, we learn from the book of Jonah some important lessons about God:

1. One thing that stands out about God is His concern for the spiritual welfare of all people!
 - a. Notice the reason why God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh is their EVIL has come up before Him! When God sees people living wickedly, He wants them taught! **(Jonah 1:1-2)**
 - b. We sometimes think of God responding to wicked nations the way He did with Sodom & Gomorrah... what this shows is He wants to give them every chance to repent first!
 - c. God saw the people Nineveh with pity & a readiness to forgive! He had compassion on the people due to their state, the animals, & apparently on the children **(Jonah 4:11)**
 - d. When we see people steeped in sin do we think, "I'd really like to lead that person to Christ!" or do we look despisngly at them? Do we see suspects or prospects?
2. Closely akin to this concept we learn that God is no respecter of persons! **(Jonah 3:10)**
 - a. Remember the Ninevites are not "God's chosen people," they have not been privy to having the law, close fellowship with God, or most of the prophets... They're Gentiles
 - b. And yet here God is giving the same chance He gave to the nation of Israel and Judah before their captivity... That if you repent you will be spared from punishment
 - c. This really hits home when we consider people from other countries, especially countries that are known enemies of the United States! What about those who have been raised in ungodly environments? What about those from different backgrounds?
3. We learn that God is able and will accomplish His purpose in this life: **(Jonah 1:3-4)**
 - a. God is able to use all the incidents in the life of His servants for their good and His glory!
 - b. God wanted Jonah to go to this city... It likely seemed too difficult for Jonah! Would you have questioned the wisdom of going to such a city as Nineveh to preach?
 - c. Unlike Jonah, God does not directly speak to us today telling us exactly when the door of opportunity for the gospel opens in the life of a person, but God still opens them!
 - d. We must be ready to be used by God in any way possible! **(Esther 4:14-15)**

B. There are some important lessons Jonah learned that we can take to heart:

1. Jonah learned, the difficult way, it is impossible for us to hide from the Lord! **(Jonah 1:3; 2:1-3)**
 - a. Jonah allowed his emotions to overcome him take control of his decisions! He knew deep down that he couldn't escape God's presence, but he tries to hide from God anyway!
 - b. He's on a boat, heading as far from Nineveh as he could get, surrounded by idolatrous men, and in the lower part of the boat fast asleep... But God was still there!
 - c. There is no place we can go to hide from God's presence! Work, school, with friends, or a very ungodly place... God is there! We can't hide our thoughts, words, imaginations, or actions! The only place we can go to escape His presence is Hell! **(Ps 139:1-10)**
2. Jonah had to have gained a greater appreciation for the power of prayer! **(Jonah 2:1-2, 7-9)**
 - a. As we've noted before this chapter is a prayer of Jonah expressing thanks to God for God answering His prayer – This would mean God answered Jonah's cry for help when he got tossed out of the boat by preparing and sending the great fish to swallow him!
 - b. Even here Jonah has not given up & he's not blaming God! He knew God's character and

- prays that to God! He lays claims God's steadfast love pleading for deliverance!
- c. Jonah was honest with God in his prayers, expressing his true feelings! **(Jonah 4:2-3)**
 - d. We've got to remember that God still answers prayers today! Whether life is going well or crashing around us, we've got to be close communication with God! This means going to God with our innermost thoughts, concerns, & even complaints! **(Phil 4:6-7)**
3. Jonah understood the direct preaching God's word had power on lost souls!
 - a. So why did Jonah run away in the first place? This was a very wicked city! If they rejected Jonah & God's message then that would surely seal their doom, right? The only reason why he wouldn't go on to Nineveh is he knew they might repent! **(Jonah 4:2)**
 - b. When he did finally submit to God's will and go to Nineveh, the message he proclaimed was very simple, direct, straightforward with the truth, & courageous! **(Jonah 3:3-4)**
 - c. Do we have faith in the gospel's power? Do we refrain from teaching a person because they're too sinful or deep in some religious error? Do we think we have to spice it up or soften its sting? Do we teach its message simply but boldly? **(Heb 4:12-13)**
 4. Jonah learned just how crippling his own self-pity could be **(Jonah 4:3, 8)**
 - a. Here a prophet of God goes and in three days turns around an entire city! We think Jonah would be leaping with joy, but instead he is drowning in misery! I think it's safe to assume if Nineveh repented they wouldn't oppress Israel... Should make Jonah happy
 - b. Jonah has been called "the pouting prophet" – Things did not turn out the way he wanted them to & nothing could satisfy him anymore! He was being selfish & narrow-minded
 - c. How do we feel we things don't go the way we think they should go? Do we trust God's promises & His way enough to face what happens with joy & perseverance? **(Jas 1:2)**
 5. Jonah learned the importance of looking at things the way God looks at things **(Jonah 4:6-11)**
 - a. Geikie says of this incident outlines "...the contrast between the infinite love of heaven and the selfish coldness of man. The growth of a night can be pitied when it touches ourselves, but unspeakably higher claims too often awaken no tenderness where we are not personally concerned" (Hailey, A Commentary On The Minor Prophets)
 - b. Jonah felt more concern for some material thing than the many souls that lived in Nineveh! This plant and worm was to teach Him to look with spiritual eyes!

C. Finally, we learn that God is able to use people in spite of their weaknesses:

1. Consider for a moment some of the weaknesses of some of the great heroes of God's word:
 - a. Physical limitations – Moses at least said he had a speaking problem, David was a young boy, Paul a thorn in the flesh, and Esther was a Jewish queen to a wicked Gentile king
 - b. Beyond that, He used people who had struggles spiritually – Abraham lied under pressure, Peter lacked courage & denied Jesus, & Jonah despised the Ninevites so he ran away
 - c. Weaknesses in men did not keep God from accomplishing His will, in fact, in many cases using people despite their weaknesses glorified God more and advanced His cause!
2. Those who God used in spite of their spiritual struggles had some common traits **(Luke 8:15)**
 - a. They all acknowledged their weaknesses, they were honest with themselves and God, and they were willing to repent of what they did wrong! It's real hard to find this today!
 - b. While they had imperfections & character flaws they didn't let their struggles to rule them
3. Every person has spiritual struggles, but that doesn't mean God can't use you! **(1 John 1:10-2:1)**
 - a. Some seem to think that either you are spiritually perfect or you are a hypocrite... This idea

- is not true at all! The difference between an imperfect godly man and a hypocrite is sincerity! Sinning from time to time and weaknesses doesn't make you a hypocrite!
- b. This is important since some see their struggles & think, "I'm not good enough to be useful to God" or "I can't do that work, I'm a hypocrite." If you are... REPENT... Then SERVE!
 - c. God will still use us to accomplish His will even though we have weaknesses... When we are humble, honest, and willing to repent of our sins He can use us anyway!
4. Sometimes it's through struggles and physical limitations that God's power and glory really shines the best! God doesn't need perfect people... Just sincere and willing hearts! **(2 Cor 4:5ff)**