

Di122 Essentials of Christianity

Lesson Di122-30 Finish Well: Conclusion

Have you ever started to make something or to learn how to do something, only to get discouraged and abandon the project halfway? This lesson is the last in the course, “Essentials of Christianity.” Congratulations on coming to the final story!

Sometimes people start to follow Christ, but they get discouraged and decide that it is too hard to be a Christian. Others may even be called to be ministers for the Lord, but instead of obeying the Holy Spirit, they give up. They go their own way. Starting well is not enough. Finishing well is what pleases God and assures the believer of eternal life with God.

Jonah was a prophet about 800 years before Jesus was born. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). He was commanded to go and tell the city of the destruction that was coming to them. He was given the message from God. God had told him that judgment was coming to Nineveh because the people were so wicked.

The problem was that Jonah did not like these people. He hated them for who they were and what they had done to his people Israel. They were violent and oppressive bullies. They conquered nations, broke up families, and laid the land waste. He decided in his heart not to do what God had commanded him to do. Maybe you have felt that way at one time too. So Jonah went his own way. Running from God never turns out well.

He went down to Joppa, where he happened to find a ship headed in the opposite direction from Nineveh. He was fleeing from God and intending to escape his divinely appointed task. Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea. Such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own pagan god. They even threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

The concerned captain came to Jonah and woke him up, saying, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.” Then the terrified sailors decided to cast lots to find out who was responsible for the great storm. The lot fell on Jonah. He told them that he worshiped Yahweh, the God of heaven, who had made the sea and the land.

The sailors asked Jonah, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” He told them to throw him into the sea. They tried harder to row the boat back, but the sea grew even wilder than before. Finally they cried, “O Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life.” With that, they threw Jonah overboard. The raging waters suddenly grew calm. But before Jonah drowned, Yahweh provided a great fish to swallow him. He was inside the fish three days and three nights. From the tangles of seaweed inside the fish, Jonah could barely pray. But God heard his cry. Then God commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

To say the least, Jonah changed his mind. He would do what God had commanded and go to warn Nineveh. He was a reluctant prophet still, but the people believed his message. From the king on down, they put on sackcloth and declared a fast. When God saw what they had done and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah was angry that God would have compassion on an enemy of Israel. He prayed, “Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” But the Lord provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah for shade. The defiant prophet was grateful, until God sent a worm to chew the vine till it withered. Then he was angry again. God told Jonah he had no right to be angry. God was concerned about all the innocent people and animals in the great city of Nineveh. God had the first word to Jonah and the last. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires rather that they turn from their ways and live.

When Jonah obeyed, many people repented and came to God. To run away is to disobey God and to cause many not to hear the good news. As Jesus was about to leave his disciples and go back to heaven, he gave this command, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).

Jesus had lived and died for each of us, as the sacrifice for our sins. He rose again to be the eternal Victor over sin and death. But before he went away, he instructed each believer to go and tell the good news that sins can be forgiven. But Paul poses the question, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? ... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Rom 10:14-15, 17).

Each of us has been given the same command from Jesus himself that Jonah was given. That command is to tell the good news of God’s forgiveness to anyone who has not heard. The question is, will we run away or will we preach the wonderful news of forgiveness and freedom to a lost world? Let us not be like the unloving prophet Jonah who preferred fire from heaven on his enemies instead of mercy. Do you want to keep God’s grace and mercy to yourself, while hoping that others receive God’s judgment? If so, you need to repent of your Jonah heart and ask God to fill you with his love. He will forgive you and help you to obey the commission he left for all of us to do.

This lesson is **important** because it reminds us that God has given us a message and a command to go and tell the lost about his forgiveness. They cannot believe unless someone tells them about Jesus.

The **main truth** of this lesson is we have been given the good news and we are to go tell that news to our lost family and friends. We also need to help others to go and preach the word about Jesus.

Your **review** questions are:

1. What did Jonah do instead of obeying the word of the Lord to go preach to Nineveh? [Pause]
A. If you answered that he got on a ship headed in the opposite direction from Nineveh, you are correct.

2. What is the message that you have been given for those who are lost because of sin? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "The message is that God is willing to forgive sins if a person will believe on Jesus and repent," you answered correctly.

3. What is the command that Jesus has given you now that you believe that he is your Savior? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "Jesus gave us the command to go and tell lost people the good news of God's forgiveness, making them followers of Jesus, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey God," you have answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to the story of Jonah several times, until you can tell it to either children or adults in your community. Discuss with them the similarities between Jonah and believers today who receive God's direction. Pray together about what the Holy Spirit is asking each of you to do for him.

Memorize the following verses:

Romans 10:14-15 and 17: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? ... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Rom 10:14-15, 17).