

Children's Church Parent's Guide

For April 10, 2004

Overview of this Week's Message

Theme: Great things can happen when we listen to God.

Scripture Reference: Jonah 3

Key Passage: Jonah 3:3

Passage Background:

After spending time pondering his fate in the belly of a giant fish, Jonah seemingly has a change of heart and agrees to go to Nineveh. God delivers him back onto land in order to complete his mission: to preach God's word to capital city of Assyria, hated enemy of the Israelites.

God repeats His command to go to Nineveh (v. 1-2) and Jonah obeys (v. 3). We are told Nineveh is a city requiring three days to cover. The estimated circumference of Nineveh is only about 8 miles, which is easily covered in a day, though some historians have indicated it was larger than Babylon in size. Certainly, being the capital city of one of the most powerful empires until that time would mean Nineveh was large and would take Jonah some time to cover. Whether the 3 days refers to how long it would take Jonah to cover while preaching (which would be slow and involve a lot of steps) or means Nineveh and the surrounding area is uncertain.

Jonah begins to preach about how God will bring destruction after 40 days (v. 4) and the reaction is as God would desire: the Assyrians of that city turn to Him (v.5). The Bible indicates the conversion went across all social classes with the words "from the greatest to the least" (NIV) putting on sackcloth and fasting. This includes the king (v.6), who himself put on sackcloth, much as David did when he was mourning his first son with Bathsheba. However, the king didn't stop there but instead chose to issue a proclamation calling for all to repent and turn towards God (v. 7-9). The proclamation indicates that the king had no assurance the city would be spared but yet asked his people to call on God. The result, of course, is God compassionately relenting of the destruction (v. 10).

Jonah's preaching according to God's command swayed the capital city of a mighty empire. Even the king of the empire turned towards God and chose to follow Him. This is a great indication of what can be accomplished when we choose to listen to God. Without God in this, what would spur the Assyrians to listen to this Israelite "prophet?" However, it is important to note that historically this conversion wasn't permanent. Eventually (about 150 years later based on historical estimates on when Jonah is likely to have gone to the city) Nineveh fell to, among others, the Babylonians.

Monday: Reinforcement

Theme: Great things can happen when we listen to God.

Key Passage: Jonah 3

Bible Memory Verse: Philippians 4:13 – *I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* (NIV)

Briefly review with your child Jonah's decision not to listen to God. Remind your son or daughter of how Jonah chose to run away rather than go to Nineveh and tell the people what God wanted him to preach. Then talk about how Jonah finally accepted God's command and went. Sum up Jonah 3 and talk about how the city of Nineveh responded to Jonah's preaching: turning to God and asking for forgiveness. Spend some time talking about how unlikely this was:

- Jonah was from Israel. Israel and Assyria hated each other.
- Jonah came to tell the city of Nineveh how they had sinned against God.
- Rather than capturing Jonah and/or killing him, they instead turned to God.
- The conversion affected everyone including the king of Nineveh, meaning the king of Assyria.

Explain that the reason Jonah was successful was because of God. God knew the right time and the right person to accomplish His will. God, our merciful God, wanted to save the city, not destroy it. However, He had to warn them of where their actions were leading.

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

Tuesday: The Real World

Theme: God will work with us if our desires are righteous.

Key Passage: Nehemiah 1-2

Nehemiah was a cupbearer for the Persian king, King Xerxes. A cupbearer was the one who tested a drink given to the king for poison. The king had to have complete trust in his cupbearer. After all, the cupbearer was, in a very real sense, protecting the king's life. If the cupbearer was untrustworthy, a poisoned drink might make its way to the king. Explain the role of a cupbearer to your child and stress how important such a job was.

Cover Nehemiah's prayer from chapter 1 with your son or daughter. Talk about how Israel had sinned against God and Jerusalem was in bad shape. Explain that quite a few Israelites had been taken out of Israel by the Babylonians when God used that nation to deliver judgment against Israel and how the Babylonians had fallen to the Persians for the same reason. Nehemiah was an Israelite living in Susa (located in modern day Iran) as a trusted member of the king's staff.

Talk about how God heard Nehemiah's prayer and honored Nehemiah's request to rebuild Jerusalem. King Xerxes had noticed the sadness in Nehemiah and asked about it. When Nehemiah explained what troubled him, Xerxes not only let him go, but also honored his request to provide letters to various people who Nehemiah would have to work with. These people would be the ones to supply the materials to rebuild Jerusalem.

