

Children's Church Parent's Guide

For April 3, 2004

Overview of this Week's Message

Theme: We can hurt others when we disobey God.

Scripture Reference: Jonah 1

Key Passage: Jonah 1:3

Passage Background:

God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and declare its wickedness as a warning to the Assyrians (v. 1-2). The Assyrians and Israelites hated each other and this attitude extended down to the prophet Jonah. When Jonah heard God's calling to go preach to the capital city of the Assyrians, Jonah knew what God was up to: God was going to give the Assyrians a chance to repent. Jonah's hatred, however, caused Jonah to turn from God's command (v. 3). Jonah hoped that by avoiding God one of two things would happen: either God would call someone else to go preach to the Assyrians or the Assyrians would be destroyed for their wickedness. Jonah probably preferred the latter.

Jonah's disobedience, however, had grave consequences on those around him. First and foremost, Jonah's refusal to respond according to God's calling put the eternal lives of the people of Nineveh on the line. God's plan always does work, but from Jonah's perspective, he was hoping the people of Nineveh would never hear God's rebuke, would never turn from their wicked ways, and as a result, be destroyed by God.

Second, and most visibly, Jonah's flight away from Nineveh by boat cost the sailors their cargo. When God sent Jonah a stern message with the storm that rose up (v. 4), Jonah initially was sleeping. The sailors, unsure of what else they could do, attempted to make the boat more seaworthy by dumping the cargo (v. 5).

When that was ineffective, the captain of the ship implored upon Jonah to call on the name of his "god" in order that the ship might be saved (v. 6). Obviously this meant the sailors knew something of Jonah; if nothing else, they knew he worshipped a God different than they. We don't see any indication of Jonah praying so we can't conclude one way or the other if he did or not. What we do see next is the sailors casting lots to determine who has angered the "gods." The casting showed Jonah to be the cause (v. 7).

After questioning Jonah (v. 8), the sailors learned he had fled from God (v. 9). They asked why he had done such a thing and also asked the prophet how they were to appease God (v. 10-11). Jonah tells them to cast him into the sea (v. 12). Throwing a man overboard to drown wouldn't sit well with any sane man and it certainly didn't with the sailors on this vessel. They tried to row their way out (v. 13) but without success. Out of options, they prayed to God not to hold Jonah's life and possible death against them (v. 14). Finally, they threw Jonah overboard (v. 15) and then offered sacrifices to God and "took vows" after the seas immediately calmed down (v. 16).

Even as we look on this last scene, the thought of abandoning another man to the scene must surely have shaken some, if not all, of these sailors. What they did was akin to murder in their minds as is evidence of their prayer in verse 14. Again, we see Jonah's refusal to obey God in the first place having a damaging impact on the lives of the people around him. Not only did these sailors lose their cargo, but at least some of them bore the guilt from tossing Jonah into the sea.

Yet despite it all, God used the situation for good. These sailors came to know there was a supreme God, the very same one Jonah worshipped. This was evident by the miraculous rise of the storm and its just as miraculous disappearance. These men were so struck by the experience they took vows out of a sense of gratitude and fear. Whether or not any man stuck through with his vows and followed God the rest of his life we do not know. But at least in this instance the hearts of these sailors were softened where they could experience God.

Monday: Reinforcement

Theme: We can hurt others when we disobey God.

Key Passage: Jonah 1

Bible Memory Verse: 1 John 2:6 – *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.* (NIV)

Cover Jonah 1 with your child. Talk about God's command and why Jonah didn't want to follow it. Also talk a little about how Jonah responded. Tell the story of how the storm came up and the sailors were very afraid. Explain what it mean for them to throw their cargo overboard. Focus on the fact that it wasn't the sailors who had done anything wrong. Rather, it was Jonah's disobedience that caused the loss.

Review the Bible memory verse with your child and help him or her repeat it several times.

Tuesday: The Real World

Theme: God gives us commands to protect not only ourselves, but also those around us.

Key Passage: Exodus 32

Try to think about a situation your child would have seen or heard about where someone else could have gotten hurt because of another's actions. For instance, people driving too fast, kids throwing rocks, children running around in a small space with other people around, etc. If your child hasn't seen such an incident lately, pick one that seems appropriate.

