

**“The Big Story”  
Jonah 3:1-10**

by: Pastor Michael O. Silva 08 June 2008

What was a big news stories this week? Hawaii’s own Barack Obama won the democratic nomination for president with a possibility that Hillary Clinton would be a possible vice-president. Another big news story was that the airlines were raising their airfares in light of rising fuel and operating costs.

Well over 2700 years ago there was another major event in history that has been remembered since. Only this major event was not a tragedy but a story of hope for those who were lost, a story of the love and mercy of God. We are talking about the story of Jonah. The big story was not that he was swallowed by a fish; the big story was that he was sent by God to a major city of an enemy nation. He was sent to a non-Jewish people to proclaim God’s word. We pick up the story in Jonah 3:1.

<sup>1</sup>Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

<sup>3</sup>So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days’ walk. <sup>4</sup>Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” <sup>5</sup>Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. <sup>6</sup>When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. <sup>7</sup>He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. <sup>8</sup>“But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. <sup>9</sup>“Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.” <sup>10</sup>When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*.

Last week I mentioned that today we were going to talk a little about how the story of Jonah ties into Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 12:38-41** ~ <sup>38</sup>Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” <sup>39</sup>But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; <sup>40</sup>for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup>“The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Here in Matthew 12, Jesus uses the story of Jonah in the belly of the fish as a symbol of his own death and rising from the dead on the third day. But the real link between Jesus and Jonah is found in **verse 41**.

The big story was that Jonah, a Jew, was sent to a non-Jewish or Gentile nation as God's messenger of salvation. Jesus was also a Jew, and His message of salvation was not only for the Jew, but also for the non-Jew. The big story in Jonah's time and the big story in Jesus' time is that God wants to reach all people and draw them to Himself in a love relationship; and we, you and I are His messengers. God wants to save the nations and He wants to do it through us.

Sometimes the idea that God wants to use us to declare His truth can get kind of scary. It can get intimidating. So it is important to remember that **God's truth is more powerful than His messenger**. Think of Jonah's situation. He was sent to a main city of a powerful enemy nation. The people were known for their cruelty and evil.

I would think that Jonah felt a little intimidated when he went to preach God's word to the Assyrians of Nineveh. When he entered the city, the people of Nineveh knew right away that he was a Jew.

It reminds me of the time I was in high school and I went into the weight room to lift weights. The room was filled with football players trying to make "big body." They could tell immediately that I wasn't a football player.

The people of Nineveh could tell that Jonah wasn't Assyrian. But Jonah could take heart because he was not there to represent himself, he was there to proclaim God's word and God's word is more powerful than the messenger.

What was Jonah's message? The entire message of Jonah to the City of Nineveh is summed up in only one verse in Chapter 3:4, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." That's it, nothing else. God used that one sentence to transform an entire city. If you are in a situation where you want to share God's word but feel intimidated by those you think God wants you to share with, I hope you can find some confidence in the story of Jonah. God's word is powerful, more powerful than His messenger.

This past week this truth that God's word is more powerful than His messenger has been especially meaningful to me. For those of you who do not know, I offered my resignation last week at our Business Meeting. Two and a half weeks ago, after spending a night in prayer and seeking God on behalf of our church, I felt like God had told me that my assignment here was over. But in my own human weakness I failed to clearly say that and therefore, the church, including me, got caught up in the events leading up to the resignation rather than in coming together to seek the heart of God. In my weakness I caused confusion in the way I went about it. I must ask your forgiveness for failing you in that respect.

If you have your Bibles please turn with me to **Acts 19:20-21** ~ <sup>20</sup>So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. <sup>21</sup>Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and

Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." All things considered, Palisades Baptist Church is in a good place. We have a solid ministry. Though we do not have the explosive growth that some churches have, we have grown quite a bit numerically, and especially spiritually. There is a greater sense of the authority of God's word and there is a greater sensitivity to the moving of the Spirit. Many of us have grown to see that the strength of ministry comes when it flows out of meaningful relationships with each other rather than just programmed ministry. The word of God is growing mightily and prevailing, but like Paul, I have purposed in the Spirit that I need to move on, not because of conflict, but because I believe the Spirit is leading me out.

The Apostle Paul continued on his journey toward Jerusalem. On his way he stopped in the city Tyre. In Acts 21:4 it says, "After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem." We are told that because of impressions made by the Spirit, the disciples in Tyre kept on telling Paul not to set foot in Jerusalem. But Paul continued on. Sometimes the Lord will send people your way to test your faithfulness to Him even against those with the best of intentions.

Paul and his companions continued on until they reached Ceasarea, a town not far from Jerusalem. **Acts 21:10-14** ~ <sup>10</sup>As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup>And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " <sup>12</sup>When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents *began* begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup>And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

This was just one of those situations where the Lord spoke to the leader but the rest of the body of Christ did not quite get it. Because Paul continued on to Jerusalem, he was captured and eventually executed for his faith. But, during those years of imprisonment, God used Paul to write much of what we claim to be the New Testament – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and later 2 Timothy. God had a greater purpose.

Last week the church asked me to reconsider my resignation. Many of you have said either publicly or in private that you feel I need to stay. But like Paul I still believe I need to move on. The closer I get to the end, the more sure I am that I need to leave. As Paul said in Philippians 1:23, I feel hard-pressed in both directions. To remain with you means years more of probably the most productive years of ministry. But to yield to the prompting and leading of the Spirit, is even better. God has given us six good years together. Let's rejoice in that.

Some of you have said that after I leave that you also are planning to leave. A word of caution to that, make sure that if you do leave it is because the Lord is leading you out and not because of your personal preference. In my opinion, I don't believe that it is

healthy to leave a church just because the pastor decides that he needs to leave. I would never leave this church if I did not sense the Lord's hand in it.

What should you do next? Let me make a suggestion. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the church spent 40 days of focusing on God and each other. There were no assignments, no programs, no agendas. The followers of Christ were the agenda. For 40 days they met with each other hours upon hours each day together focusing on God and learning to love accept each other. Finally, when they were of one heart and mind, they were fertile ground and that's when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Since then, the world has never been the same.

Can you imagine what would happen if we spent forty days together in this room? All the yucky stuff that we normally keep in check would come to the surface and would have to be dealt with. Little groups would form in different parts of the room. After a while, some from one group would migrate to another group, and some from another would migrate to another. We would have to learn to love and accept each other.

My suggestion is that after I leave until about the end of July, that you cancel everything that can be cancelled. Cancel meetings, cancel projects, cancel outreaches, cancel everything. Instead focus on God and each other in smaller gatherings as in Life Groups, and in groups of threes and fours and spend the time praying for each other and for the church. Spend time learning to love and accept each other. Some of you have family members within your own household who resist Jesus, but you have not in the six years that I have been here, ever asked the body of Christ to pray for them. You need to know that I have been praying for them. God has given a ministry to you within your own household. Don't ignore it. Maybe it's time you make a change.

Next week I'm going to bring my final message to Palisades Baptist out of Jonah 4. I'm going to share some things that I have tried to instill here from the very beginning and I hope the Lord will use next week's message to draw you closer to Himself.