

**READ:** Selections from Jonah 1-3 (NirV)

A message from the LORD came to Jonah... "Go to the great city of Nineveh. Preach against it. The sins of its people have come to my attention." But Jonah ran away from the Lord... he found a ship that was going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board... But the LORD sent a strong wind over the Mediterranean Sea. A wild storm came up. It was so wild that the ship was in danger of breaking apart. All the sailors were afraid. Each one cried out to his own god for help. They threw the ship's contents into the sea. They were trying to make the ship lighter. But Jonah had gone below deck. There he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went down to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call out to your god for help! Maybe he'll pay attention to what's happening to us. Then we won't die."

The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down?" "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," [Jonah] replied. "Then it will become calm. I know it's my fault that this terrible storm has come on you."

Now the LORD sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. The LORD gave the fish a command. And it spit Jonah up onto dry land.

A message from the LORD came to Jonah a second time... "Go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce to its people the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the LORD. He went to Nineveh... and announced, "In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed." The people of Nineveh believed God's warning. So they decided not to eat any food for a while. And all of them put on the rough clothing people wear when they're sad. That's what everyone did, from the least important of them to the most important.

God saw what they did. He saw that they stopped doing what was evil. So he took pity on them. He didn't destroy them as he had said he would.

ENTER THE STORY:

Jonah did NOT want to do what God asked him to do, so he ran away from God, but you can't REALLY run away from God. He is everywhere, and after all was said and done, Jonah found himself in the belly of a HUGE fish.

Can you imagine being in a dark, stinky fish belly with gooey guts all around you for three whole days? EWWW!

Sometimes, God has to do something CRAZY to get our attention. Jonah needed to learn a lesson, so God used a big fish to teach him.

After three days, God spoke to the fish, and it spit Jonah out, and this time, when God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh, he obeyed. Jonah told the people exactly what God told him to say. Do you remember what his message was?

"In 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed." It's might not have been the nicest message, but it WORKED!

The people of Nineveh listened to Jonah's message, and they felt very sad for all of the bad things they had done. They prayed to God and told him how sorry they were, and they STOPPED doing all of the bad things that they had done.

God heard their prayers, and he forgave them. He stopped being angry about their sins and he decided NOT to punish them. This made Jonah very angry because he did NOT think they deserved God's forgiveness, and he wanted God to punish them.

Jonah did NOT understand that God loves EVERYONE, and wants everyone to be sorry for their sin.

- Jonah thought God only loved his special people, the Israelites, but God's plan all along was to send a very special
- someone from Abraham's family to bless the whole entire world. This person is BETTER than Jonah because he did *NOT*
- run away when God asked him to do something he didn't really want to do. Instead, he obeyed God even though he
- knew God was asking him to give up his life and die for the sins of God's people.
- *Do you know who this special someone is? It's Jesus, of course!*
- *Just like Jonah spent three days in a dark fish belly...Jesus spent three days in a dark tomb.*
- *And just like the big fish spit Jonah out after three days...the dark tomb couldn't hold Jesus either, so after three days,*
- *God raised him from the dead and that old stinky tomb had to spit Jesus out too!*
- This season, let's find joy in doing the things that make God happy, even if that means doing things we really don't want
- to do!
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- **PRAY:** *God, we are SO thankful that your love and mercy are for EVERYONE! Help us have soft hearts that are willing*
- *to admit when we are wrong. Amen.*
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