

## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THE JONAH SYNDROME

WE OBEY EVENTUALLY (JONAH 3)

APRIL 17-23, 2016



### MAIN POINT

God has a sovereign plan that will be carried out, and we need to take on our part in His plan.

### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What is one area of life where you feel like you always have to be in control? (parenting, physical health, finances, etc.) Why do you feel that way?

2. When is a time when you feel most out of control?

**Leader:** We all like to feel as though we are in control of our lives, and we have our own plans for how our lives should go. The feeling of being out of control in any given situation can be terrifying; there are so many “what ifs” and worst case scenarios that inevitably enter into our minds. But the truth is, we are not in control of our lives, no matter how in control we may feel. We serve a sovereign God whose plans govern our world and our lives. God’s sovereign plan will be carried out, and we need to take on our part in His plan.

### DIGGING DEEPER

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

**Leader:** The verses we will look at from Acts 4 record the events immediately following the arrest of Peter and John. The apostles were arrested because they were preaching openly about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (Acts 4:12). Although the two were released from jail quickly, they were warned not to continue preaching in Jesus’ name (Acts 4:13-22).

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 4:23-28.

**Leader:** Peter and John returned after they were released from jail to the other apostles, friends, and relatives who encouraged and supported them during this difficulty. Once there, they reported the events that just transpired, telling how authorities had ordered them not to preach about Jesus again.

3. What did the group of disciples do when they heard the report from Peter and John? What are some other ways they could have responded, instead of turning to God in prayer (vv. 23-24)?

4. As the assembled disciples raised their voices to God, they began their prayer by acknowledging God's sovereignty. What do we communicate to God when we affirm He is the Sovereign Lord (v. 24)?

**Leader:** The sovereignty of God is the biblical teaching that all things are under God's rule and control, and that nothing happens without His direction or permission.

5. In their prayer, the disciples quoted Psalm 2:1-2 (Acts 4:25b-26). What promise from this passage helped them understand God's plan for them?

6. When we pray, both on our own and together as a Growth Group, would you say we embrace God's plan and trust His sovereignty, or do we seem to be trying to persuade God to change His mind?

**Leader:** Rather than despondency and defeat or fear and anxiety over such dire news of persecution, the assembled believers turned to God in prayer, not as a last resort but as a first resolve. Surprisingly, the believers didn't pray for changed circumstances or personal comfort. They instead turned to God, recognizing His power and sovereignty and acknowledging their place in His plans. If we believe God is sovereign, then we must recognize our current situation (even if it is a difficult one) is being permitted by God. Instead of fretting or resisting, we can turn to God in prayer and look for how to be a part of His plan in the midst of our circumstances.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 4:29-30.

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7. What did the disciples ask the Lord to do about the threats the Jewish leaders had made? What else might we have expected them to ask?

8. Why do you think they didn't ask for God to protect them, or to judge their enemies?

9. How does their prayer for boldness reveal their commitment to obey the task God set before them?

**Leader:** Having embraced God's plan in their prayer, the believers now requested God to perform a great and visible work. They asked that God would consider the threats from their opposition, give them boldness in sharing their faith, and show miracles in answer to their prayer. God's will might not remove us from difficult situations; but when we pray, God will strengthen us and make us more effective for Him in those situations.

10. How would our prayers be different if our focus in prayer was on obeying God in the hard times instead of on asking for relief from the hard times?

**Leader:** It is important to note there is nothing wrong with asking God for relief from the trials we face. In fact, God tells us to do that in His Word (Matt 7:7). The point is that when we don't like the outcome, we still need to consider the sovereign work of God through that situation.

**11. How have you seen God confirm His word clearly and powerfully? Do you feel free to pray for Him to do so? Why or why not?**

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

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

**12. What evidence of God's sovereign love and grace can you point to in your life? What efforts do you think you should take to share that love and grace with others?**

**13. What is the next step of obedience you need to take in order to take on your part in God's plan?**

**14. The early church's example of boldness in the face of persecution is one we need to imitate today. What would it look like for us to be people who courageously stand up for God?**

### PRAYER

For your closing prayer time, give your group members the opportunity to pray silently, thanking God for His sovereign control of their lives and our world. Encourage them to surrender to Him any areas where they struggle to give Him control. Pray also for the people you know who have not given control of their lives over to God in salvation; pray that they would come to know the one true God of the universe.

### MEMORIZE

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. —Acts 4:24

### SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

#### ACTS 4:23-31

The beginning of Acts 4 recalls Peter and John's imprisonment for boldly proclaiming the gospel. After their release, Peter and John went to their own people and reported everything that had happened to them. The Sanhedrin had threatened them, but they had refused to stop preaching and teaching in Jesus' name.

The news of Peter and John's experience moved the church to pray. This growing but struggling church embraced God's plan for them in spreading the gospel in a hostile environment. God's authority is absolute. The argument of these believers is sound and uses a greater to lesser principle: If God created everything in this vast universe, then He certainly has authority over the circumstances we face as believers.

The connection between God as Creator and His control of His world is made in the quotation of Psalm 2:1-2. David, the author of this psalm, faced opposition to his reign from pagan rulers and his own countrymen. Similarly, Jesus, the greater Son of David, also faced opposition from people in authority. This Messianic psalm refers to the fact that those faithful to King Jesus can expect the same opposition.

The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers assembled together against the Lord and against His Messiah. Their rejection of the gospel means that eternal punishment awaits them. Peter and John told the Sanhedrin the truth; the Jewish leaders rejected their message to their own peril. Despite the guilt of these men in putting Jesus to death, it was God's sovereign plan for the redemption of people. God's people today have a part in that plan as we share the gospel and watch God continue to grow His church.

Christ's followers called on God to use them to advance His kingdom in the midst of this opposition. Christians in many countries are familiar with hostile governments, and this was the case for the early church from the very outset. The believers did not ask God to remove persecution but to empower them to proclaim the gospel boldly despite persecution. They were more concerned about advancing the gospel and God's kingdom than they were about avoiding persecution.

Through this prayer, these believers serve as a reminder for us that God does not call us to lives of ease, prosperity, and comfort. One of the most dangerous ideas propagated in modern churches today is that God's plan is for His people to be happy and prosperous. The Scriptures do not support this claim. The believers in the early church already knew this and prayed accordingly. They wanted God to use them to spread the gospel in the face of persecution, even if it led to their martyrdom.

After the church had finished praying, the Holy Spirit moved in a powerful way. God had a specific plan for the church at that time, and the Holy Spirit gave them the power to accomplish that plan. God never demands of us what He doesn't empower us to do. The church had been praying that God would continue to use them, and we should expect God to move when we pray according to His will. The church's prayer was answered—they had asked for boldness (v. 29) and now they had the boldness they needed to be effective witnesses (v. 31). The early church was willing to boldly go where no Christians had gone before—because they had the power of the Spirit in them and a powerful message to share with others.