

ALL AGE - A Fishy Tale

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[0 : 00] All right. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the story that we just heard told, about the story of Jonah.

And my last four sermons have gone for 50 minutes each. I can see the excitement on your faces. This is going to be a brief, brief sermon about the story of Jonah.

And I want to talk to you today about my top three heroes in the story of Jonah. Who likes superheroes? Adults. Come on. You were the generation of superheroes.

Name me some superheroes. Yes, Josh. Mr. Incredible. Mr. Incredible. Yep, Mr. Incredible. Bit modern. Yes.

Superman. Superman. Yes, Superman is the greatest superhero that's ever existed. He's Superman. He has defined superheroes. He is quite super.

[1 : 04] And so I used to like Superman so much that on my first day of school, primary school, I turned up at school in my full Superman costume with cape, red boots.

My mum wouldn't let me wear my undies on the outside. But apart from that, that was how I turned up to school my first day. Because I wanted them to know that I was committed to Superman and that we were buddies.

So, Superman is my favorite superhero. In the story of Jonah that we just heard told so well, who do you think my top three heroes of the book of Jonah are?

Yes. Any idea? Yes. I'll come back to you.

Just I. God. He is in the top three. We'll get to him later. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

[2 : 05] Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. I didn't think about the worm. But no. Jonah is not in my top three heroes of Jonah. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Thank you. Yes. I think it. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. own stupidity and out of humility, which is good. But Jonah is not a hero. I think Jonah is a disobedient, pugnacious, write that down, rebellious prophet. I think the story is set up to show that he and his disobedience is in contrast to God in his faithfulness.

Okay, so Jonah's not on the list. But if you go to the next slide, if you go to America or if you have an internet connection, you can buy for \$23.99 from Target, the almighty heroes Jonah and the whale playset. There's Jonah looking like the incredible Hulk. Been working out in that whale's belly. Far be it from me to argue with Target on terms of theology, but I disagree. I don't think Jonah is a hero of the Bible. I think he is set up, as quite the antithesis to a superhero. So anyway, why don't I talk about my top three heroes from this book? I'm going to start with the pagan sailors. Do you remember those sailors that speak like pirates for some reason? Yes. I can't do the voice. But I want to talk about those sailors. I'll tell you why I think they're heroes in this story. First of all, we meet them in verse 3. So I'll just read about them for a tick. God tells Jonah to go and preach to the Ninevites. And then Jonah, it says, but Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish, which is the exact opposite direction to Nineveh. It's like to Spain. Nineveh was over here. He went that way. Exactly the opposite direction. He went there. He paid his fare to go on board to go with them, the sailors to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Then what happens?

[4 : 50] He's on the ship. What does God do? Exactly. He sent a storm. God, who is Lord of the universe, and can do whatever he pleases, sends a storm, such a huge storm, that what happened?

You're getting ahead of the story. Okay. First of all, it's not going to be that quick. The ship, the ship starts to break up. It's a serious storm. The ship starts to break up. And so the sailors, who know

what they're doing, have never seen a storm like this and they start to panic. What is Jonah doing? We're going to see what Jonah does and what the sailors do and why they're heroes. What does Jonah do? Do you remember? Storm comes. He has a little nana nap, doesn't he? He falls asleep. Instead of praying to the God who he knows has sent the storm, instead of asking God for help, he goes and falls asleep. It's not a very heroic thing to do. That the sailors figure out that he's got something to do with this. Exactly.

And they throw him overboard, which is what God intended to happen. That's why he sent the storm, in order to get Jonah back to Nineveh. And the sailors' response is a really good one. They say, they pray to God. They do what Jonah didn't do. They pray to God. They say, please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you. So they recognize that God is in control.

They pray to him and then they worship him. They feared him, offered a sacrifice and made vow. So they worship God. They pray to God and Jonah falls asleep. That's why I think the sailors are heroes. I think in the book, the sailors are set up in a contrast to Jonah to show the faithlessness of this prophet and yet the faithfulness of these pagans in contrast to Jonah.

Jesus does the same thing throughout the New Testament. He sets up pagan people who should not know who God is, let alone how to serve him. And he contrasts them with the Pharisees quite a bit.

[7 : 13] We saw that a couple of weeks ago with this story. Jesus refers to the Ninevites and says that they will rise up in judgment against the Pharisees because they responded to God and the Pharisees didn't. So my second hero, I've talked about sailors. Who's my second hero going to be?

No. Another one. Not the worm. Another one. Doing enough research. Yes. Any other? Yes.

No. The Ninevites were good people. They could have made it in my top three, but they got squeezed out by, yes, the whale, the great fish. He is my second great hero of this story.

This is a little bit of a weird one, I know. A great big fish being a hero of the story. I'm a little bit scared of great big fish. Who's scared of great big fish? I'm scared of great big fish. You know, I've been to the ocean twice. This is how strong and manly and heroic I am. Been to the ocean twice and had to go running out of the water because I've seen a shark.

Twice. That's right. Never went back in again. But I'm scared of big fish. What happens to Jonah? He gets thrown overboard and no sooner has he been thrown overboard. The sea goes calm and this great big fish comes up and goes, goop, swallows him up. This is why I think the fish is a hero. What would have happened to Jonah if the fish didn't swallow him? Exactly. He would have died. He would have drowned. And so the fish saved Jonah's life, didn't he? And really it was God that sent the fish to save Jonah's life. There's a few reasons in addition to that obvious one. Second reason is being in the belly of a fish for three days did something to Jonah. Didn't just make him stink. What happened? Yes, Josh. Made him realize something. Exactly. And so we have Jonah who got told by God to go and preach to the Ninevites.