Discuss with your child the situation and review with your son or daughter your own command in this situation ("Don't throw rocks," "Walk in the Fellowship Hall," etc.). Explain why you've set such a rule down so your child understands it's not just a case of mom or dad saying, "No," to be "mean." Explain how your command protects others from being harmed.

Then talk about how God has given us His Bible to tell us what's right and what's wrong. Explain how God, our Heavenly Father, is looking at for all of us, just as you as a parent look out for your child. Discuss how the Bible isn't there to put restrictions on us because God is being mean. Rather, God is advising us on what to do and not do in order to protect us. Lead

into Aaron and the Golden Calf. Aaron's disobedience led the Israelites astray. This is an example of one's man disobedience causing harm to others.

Review the Bible verse with your child.

Wednesday: Missions Focus

Theme: Others look at our actions and follow us.

Key Passage: Galatians 2:11-14

Remind your child about who Paul and Peter were. Talk about how Peter walked with Jesus and about how he was one of the main leaders of the disciples. Discuss how Paul wrote most of what we consider the New Testament and was called by God to spread the Gospel to non-Jews. Talk a bit about how God used Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41) to bring many people to choose Jesus as their boss.

Then talk a bit about how Jewish people had certain rules about what they could eat and what they couldn't. Explain how God had given the Jews these rules initially to keep them safe from harm and also to teach them about sacrifice and worship. Then talk about Peter going to Galatia and starting to follow these rules again, even though he knew that following a set of rules blindly wasn't what God desired. Rather, God wants love; God wants faith. While eating the way he did wasn't wrong, Paul's discourse makes it clear Peter was following it more out of a sense of legalism than because he wanted a kosher diet. Peter's actions visibly impacted the Jews around him. Peter's falling into this legalistic behavior caused others to do the same.

After your child is firm on what Peter did wrong, talk to your child about how others started following Peter. Also talk about how Paul had to confront Peter in order to break the disobedience. Use that to discuss about how others watch us, especially if they know we're Christians. A good analogy is how we're fish in a fish bowl. Everyone is looking in at us. Therefore, even when we think someone isn't looking, chances are someone is. Talk about how if we disobey God, this may be all another person needs to do the same. Therefore, when we disobey, we can lead others down the wrong path, too.

Review the Bible verse. Your child should be able to say it with no more than one or two prompts from you as your child recites the verse.

Thursday: Personal Application

Theme: I will obey God out of love.

Key Passage: 1 John 2:3-6

Start by asking how we know we love each other. Your child will probably talk about giving hugs and kisses, telling each other, giving gifts, etc. Ask about how a child knows a parent loves that child. Then ask how a parent knows. If your child doesn't say by obedience, ask about that. Talk about what disobedience says. It usually means a lack of respect. It certainly causes the parent pain to have a child disobey. Ask if causing pain is typically how we demonstrate love.

Talk about how God has given us commands because He loves us. He wants the best for us and He has put together the absolute best plan we can have for life. Explain how as a loving Father He has done all of this for us. Take some time to explain that God is very much like a parent and that when we as His children disobey, it affects Him in a similar way as when a child disobeys his or her parent. Discuss with your child how he or she might do a better job of following God. If your child has never made a commitment to Christ and seems ready, this would be a good time to present what that means and what is expected from God of such a decision.

Review the Bible verse. Your child should be able to say it without prompting from an adult.

Friday: Family Time

Theme: A family can help each other obey God.

Key Passage: Esther 4

Tell the story of Esther to your son or daughter. Explain how Esther had been chosen as queen and was in a unique position to be able to talk to the king. Talk about the dedication of Mordecai, Esther's uncle, who went to the palace gates to try and tell Esther.

Then talk about Esther's response, one where she was afraid of going before the king. Look at Mordecai's reasoned argument back to his niece and reflect on how Mordecai kept Esther where God wanted her. Also talk about how Mordecai's words spurred Esther on to action.

Briefly discuss the end of what the Bible tells us about Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews. Spend some time looking at how Mordecai's dedication saved his whole people because he helped his niece do what God had intended of her.

Have your child recite the memory verse. Provide prompts if necessary. When your child finishes reciting the verse, take the time to celebrate your child's hard work this week.