



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

Jonah • Jonah Obeys • Jonah 3:1-4; Luke 9:23-27,57-62 • 04/22/2018

Main Point

God's call to join Him on mission takes precedence over everything else.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever wished for a second chance? Why?

What was the last really BIG decision you had to make? What were the stakes involved in this decision?

To follow Christ in obedience may require hard choices. Sometimes the choice is between what's good and what's best. Following Christ means we choose sacrifice over selfishness. We choose the cross over comfort. We choose God's mission over maintaining the status quo. The stakes could not be higher.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Today's study focuses on Jonah's obedience to God's call in Jonah 3:1-4 and Christ's call to discipleship in Luke 9:23-27,57-62. What both passages have in common is that obedience to God requires that we be willing to lay aside personal desires or selfish concerns to join Him on His mission.

In addition to Jonah, what other biblical characters were given a second chance to obey?

When God issues a command His people are to obey what He has commanded without hesitation or debate. When we reject God's commands, God is under no obligation to give us a second chance. But in His grace He often does.

God may offer us second chances to obey, but He is most honored and we are most blessed when we obey Him instantly and completely. Jonah seized his second chance and went to Nineveh as the Lord commanded.

| Have a volunteer to Read Jonah 3:1-4.

What must Jonah have been thinking as he entered the city?

Has God ever asked you to do something that was too big and overwhelming for you to handle? What happened?

What was Jonah's message to Nineveh?

Why did God give Nineveh 40 days? (See commentary.)

Forty days in the Bible often refers to a period of testing or judgment in the Bible (Luke 4:2; Heb. 3:8-11), serving here to give Nineveh time to repent.

What was the result of Jonah's obedience to God? What can we expect when we are obedient to God's call?

Have a volunteer read Luke 9:23-27.

Some people equate Christianity simply with going to church, refraining from obvious outward sins, treating neighbors right, being a good family member, and trying to keep the Ten Commandments as much as possible. At the heart of their beliefs and practices is the principle of living for themselves.

Shouldn't we make it as easy as possible for people to follow Jesus? Why or why not?

What does it mean to deny yourself?

What does it mean to take up your cross?

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

A big decision is called for in verse 23. The consequence of this choice is huge and life-changing (vv. 24-26). Following Christ is the key to finding lasting fulfillment in life.

The point of emphasis here is that being a follower of Christ involves loving Jesus so much that we follow Him in our everyday lives, sacrificing personal desires, and devoting ourselves totally to Him without embarrassment or hesitation. Laying aside selfish concerns, we receive a greater life in Him.

| Have a volunteer read Luke 9:57-62.

What conditions do people often place on serving Christ?

Do you think Jesus' response to the second potential follower was too harsh (vv. 59-60)? Why or why not?

What obligations and commitments do Christians often see as more pressing than following Christ in His mission? What are you most prone to place ahead of Christ's mission in your own life?

God wants us to care for our families, but we care for our families out of obedience to God and never instead of obedience to God.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What would change in your life if you made the decision daily to choose the cross over comfort, God's mission over maintaining the status quo, and sacrifice over selfishness? What needs to happen to make this change?

What can our group do to hold each other accountable to giving God's mission top priority?

Pray

Lead your group in a prayer of commitment. Thank Him for His grace that gives second chances. Thank Him for calling us to be a part of what He is doing in the world today.

Commentary

| Jonah 3:1-4

Verse 1. Jonah 3:1-2 has a clear parallel with 1:1-2. The wording is almost identical. In the Hebrew text three imperatives convey God's command to Jonah: "arise," "go," and "proclaim." Jonah discovered that God often gives second chances. He also discovered God's expectation that he obey the original commission.

Verse 2. Jonah was told precisely and specifically what he was to preach. Jonah had only one assignment: to obey God. Jonah was on a short leash with respect to the message he was to deliver. His marching orders were clear at two crucial points: (1) where he would speak and (2) what he would say.

Verse 3. In chapter 1 Jonah ran from God. In chapter 3 he ran with God. The response of God's reluctant missionary in 3:3 is what it should have been in 1:3. Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh. God is good. He had extended His mercy to His servant Jonah. He now would use His servant to extend His mercy to the sinners of Nineveh. Both the messenger and his message would be evidence of God's love and compassion for people in need of His grace.

When God called Jonah in chapter 1, Jonah headed to a place about 2,000 miles west by sea. In 3:3 he obeyed and headed for Nineveh, about 500 miles northeast by land. Traveling by normal means—by camel or donkey caravan—would have taken about a month to get to Nineveh. If he traveled by foot the journey would have been even longer and more difficult.

