

Children's Church Teacher's Guide

For April 3, 2005

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.

Introduction:

Open the Children's Church by praying. Pray specifically for God to help each child to obey what the Bible says, even when others around them aren't and especially when God calls them to do something they find very hard to do.

Most of you have heard of Jonah. Some of you may even know the story pretty well, especially if you've seen the VeggieTales¹ movie. But how much do you really know? Let's start off by seeing how much you know. I'm going to ask some questions about Jonah and what he was supposed to do, and let's see how many you all get right. These questions will all be multiple choice so listen carefully to the possible answers before you raise your hand to answer.

Ask the following questions:

1. Who spoke to Jonah and told him to do something? Was it:
 - a. Jonah's wife
 - b. Jonah's best friend
 - c. God
 - d. The prophet Elijah

2. What city was Jonah supposed to go to? Was it:
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. New York
 - c. Tarshish
 - d. Nineveh

3. What did Jonah do?
 - a. He went back to sleep.
 - b. He got on a boat.
 - c. He went to Nineveh right away!
 - d. He asked the Apostle Paul to go for him.

¹ VeggieTales is the property of Big Idea, Inc.

4. What happened to the boat?
 - a. It made it to Tarshish just fine.
 - b. It ended up going to Nineveh
 - c. Godzilla came out of the ocean and destroyed it.
 - d. God raised us a huge storm.

5. What did the sailors do to try and save the boat?
 - a. They threw all of their cargo overboard.
 - b. They engaged the warp drive engine.
 - c. They all went to sleep and waited it out.
 - d. They gave up and caught a ride with some dolphins.

6. After everything else had failed, what did the sailors end up doing?
 - a. They gave up and caught a ride with some dolphins.
 - b. They called for a rescue helicopter.
 - c. They threw Jonah overboard.
 - d. They started singing *You Are My Sunshine*.

7. With Jonah overboard, what happened next?
 - a. Nothing changed.
 - b. Suddenly the storm stopped.
 - c. The ship sunk and they caught a ride with some dolphins.
 - d. The sailors were rescued by the United States Coast Guard.

Some of the possible answers were silly, but I did that on purpose. I wanted to get your attention because we're going to take a really good look at Jonah today. We're going to look at the trouble Jonah caused others. He disobeyed God and other people were hurt. Let's go back over the important parts of the story.

God told Jonah to go the city of Nineveh and tell the people there that they had been very bad. These people weren't following God and He wasn't happy with them. Jonah didn't want to go so he got on a ship sailing for Tarshish. Tarshish wasn't Nineveh. Jonah disobeyed God and he did so on purpose.

God brought a very bad storm that looked like it was going to sink the ship. The sailors, trying to save the ship, threw overboard everything they had on board they could spare. They were probably trading stuff to make money, and that means they lost a lot of money. Finally, with no other options, the sailors threw Jonah overboard. Jonah had told them he was God's prophet but he was running away from what God called him to do. He also told them that if they threw Jonah overboard God would save the ship. This is why the sailors finally did throw Jonah into the sea. After Jonah was overboard, God stopped the storm right away.

Got all of that? If not, don't worry, because this is a story you'll hear many times in church. Just follow along the best as you can as we look at what Jonah's disobedience caused. Now, where are my eggs?

Activity:

Materials: Raw egg, hard-boiled egg, plastic wrap or something to put down under the eggs (cleanliness).

Spread out the plastic wrap on the floor or table so that it will adequately protect against the splattered raw egg.

A lot of times God gives us instructions that either we don't understand or we don't like. For instance, God sent an angel to Philip. The angel told Philip to go out into the desert. Philip didn't know he'd meet a guy in a chariot. That guy just happened to be looking at God's word but couldn't understand it. God knew Philip was the man to help this man out. Philip is an example of when we don't understand why God says to do something.

Jonah is a different story entirely. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. God had given him a command he didn't like. So Jonah decided he wasn't going to do it. Jonah did something a lot of us do. He chose to do things his way when he didn't like what he was told. How many of you have ever been told to do something by your mom and dad and you didn't listen? All of us have done that. So you don't get the wrong idea, let me be clear about something. It doesn't matter if everyone else has done it. Disobeying is wrong, whether it's your parents or God. Even if "everyone" does something you can't say, "It's okay." That's what the Bible is for. It tells us what is right and what is wrong. It is what we follow. The Bible says over and over again that disobeying your parents is wrong. The Bible says even more times that disobeying God is wrong.

What can happen if we disobey God? Quite a bit. But let's first look at what can happen when we obey.

Hold up the hard-boiled egg.

This egg is hard-boiled. This egg represents the person who has listened to God. God knows the future. He knows what the future holds. Sometimes when He tells us to do something we don't understand, it's because He is trying to get us ready for what's coming. Other times we can see clearly why He wants us to do something. I guess you can say boiling the egg is the preparing we do when we obey God. See, we'll never know when something unexpected might happen.

Drop the hard-boiled egg onto the plastic wrap. After it hits, show it to the children.

Wow. Well, though the egg may have a cracked shell, the inside is okay. This is what it's like when we listen to God. Not only are we okay, but the folks around us are, too. This is usually what happens. I say that because there are times when we're doing everything right but bad

things still happen. Until we get to heaven, that's life. There are a lot of reasons why this is true. One reason is disobedience.

Hold up the raw egg.

This is another egg. It's an example of a person who hasn't listened to God. Either that person hasn't chosen Jesus as his boss or this person is a Christian who is just being disobedient. It really doesn't matter. Both types of people aren't listening to God. They aren't doing what God says. Watch what happens.

Drop the raw egg.

What a mess! This egg hadn't been cooked. Remember, we said the cooking is a person doing what God said. That person was prepared for the future. This person isn't. This person hasn't followed what God wanted. Now look at the inside stuff, the yolk. It's leaking out of the shell. Now think about if you were around that egg when it hit the ground. You might have gotten some of the egg on you. Not only is the egg affected, but so are you.

That is always a possibility when we don't listen to God. Not only does our disobedience affect us, but it can affect others around us. For Jonah, it affected the sailors who took him on board. They lost their cargo. They lost the things they were going to sell to make money. This was not a good thing! When we don't listen to God, we can hurt others. Never forget that.

Okay, this has been a pretty heavy lesson. Let's relax a little and have some fun.

Fun Time:

We're going to play a game some of you, if not all of you, have played before. We're going to play "Plant or Animal" to celebrate God's creation. Jonah learned the hard way that God doesn't play favorites. Therefore, we must respect all that God has created. "Plant or Animal" helps us do that.

If you don't know the rules, they are pretty easy. Whoever is up front is going to think of a plant or animal. Everyone else gets a chance to ask a Yes or No question to try and figure out what it is. Once you ask your Yes or No question you get a chance to guess what kind of plant or animal it is. If you ask a question that can't be answered with a Yes or a No, you lose the question, but you still get a chance to guess.

If you guess correctly, you get to come up front. Don't worry if you can't answer the Yes or No questions, we'll help you. You just think of the plant or animal and we'll help you do the rest!