



LESSON 3: BACK ON TRACK

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-10

Main Point: God is merciful. When we deserved death for our sins, he showed us mercy by sending Jesus as our Savior

Memory Verse: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

LARGE GROUP LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Has your mom or dad ever told you to do something? They may say "Hey, can you please put your shoes up?". And you don't respond or you whine or you get distracted and then they have to tell you a SECOND time. "Hey, go put your shoes up!" Hopefully by the second time you get the idea. You FINALLY do what they ask.

Jonah was like this too. In the past two chapters (and weeks) we've seen Jonah run away from God's first request for him to go to Nineveh and then we see God save Jonah even after disobeying. He uses that great big fish to rescue him from drowning in the sea. Let's see if in Jonah chapter 3 he gets back on track.

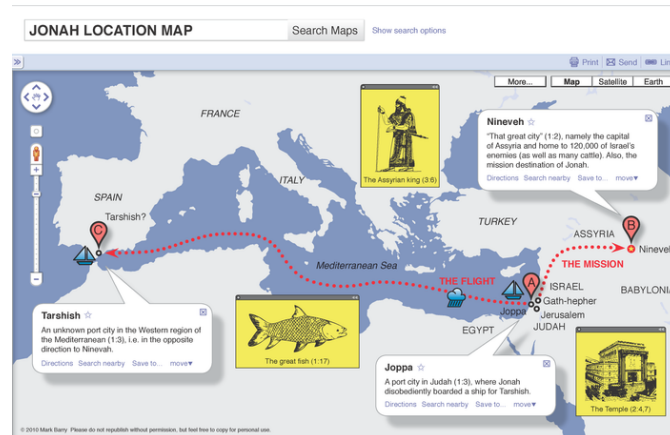
MAIN LESSON

Jonah 3:1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

Phew! I was worried about Jonah! I was afraid he'd try to jump on another boat, but instead he uses his second chance wisely and goes to Nineveh. Now what do we know about Nineveh. Let's see:

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey.

Speaking of journeys, I have a little map of what Jonah's journey looked like.



Here's (show the path to Tarshish) where he was trying to go, and this was the little journey from Gath-hepher to Nineveh. When he gets there, it's time to get down to business:

Verse 4: And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

He warned them that God wasn't happy and God was going to judge Nineveh and it wasn't going to be pretty. And do you know what the people did?

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

They believed! Jonah didn't have to show them a miracle or preach a lot or really do much at all. God moved their hearts and they immediately believed him. Then the news reached a pretty powerful guy. Let's see who in verse 6:

6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

Wow. The King heard that God wasn't happy and he immediately warned his people to shape up and change from their sinful ways! The people fasted (didn't eat) and put on sackcloth-this was their way to show they were sorry and wanted forgiveness. They prayed to God asking for mercy. And what do you think God did?

10 *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

In another translation it says God “changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.” The Ninevites knew they deserved God’s judgment. They repented, changed their heart and God showed them mercy. Mercy is kind and forgiving treatment when we deserve much worse. God always wants us to repent, he doesn’t want to punish us, he wants us to turn to Him and have him forgive us.

God showed us mercy. The Bible says that we are all sinners in *Romans 3:23* -for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. *We should be judged and punished for our sins.* In *Romans 6:23* it says *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* When we sin that means that we deserve death, but God showed us **MERCY**. How did he show us mercy? Through his son Jesus. He sent Jesus to come to earth and be our Rescuer. Jesus lived a perfect life and then died on a cross as a sacrifice for all of our sins. Then he rose again three days later. Through God’s mercy, we get the gift of salvation in Jesus.

God just asks us to do one thing, the same thing Jonah asked the Ninevites. Repent! Turn away from all the sin and bad stuff and turn to God. He loves you and he wants you and he’s got lots of mercy. When we do that and believe Jesus is the only one who saves us, then we won’t be punished by death. We’ll get eternal life with God!

Isn’t God so cool? He showed Jonah mercy last week, he showed the Ninevites mercy this week AND he shows us mercy now! Next week we’ll finish the very last part of Jonah, this isn’t the end of the story and I think the ending will surprise you. Now let’s close in prayer and thank God for his great gift of mercy.

Close in prayer and dismiss to small groups.



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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

Today we read Jonah 3 and learned about Jonah's warning to the Ninevites and their repentant heart.

- Do you ever need a second chance like Jonah did? When have you got a second chance when you need one? *Let them share*
- After Jonah warned the Ninevites, what did they do? *Believe God*
- Where did the warning go next? *To the king*
- What did the king do next? *He wanted everyone to fast and wear sackcloth and tell God they were sorry.*
- What did God do when he saw their actions? *He forgave them and didn't destroy them*
- What does this chapter tell us about God? *God is merciful and loving. He doesn't want us to be punished, he wants us to turn to him and ask forgiveness.*
- What does MERCY mean? *Mercy is kind and forgiving treatment when we deserve much worse.*
- How did God show mercy in this chapter? *God showed mercy on the Ninevites, they deserved destruction, but God saved them.*
- How do we see Jesus in today's chapter? *Jonah asked the people to repent and Jesus wants us to repent and turn to Him.*

Jonah used his second chance well and so did the Ninevites. They turned to God and were saved from destruction. They got a second chance. God gives us more than a second chance, He gave us Jesus and because of Jesus no matter how good or bad we are, we are always forgiven by Him and what He did on the cross.

BIBLE CHALLENGE

This Week's Memory Verse: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

Go over this week's verse. Practice as a group. Reinforce the idea that we all deserve death, but God gave us Jesus freely—no strings attached! Tell them this is a very good verse to memorize and remember for years to come.

POST-IT BACK CHALLENGE

Supplies: two sets of post-its with each word of the memory verse written on it

Instructions:

1. Keep the two verses separate.
2. To play, divide your students into two teams. Call a volunteer from each team. Have the two volunteers come to the front and turn their backs to their teammates. You will take the sticky notes from one verse and stick them all over one volunteer's back. Take the other set of sticky notes and stick them all over the other volunteer's back. Make sure you stick them on randomly so that the words are out of order.
3. Select a second volunteer from each team. The second volunteer will come forward and stand next to the first volunteer with their backs to their classmates.
4. Select a third volunteer from each team. This volunteer will come forward. When you say "Go", volunteer #3 must take the sticky notes off of volunteer #1's back and transfer them in the correct order to volunteer #2's back. The teammates still sitting may call out instructions to volunteer #3 to help him or her, or just to cheer them on. First team to get all of the words in the correct order on Volunteer #2's back wins.

Play several times to let all kids have a chance to put them in the right order.

Prayer: Ask children if they have any prayer needs and then close in prayer.