Conclude on how unusual it was for the king to let a valuable and necessary member such as a cupbearer go away on a journey for so long. Reflect a moment or two on how this was possible due to God's intervention but would have been unlikely otherwise.

Review the Bible verse with your child.

Wednesday: Missions Focus

Theme: We can reach the most unlikely people when we obey God.

Key Passage: Acts 16:16-35

Begin by asking your child who he or she knows that he or she might be hesitant to share the Gospel with. Talk for a moment or two about why your child might now want to. Is the person in question a bully? Does that person have habits that your child doesn't like?

Retell the story found in the Key Passage. Explain how Paul and Silas were thrown in jail for helping a young girl. The young girl's boss (if your child is mature enough you might explain the young girl was a slave and had no choice but to serve her master) had been making a lot of money due to her "ability" to tell the future. However, this "ability" was due to a demon within her that was controlling her. Therefore, when Paul commanded the demon to come out of the girl, the master/boss stood to lose a lot of money and had Paul and Silas thrown in jail.

Then talk about the earthquake that shook the area and how the jailer was scared his prisoners had escaped. The jailer was responsible for producing the prisoners when called upon by the Roman authorities and if any were missing, he'd likely be killed. Therefore, he assumed the prisoners had escaped and tried to kill himself. Paul shouted out that everyone was present, thereby saving the man's life. Paul reached out to the very man who imprisoned him. When the jailer heard this, knowing what Paul and Silas had been doing, he begged them to tell him what he must do to follow Christ. Paul and Silas explained the Gospel to him as well as the other members of the jailer's house. The whole house came to Christ.

Finish by talking about how most people wouldn't have reached out to the jailer had they been in Paul and Silas' place. However, Paul and Silas understood they were called to share the Gospel with everyone, including the jailer. Talk about how we can reach the most unlikely of people if we just obey God and attempt to share the Gospel with them.

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: God will do the miraculous if we can trust Him.

Key Passage: Matthew 8:5-13

You'll need two things for this day's lesson: a piece of candy your child would enjoy and a small rock. They should both be about the same size. Show both to your child. Ask your child to close his or her eyes and hold out a hand. Instruct your child to ask for whichever he or she wants. Whichever one your child asks for, place into his or her hand. Then ask your son or daughter to open his or her eyes.

Retell the story of the faithful centurion. Explain how this centurion believed Jesus could heal, merely by saying it was done. The centurion had come to obtain healing for his servant; he asked for a miracle. Emphasize this centurion's belief in Jesus to accomplish this miracle. Point your child's attention back to the rock or the candy, whichever was asked for. Discuss how if we trust God to deliver something, and (reflecting back on Tuesday), and it's a

righteous request, God will deliver. However, a righteous request without faith may get us nowhere. Conclude by talking about how obeying God, especially in situations that don't make sense to us, is a matter of faith. Faith is believing when we can't see the outcome. If we trust God and obey Him, He will deliver.

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

Friday: Family Time

Theme: Standing with our family can result in blessing.

Key Passage: Ruth 1

It is important to remember how Ruth plays into the lineage of King David and ultimately Christ. That line is:

- Ruth marries Boaz (the Kinsman-Redeemer) and has a son, Obed
- Obed has a son named Jesse
- Jesse has a son named David. This is King David, from whom both Mary and Joseph are descended. The Messiah must come from the line of David according to Scripture.

Try, along with your child, to come up with a situation when your child didn't know what to do and was very scared. Talk about how it either (a) would have been better if someone your child knew and trusted was their with your child or (b) how much it meant to have that person there, depending on the situation.

Talk about Naomi and her situation with your child. Explain how Naomi's husband had taken her to live in Moab, far away from any family. While there, Naomi's two sons married women from Moab, one of them being Ruth. Then her husband died. To make matters worse, her two sons died as well. This left Naomi alone. She decided to return back to her family in Judah. Both daughters-in-law said they were going with her, but Naomi gave her daughters-in-law permission to remain in Moab. One chose to. The other, Ruth, refused. Read to your child Ruth's faith-filled reason why she would go with Naomi. Then summarize the rest of Ruth for your child by explaining that when they got back to Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth had very little. However, Boaz, a kinsman-redeemer, showed great kindness towards Ruth. Boaz and Ruth were eventually married after a series of events and one day had a son. Cover the lineage that led to King David with your son or daughter. Conclude on how Ruth's choice to stand by her mother-in-law resulted in this blessing for all nations, Jesus.

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.