

Children's Church Teacher's Guide

For April 10, 2005

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.

Introduction:

Open the Children's Church in prayer. Pray specifically for God to help each child understand how much can be accomplished when they choose to team up with God.

Last week we looked at how Jonah didn't want to do what God said. Jonah chose to get on a boat and head anywhere but Nineveh, where God had called him to preach. In the end, the sailors of the boat ended up losing all of their cargo. Though the sailors had done nothing

wrong, Jonah had. This reminds us that when we choose to disobey God, we can hurt other people.

This week we're going to look at something more exciting. We're going to look at what can happen when we listen to God. If we obey Him, great things can happen. Yes, great things can happen when we listen to God. Let's say that together:

Great things can happen when we listen to God.

The last we left Jonah, he had been swallowed by a great fish. Well, Jonah had some time to think while in that fish. And he finally decided to try it God's way. So God delivered Jonah back up onto dry land. Then came God's command one more time. Jonah was to go to Nineveh and tell the people there about how they were disobeying God. God was going to punish these people. This time Jonah went.

Jonah traveled to Nineveh, capital city of Assyria. Assyria was a very powerful empire, one of the most powerful in history. Nineveh was a large city. The Bible says it would take Jonah three days to cover the city. That's a big city! Of course, with Jonah walking around and preaching, he'd be going about fairly slowly, but three days is a long time. And Jonah wasted no time.

On the very first day he began to preach about how God was not pleased with what He saw of that city. Jonah told the people what God was going to do. Then an amazing thing happened. Do you know what that was?

Give the children a chance to respond. If they know the story they will know the people of Nineveh chose to repent and turn to God.

The city of Nineveh chose to ask God for forgiveness. The Bible tells us from the greatest to the least, in other words, everyone. It even says the king called on his people to ask God for forgiveness. Imagine that! Let's look at how crazy this sounds.

Jonah enters the city, an Israelite, a person from a country Assyria doesn't like, and preaches that Israel's God is going to destroy the city because the people there haven't obeyed Him. The Assyrians didn't kill Jonah for being an Israelite. They didn't kill Jonah after he told all of them his God was going to destroy the city. Those would be what we'd expect to happen. The city wouldn't listen, it would kill God's prophet, and God would destroy the city. Only none of that happened. Instead, the city listened to Jonah and asked God to forgive it! Now that's crazy! But that's the kind of thing that can happen when we listen to God.

God knows the future. He knows when to do something and how to do it. And if we listen to Him, if we obey, we can be in the right place at the right time. Jonah was. We can team up with God and see things get done we'd never be able to do on our own. As a matter of fact, we'll look at just that.

Activity:

Materials: None needed.

Pick a volunteer.

This is what I want you to do. I want you to sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. I want you to try and stand up without putting your hands or any part of your arms on the floor. You must try and stand up just using your feet and legs. Think you can do it?

Give the child a chance to stand up. Even if the child is able to do so, the child will not be able to do so without a great deal of difficulty.

Okay. Let's make things easier. I need another volunteer.

Pick a volunteer who is about the same height and weight as the first child.

I want you two to sit back-to-back on the floor. Next, I want you to interlink arms at the elbows. Following the same rules as before, I want you two to stand-up. I'll give you a little hint: if you press against each other and work together, you'll find you can stand up easily. Okay, give it a try!

Allow the two to try. If they need a little coaching, help them understand how to do the exercise. Once they have stood up, continue:

Thanks for being volunteers. Did everyone see what they did? By working together they were able to stand up a whole lot easier than either of them could, alone. The same is true when we work with God.

Let's go back and talk about Jonah. It's time to do some thinking. God asks us to think about what the Bible says. I want you to really think about these questions before you answer. Are you ready?

Could Jonah have survived in that great fish without God's help?

If Jonah had gone to Nineveh on his own and told the people there they had sinned against God, do you think the people would have asked God for forgiveness? Or do you think they would have tried to hurt Jonah?

Was it a miracle so many people chose to listen to Jonah and turned back to God?

Let's face it: without God Jonah wouldn't have made it out of either situation. Jonah needed God. Just as Jonah needed God, so do we. As we've talked about before, God has blessed you with certain talents, abilities, and skills. You might be able to go a long way with you've been given. But you will never be able to go as far by yourself as you could go with God. That means we must listen to Him. That brings up the next question: How do we hear God?

Let the children try and come up with the following answers:

- The Bible
- Prayer
- Things That Happen Around Us

There are several ways God uses to tell us what He wants us to do. We'll talk about three of them. The first is the Bible. If we think we're supposed to do something and it doesn't fit with what the Bible says, we aren't to do it. There's going to be a lot of people that are going to tell us what they think we should do. Sometimes we get so caught up in what other people say that we think we're hearing from God. One good way to test is to take what we've heard and look to see if the Bible agrees. If the Bible doesn't agree, what we've heard is not from God.

The second way is through prayer. Prayer is just talking to God. God allows to talk to Him as a friend. He tells us when we come to Him as His child. If we pray to God and we are quiet and listen, we can hear what He wants us to do. Now most people don't hear God's voice like you hear mine. But most people do get a sense of what they should do. Once again if you feel like you should do something after praying, check it in the Bible. If it doesn't agree, then don't do it.

The last way we'll talk about is through what happens around us. For instance, Jonah didn't drown when the sailors threw him overboard. Instead, God used a great fish to keep Jonah alive. When Jonah got to Nineveh, he preached about God. The people of Nineveh heard how they were disobeying God. Even the king heard the message Jonah brought. And they chose to ask God to forgive them. Sometimes God will use what happens around us to show us what He wants us to do. Once again, always check the Bible. We can something think God means one thing but that not be true at all. The Bible is the best way for us to keep on track.

Fun Time:

Materials: yellow or gold yarn, black beads, red beads, white beads, green beads

For the craft today we're going to make necklaces. I have plenty of supplies so you can make several necklaces. You may keep one, but I want you to try and give the rest away. These necklaces have to be made a certain way. I'm going to explain how to do it.

When you make your necklace, you're going to start with a yellow (gold) piece of yarn. This is for the streets of gold in heaven. God lives in heaven and one day He wants us to be there with Him.

On that yellow piece of yarn you're going to put a black bead. This black bead represents sin. Sin is when we do something that God has said not to do. Sin is also when we don't do something God has told us to do. For instance Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. Sin keeps us from heaven.

Next to the black bead you're going to put a red bead. The red bead is for Jesus' blood. Without Jesus we are stuck with our sin. God's not going to let us into heaven with that sin. And we can't do anything to get rid of it. That's why God sent Jesus. Jesus lived the perfect

life. And when he died on the Cross and came back to life Jesus proved He was God. As God He can forgive our sins. He can forgive our mistakes. The blood Jesus shed for us gets rid of those sins.

Next to the red bead you're going to slide a white bead. So we should have black, red, then white. The white bead represents us. If we've made Jesus the Boss of our lives, His blood gets rid of all of our sin. God sees us without any sin and that allows us to go to heaven.

The final bead is green. You'll slide the green bead next to the white one. Your beads should be in the following order: black, red, white, and finally green. Green means life. This bead means living forever with God. If we accept Jesus as our Boss, then we live forever with Him.

Let's review. Yellow is for the gold streets of heaven where God lives. Black is for our sins which keep us from God. Red is for Jesus' blood that erases those sins. White is for how we are to God after we accept Jesus as Boss: we are pure and without sin. Green is for life; life in heaven as we live with God forever.

Don't worry if you're having a hard time remembering. I've got a sheet for you to take home to remember what the colors mean.