Verse 4. When God gives believers a second chance to obey His call, they are to obey. He proclaimed the message God had given him: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” (v. 4). The message was short and to the point. It is only five words in the Hebrew text, though likely Jonah preached to the Ninevites in their native tongue of Aramaic. Jonah’s message contained mercy and judgment. The words “forty more days” expressed God’s mercy. Perhaps the Ninevites still had time to repent. The phrase “Nineveh will be overturned” expressed God’s judgment. A time of reckoning had come for Nineveh. We cannot be certain that this is all Jonah said. Verse 4 could be a summary of his preaching. Yet clearly the message was brief, and Jonah delivered it in a straightforward manner. Jonah has been chided for delivering such a harsh and brief message, as if he were attempting to make it as hard as possible for the people of Nineveh to respond. This is unfair. We have no reason to believe that Jonah did anything other than proclaim the message God had given him (v. 2). True, Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh; and in his heart he still harbored disgust and perhaps even hatred toward Nineveh. Still he did what God commanded. He obeyed God even if he may not have agreed or even may not have understood all God was doing.

| Luke 9:23-27

Verse 23. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand what He expected of them if they wanted to be His followers. No one was exempt. Jesus addressed His imperative to them all. The implication is clear. The cross was not only for Jesus and the Twelve but for anyone who wants to follow Him.

Jesus issued three commands to those who desired to follow Him. These were the conditions of discipleship. First, a would-be disciple must deny himself. Deny means “disregarding one’s own interests.” “Himself” refers to one’s basic self—the dominant element in the life of a human being. The action pictured in the verb deny is a conscious act whereby a person makes a definite decision to turn away from a life of self-interest to a life of interest and commitment to Christ. This step is what a disciple turns from.

The second step is what a disciples turns to. The second command is to take up his cross. Again, this command calls for a definite decision or action. To take up one’s cross was something very familiar to people in Jesus’ day. They had seen criminals carrying the beam of their crosses to the place of crucifixion. Rome put to death its worst criminals by means of crucifixion. The Roman emperor Nero persecuted Christians by crucifying them on crosses. Jesus was referring to dying to one’s self when He required a disciple to take up his cross.

Jesus’ third command was follow Me. This command called for a continuous action. The word follow means to “accompany, go along with” Jesus. That was the relationship a disciple had daily with his teacher or

master. To follow Jesus was to submit to His authority, to participate in what He did, and to go where Jesus wanted to go.

Verse 24. Some people shrink from the thought of self-sacrifice. Desiring to advance their own purposes, they think they can live as they want and still follow Christ. Jesus warned His disciples against such futile efforts. He said, “Whoever tries to save his life will lose it.” Therefore whoever loses his life, or sets aside his or her own desires for the sake of Christ, ultimately will save his or her life and find the fulfillment that comes from life in Christ.

Verse 25. Jesus’ rhetorical question contained the wisdom of its own answer. No one is benefited who gains the whole world yet loses eternal life in the process. The phrase the whole world was designed to show that no level of worldly success, financial gain, fame, power, or position could compare to the value of eternal life. Even if someone were to gain greatly in pursuit of selfish desires, it would not be worth the loss of this life of eternity with God.

Verse 26. Disciples cannot accept Christ’s lifestyle in private only or try to follow Jesus secretly. The day will come when the Son of Man will return in His glory. Jesus was describing His second coming, a day when the Messiah would finally establish His earthly kingdom. In that day of judgment, those who were ashamed of Jesus during their lives will experience the same from the Lord. The word ashamed means “to disown.” Those who reject Christ will find themselves rejected in that day. Jesus demanded that disciples exhibit His lifestyle of self-giving love by living unashamedly for Him.

Verse 27. While the previous verse obviously described the second coming, this verse uses a different term—the kingdom of God. Jesus declared that some disciples present at that time would not taste death until they witnessed God’s kingdom. Since the second coming has not occurred and Christ did not mean these people would live for more than 2,000 years (and counting), His reference to the kingdom of God had to mean something else. Jesus could have meant the kingdom was already present among them, or He could have had in mind events such as the resurrection, ascension, or Pentecost.

| Luke 9:57-62

Verses 57-58. As Jesus and the disciples were going along the road, someone approached Jesus and expressed a desire to go with them. He said, “I will follow You.” The enthusiasm of this would-be follower contained no limits—wherever You go!

Jesus’ instruction to this person took the form of a comparison. What foxes have (dens) and even wild birds have (nests), the Son of Man is without. A potential disciple needs to factor discomfort into his or her decision to follow Jesus, or he/she will become another enthusiastic starter who falls by the wayside. Religious enthusiasm is not necessarily the same as sacrificial commitment.

Verses 59-60. The man said he wanted first to go bury his father, which was a family obligation. To the Jews, the duty of burying a family member was of great importance. A Jew was absolved of this responsibility only in two cases—if he was a priest (Lev. 21:10-11) or under a Nazirite vow (Num. 6:6-7). Clearly the man felt that burying his father was more important than following Jesus. Jesus recognized the man's statement and desire for what they were—reasons to do good but not to do the supreme good. The man put his father first and Jesus second.

Jesus' said, "Let the dead bury their own dead." Jesus' statement may seem harsh to some, but it puts His demand in perspective. Disciples are to be about the ministry of spreading the news of the kingdom of God. Those who have little or no concern for the kingdom of God allow family matters to cancel out kingdom matters. Jesus did not mean His followers should abandon giving care to their families. He was saying that discipleship and kingdom preaching are of higher priority.

Verses 61-62. Jesus recognized excuses even when they appeared legitimate. He again called for undivided loyalty. His proverb about a distracted plower is straight to the point about discipleship. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back" (the full sense of the Greek present tense is "keeps looking back at the things behind") makes straight furrows. Distractions disrupt plowers just as misplaced priorities disqualify disciples.