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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1933 ~ Jonah Swallowed by a Fish.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

Jonah is a well-known Bible character who lived as a Jewish prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel near the Sea of Galilee during Jeroboam II's reign from 800 BC to 750 BC. Jonah had predicted the return of some territory to Israel and the king had brought this about. This is mentioned in 2nd Kings Chapter 14. Jonah knew other fellow prophets of that time, including Amos and Hosea.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the pagan capital of the Assyrian Empire, to warn the people there to repent of their acts of wickedness, cruelty and idolatry. If not, God's judgment would swiftly come upon them. At that time, Assyria was the dominant kingdom of the known world that controlled Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

The Jewish people both despised and feared the Assyrians. The Assyrians were known as merciless towards their enemies and along with many other Israeli people Jonah desired that God send Nineveh to its well-deserved fate of complete destruction.

We must ask ourselves: do we allow our prejudices and fears about others to get in the way of our obedient service for the Lord? We can easily speak of all people of one racial background as being generally bad. But each person's real character is on the inside and their body is only temporary housing on the outside. It's wrong to judge people by their outward appearance or skin colour. We're all sinners and need Jesus to save us from our sin. The main message of the book of Jonah is that God is concerned with redeeming all the people of the world to Himself, not just His chosen people, Israel.

God's grace extends to everyone; therefore, Christians filled with God's Holy Spirit are to think and act like God, behaving graciously to all people, even to our enemies. But at the beginning of the book of Jonah, the prophet Jonah resisted his assignment to preach to Nineveh. Jonah already suspected that God intended to show mercy to the people of Nineveh and Jonah didn't want that to happen. He didn't want to be any part of any mission that would end up benefitting Israel's worst enemy.

In the Old Testament times, it was commonly believed that gods had authority only in the area in which they were worshipped. Jonah thought that if he went to the extreme west of the Mediterranean Sea, perhaps God wouldn't trouble him any more about going to Nineveh. So, he disobeyed God and found a ship sailing in the opposite direction to Nineveh. But the Lord caused a dangerous storm to develop once Jonah's ship was out at sea and soon, to the crew's horror, the ship was in danger of breaking up and sinking.

Jonah thought he had a choice to do things his way. But he forgot that doing the will of God is not an option. It's a command and opportunity to serve Him. When we run from doing God's will, we will always get into trouble. Jonah sacrificed safety for danger and peace for a life-threatening storm for many. As God's prophet, he should have known that it was futile to run away from God. God's power and authority extends everywhere in the universe. When God first called Jonah, he should have prayed about his concerns and asked for God's divine help to safely carry out his mission.

While the wind and violence of the storm crashed around Jonah's ship and threatened to sink it, Jonah was fast asleep down below in the hull, and not aware that the ship was in any danger. The desperate sailors feared for their lives and shouted to their gods for help. They also threw all the cargo overboard to help lighten the ship. As the captain didn't know which god had caused the storm he wanted to make sure that all possible gods were being prayed to! He was furious to find that Jonah wasn't awake and praying to his God.

When the crew's prayers didn't seem to be working, the sailors rightly concluded that someone on board had done something to displease one of the gods. As was the usual custom, they cast lots to find out who the guilty person was. And by God's direction, the lot fell on Jonah. The sailors had already suspected Jonah as the problem, for when boarding the ship, he'd told them that he was running away from his God.

The sailors questioned Jonah and were terrified when he told them that he worshipped the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land. They asked him what they should do to him to stop the storm. Jonah must have sensed that if he died, he could at least spare the sailors' lives. He told them to throw him into the waves and all would become calm. But those sailors revealed more character than Jonah did. They were very reluctant to throw him overboard to save the ship and themselves, so they tried even harder to row to land but the crashing waves made this impossible.

Jonah realised that he was out of God's will and accepted the consequences – death by drowning. The sailors then cried to the Lord, Jonah's God, and pleaded that He wouldn't make them die for the sins of Jonah. They also asked that the Lord wouldn't hold them responsible for Jonah's death. Then they picked up Jonah and they threw him into the raging sea. And the storm stopped – immediately! This sign amazed the sailors, as they'd never seen such great power. They offered a sacrifice to God and promised to serve Him. These actions didn't mean that these sailors all put true faith in the God of Israel, but they recognised that God fully controlled the Mediterranean Sea.