[9 : 42] Then he turned away from God, went in the exact opposite direction and he stopped talking to God. He said, God, I'm not going to talk to you anymore. I'm not going to pray to you anymore.

I'm going to pretend like you don't exist. And yet in the belly of the fish, he prays to God. He writes an amazing psalm actually. It's a really cool prayer that he prays. So this is the application for you guys. Next time you get sent to your room without your supper, maybe you could pretend that your room is like the belly of a great fish. And you could think about what you've done.

How good is this, parents? You could think about, you could think about what you've done and you could pray to God and ask him for help and spend that time in prayer. Instead of being angry and saying, I'm not going to talk to my parents, I'm not going to talk to God, you could pretend like you're in the belly of a fish like Jonah and pray to God and ask him for help and say sorry.

And then go and apologize to your parents and help them with the dishes. Who's with me? So that was another reason why the fish is a hero because in effect, being in the belly of the fish caused Jonah to turn back to God, at least for a while. Another thing is, the fish got Jonah back to Nineveh. Remember what happened? Jonah got told to go to this city Nineveh to go and preach to them and tell them that God loves them and that they need to repent and believe in God. So he went in the opposite direction because he didn't want to do that. He's way over here. He gets thrown in the sea. The fish swallows him.

[11:28] Where does he end up? He ends up somewhere close to him. Exactly. Somewhere close to him. Have you been reading your dad's reference material? No, I haven't.

I am. Okay. All right. That's true. God commands the fish not only to swallow Jonah, but to take him back somewhere close to Nineveh. Vomits him out onto dry land. So I want you to imagine this. You're at the ocean. You're swimming in the shallows, making some sand castles, dunking your brother underwater. Suddenly you look across and there's a huge fin. Vomit everywhere. Up comes the prophet Jonah. Walks onto dry land. And that's how Jonah enters Nineveh. A little bit of a humbling experience. I think it shows God's sense of humor. But it gets Jonah to Nineveh.

Three reasons why the fish is a hero, I think. Saved Jonah's life. Gave him an opportunity to come back to God. And he delivered him to Nineveh. Close by to Nineveh. Okay. Third hero. This is my third and final hero. The most important hero in the whole story. The most important hero in the Bible. The most important hero in the world. In eternity. In the universe.

Say it. Yes. Not the worm. It was God. It was God. It is God. And there's heaps of reasons why God is the great hero of the book of Jonah. He saves everyone's life. Let me tell us. Do you want to come up and preach? No. Okay. Next week. You're going to hear a lot more about Jonah in the coming weeks because we're going to be going through the book as a series. We're going to see that God is merciful. We're going to have plenty of reasons to go out on mission, spread the gospel, support missionaries and gospel workers. It's going to be mission month here because we're going to be looking at the book of Jonah which is a display of God's faithfulness and his judgment on people but his willingness to forgive them as well. So a few reasons. Listen up. I'm going to finish here guys. A few reasons why God is the hero of the book. First of all, he told Jonah to go and preach to the Ninevites.

[14:10] This is a big thing. You can read in Nahum 3. That's a book in the Bible. Nahum chapter 3. All right. It talks about Nineveh as a disgraceful place. A terrible place. It was probably quite apt that you were Tigers players this morning representative of Nineveh because they're almost as bad as Richmond. Okay. Terrible. The Bible talks about Nineveh being a place full of blood and death and corpses and just a terrible, terrible place and yet God told Jonah to go there and preach to them. No one is too bad for God to save and forgive. So first reason why God's a hero. He cares even for people as bad as the Ninevites. Secondly, he sent the storm so that the sailors would believe in him and worship him. He also had Jonah thrown overboard so that he could send a fish to swallow him and get him back to Nineveh. All good reasons why God is the hero. We see if you look at the book as a meta-narrative, you see God is at work all the way through and he knows what's going on all the way through. The funny thing is, this is a comedic book in a way, the funny comedic plot is that Jonah thinks he can get away from God.

And so God lets Jonah go a little way and then he grabs him back and throws him in the sea and then he gets a fish and throws, you know, God's pulling the strings and Jonah thinks that he's in control. That's the joke. And this happens with us. You might, before you became a Christian, you might have been running away from God, thinking you can get away from God and God lets you go a little while and then he grabs you and saves you just like he did Jonah. God is the hero. He sent the giant fish which saved his life.

He heard Jonah's prayer even after Jonah had told him that he didn't want anything to do with him. And the greatest moment of the book, the climax of the book is where God saves every single person in Nineveh. This terrible place, terrible, terrible place full of terrible people. Jonah walks in, in the climax of the book and gives them a five word sermon it is in the Hebrew, something like, God's angry, you need to repent and then walks out again. He's still upset with God. So I don't think he put a big effort in. It wasn't like a Billy Graham crusade. He's not coming in with a band and with, you know, publicity and flyers and tracks. He just walks in, says, God's really angry, you guys got to repent, walks out, sets up his booth. But God works through that terrible sermon and saves the entire city. To a man, from the poorest person up to the king, everyone repents.

And it's because of who? Is it because of Jonah and how good he was? No. Who was it because of? God, exactly. So who's the hero of the book of Jonah? Praise the Lord for that.

So remember, remember, even though the book's called Jonah, it should be called God. In fact, every book of the Bible probably should be called God because God is the hero of every book of the Bible. But remember this, every time someone tries to tell you that Jonah is the hero of the book of Jonah or that the worm is the hero of the book of Jonah, you say no, nay, nay, a thousand times nay.

[17 : 46] God is the hero of the book of Jonah. Who's with me? Amen. Okay, guys, you can go and take a seat.