

JONAH IS HUMBLING BY GOD

JONAH 4:1-11

MEMORY VERSE

PSALM 103:11

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Several scraps of various colored construction paper, a cup, scissors and markers.

A jump rope.

Egg cartons (enough for 4 – 6 “worm” sections) per child, 2 wiggle eyes per child, pipe cleaners, and glue.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Using The Small Things

Sometimes God uses small things to get our attention. In our story, today, we are going to learn about a time when God used a little worm to get the prophet Jonah’s attention. Let’s look at the small things in our lives to see what lessons God may want to share with us.

You will need several scraps of various colored construction paper, a cup, scissors, and markers. Have each child use a cup to trace a circle onto a piece of construction paper. Next have all of the children write their name in their circle. After the children have written their name on the circle, cut the circle out of the paper and tape or staple each circle onto the wall, just having the edges touching. This will make a colorful worm. Cut out one circle for the face. Write the scripture reference from Jonah on the finished worm.

LESSON TIME!

Remember, God told Jonah to “cry out against” Nineveh, the capital of the great, but evil, Assyrian empire, warning them that judgment was forthcoming. Assyria was Israel’s most dreaded enemy. They flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of violence and cruelty. No one deserved God’s favor less than the people of Nineveh and Jonah knew this. He hated the Assyrians; he wanted vengeance. Jonah feared that God, who he knew to be merciful and full of loving kindness, might not see things as he did. God was sure to show mercy if the Ninevites repented, and Jonah wanted no part in that! So, how did Jonah react when he heard God tell him to go to Assyria and call the people to repentance? He ran in the opposite direction.

God had His way, ultimately, with Jonah; he obeyed God and went to preach in the streets of Nineveh. Jonah’s message gave no hope that repentance would make any difference at all. However, to his dismay, the people repented—fully and completely. Remember, even the King came down from his royal throne and covered himself in sackcloth to demonstrate repentance.

God Himself said that any nation on which He pronounced judgment would be saved if they repented (Jeremiah 18:7-10). **God is gracious and compassionate.** God saw their works and, in His great mercy, forgave the people of their wickedness and determined to withhold judgment. God had responded just as Jonah had feared. If Jonah had a problem with attitude before, it was only the beginning!

JONAH 4:1-3

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

"Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Jonah was angry, very angry. He had taken pleasure in the fact that the people of Nineveh might receive the judgment they deserved. What an attitude! Jonah was certainly quick to forget God's mercy on him when he was in the belly of the fish. The Bible says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). It's clear God needed to deal with the attitude of his prophet.

It is certain, however, Jonah knew the character of God. He knew God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness. God's actions did not surprise Jonah. They just made him angry, so angry he wanted to die!

JONAH 4:4-8

Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

God once more needed to deal with his prophet, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Jonah was so upset he did not respond, but went out and pouted. He made a small lean-to shelter in which to sit and watch what would happen to the city. It would seem he was still hoping God would change his mind and bring judgment.

God decided to use an object lesson to reveal Jonah's selfishness. God prepared (or appointed) a plant to give the prophet the shade that his crude shelter could not provide. Jonah was thankful for the shade from the burning sun. But then, God prepared (or appointed) a worm that destroyed the plant that had brought comfort and relief to Jonah.

When the sun rose, God prepared a strong wind, and the sun beat down upon Jonah's head. Now, Jonah was so miserable, again, he proclaims, "It is better for me to die than to live."

JONAH 4:9-11

Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"

Then God questioned Jonah. "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah still had quite an attitude. He responded, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

God pointed out that Jonah had a lot of mercy for the plant—he wanted it to live, though he did not labor over it (plant it, water it, or make it grow) and though it's life was so short.

God then reasoned with Jonah. "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left--and much livestock?" God created the Ninevites—their existence was not just overnight; they were not plants. The Ninevites were people whom God loved; among them were over 120 thousand little children who were not old enough to know their right hand from their left hand as well as livestock. Note, God reveals his great compassion on the children, and even his mercy toward the animals.

It appears that Jonah did not know how to respond. God had confronted Jonah on his self-centered values and lack of compassion. Hopefully, Jonah had a big change of heart.

What insight we gain into God's character through the book of Jonah! God is indeed a gracious and loving God, full of mercy and slow to anger. He does not want to bring judgment on evil people. Woven throughout the book of Jonah, we see examples of the grace and compassion of God. He spared the sailors when they pleaded for mercy. God saved Jonah when he prayed from the belly of the

fish. And, He saved the people of Nineveh when they responded to Jonah's preaching. God always answers the prayers of those who call upon Him. He extends His mercy and grace to all men.

Remember, we, like Jonah, have been commissioned (assigned) to share God's message—the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ who took the punishment for our sins. May we not be a reluctant messenger as Jonah was! May we allow God to use us to extend His offer of mercy and love through Jesus Christ to all people. **God is gracious and compassionate.**

Wiggle Worm

This game is just to release some energy. Use a jump rope and have one student on each end. Have them wiggle the rope on the floor. Have the other children jump over the rope (worm) without stepping on the worm and squashing it. Keep playing until the children tire of the game.

Egg Carton Worm

You will need egg cartons (enough for 4 – 6 “worm” sections) and 2 wiggle eyes per child, pipe cleaners and glue.

Cut your egg carton to make a 4 – 6 section piece (your choice on how long it is based on egg carton availability).

Have the children glue the two wiggle eyes onto one end of the egg carton.

Next, have them take the pipe cleaner and cut two pieces for the antennae. They are ready to decorate.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to share God's heart of love, mercy, and compassion. Pray the children will know their part and calling in extending God's mercy and offer of salvation to others. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.