As soon as Jonah sank into the salty water, he was swallowed by an extremely large fish that God had sent to save him, for Jonah had a mission he needed to complete. God still chose to send Jonah to Nineveh, despite his disobedience. Some people have called Jonah's oversized fish a whale. But most whales have a mouth that is too small to swallow a person whole, because they filter their food out of the sea by sifting water through their mouths to catch small sea vegetation and sea animals. But could Jonah have survived in the stomach of a large fish for three days and three nights? Is such a thing possible?

God kept the plan that He had for Jonah to warn the city of Nineveh to repent. However, Jonah remained inside the large fish for three days and three nights. Can this be proven true? In Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 12, the teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him to show them a miraculous sign to prove His authority as the Son of God.

Jesus rebuked them and told them that the only sign He would give them was the sign of the prophet Jonah. He said: "For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights." Jesus believed and quoted Jonah's experience to be true. Jesus knew that His Father had performed a miracle for Jonah's survival.

While God used disobedient Jonah to bring about faith in God among the sailors, Jonah's life was doomed unless God saved him too. We can see that disobedient Jonah saved a ship and its crew, and later on, an obedient Jonah also saved the city of Nineveh. Yes, God can use us even when we're out of His will, but He can use us much more when we're in it. When we're in His will, we too will be able to enjoy the blessings that come from obeying God!

In Chapter 2 of Jonah's book he prayed to the Lord with a prayer written in poetic style. He praised God for saving him from death and asked for His great forgiveness. Jonah also made a vow to the Lord, which we can guess would have been to obey the Lord's commands from there on. After Jonah had repented and asked God for a 2nd chance, the Lord ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto a beach.

Are all missionaries successful from the beginning of their 1st call to spread the Gospel of Christ both at home and overseas? A young United States woman, by the name of Miss Miah Oren, learnt about God's grace in church. She heard that Christians are saved by God's free gift of grace alone; all sinners need to do is to confess their sins, believe that Jesus is God's Son and that His death is what saved them from their sins.

But Miss Miah said that perfectionism had crept into her life and she had a belief that God loved her less whenever she made mistakes. Being “successful”, even in the church, came to mean to her as having a good job, the right church service positions, and no obvious sin that others could see in her life. Building up a list of achievements became more important to her than following God’s Holy Spirit and believing that He loved her and that she was fully forgiven of her sins.

Miss Miah lived in a culture that rated a person’s value by the results they achieved in their lives, and as she was involved in a missionary focused church, she accepted a 2-year overseas appointment to be a missionary. Now as a new missionary, Miss Miah was burdened with the expectation of living a perfect life so that others would come to know Christ. It’s a struggle for any missionary trying to adjust to a new culture different from their own, while trying not to offend anyone, as well as make new friendships and sharing the good news of Jesus.

After experiencing failure after failure, being “successful” for Miah became just getting out of bed in the morning. After returning home, she wrote her experiences in a book that she called: “The Reluctant Missionary – A Journey from Failure to Faith.” In her book, Miss Miah explored her struggles with the feelings of failure with God, her co-workers, her students and with herself. Her struggle to please others when goals were unclear or not achievable is very real to all of us. We can see and relate to her journey through the unfamiliar territory of failure, guilt and pain but Miss Miah gained through her missionary experience a better understanding God's saving grace and that forgiving oneself for one’s own failures can be the hardest work of all.

Her book is both eye-opening to the realities of overseas ministry and encouraging in that Christians are not alone in their anxiety, worry or feelings of failure while doing God's work. God is the constant in all of this. We have to let go of the weights and expectations that we've placed on ourselves when it comes to ministry and move into God's love and grace for us instead. If there's a lesson given in this book, it's that sometimes trusting God through a difficult situation is enough, for often times, there's a meaning in our daily struggle, even if it takes years afterwards to discern what that meaning was. God revealed to us in the book of Jonah that He's able to use failure as well as success to accomplish His good work.

No matter what culture we live in, when we fail God, we need to bring our earnest prayer to Him, asking Him to bring good out of bad situations that we've caused by our mistakes. God can do that, and even more. Relying on Him when we think all is going wrong becomes the turning point for our own heart to find peace. In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus said: "I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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