

“True Repentance”  
Jonah 3  
(Preached at Trinity, December 27, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The Book of Jonah opened with God's Divine command upon the prophet Jonah:  
**Jonah 1:1 NAU** - "The word of the LORD came to Jonah"
2. It was a direct charge from God. After all, it was the Word of the Lord. Jonah denied God's authority over him. He deserted his calling as a prophet of God. God had called him to deliver a message of repentance to the pagan city of Nineveh. Jonah hated the Ninevites and was unwilling to be God's agent of mercy.
3. As we've seen, the Book of Jonah is many faceted. Jonah was being charged to preach God's mercy to Nineveh, but was unaware of his own need for God's mercy. He was in no less need of God's mercy than the Ninevites.
4. As I pointed out last time Jonah himself was the recipient of God's great mercy. God gave Jonah a second chance:  
**Jonah 3:1 NAU** - "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time"  
**Jonah 3:3 NAU** - "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD"
5. Jonah rose up in obedience to God and brought God's message to Nineveh.  
**Jonah 3:4 NAU** - "Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."
6. The next verse is truly remarkable.  
**Jonah 3:5 NAU** - "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God"
7. This is a puzzling turn to the story. Did the Ninevites truly believe? Did they truly repent? There is much we do not know.
  - a. Did they hear more than the simple words recorded for us in **Verse 4**? It could be that this was the entirety of the message. After all, Jonah probably didn't know the Assyrian language. On the other hand, this message doesn't seem to be sufficient to lead to faith and repentance.
  - b. The message tells them nothing about God. How much did they know? The message tells them nothing about the disobedience that brought God's charge upon them.  
**Jonah 1:2 NAU** - "for their wickedness has come up before Me."
8. Even more disturbing was the future history of Nineveh. Within a generation Assyria would invade Israel. God would then judge Assyria for their prideful arrogance.  
**Isaiah 10:12 NAU** - "So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness."

- a. Nahum was sent to announce judgment upon Assyria  
**Nahum 1:1-7 NAS** - "The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. <sup>2</sup> A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. <sup>3</sup> The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.
  - b. Nineveh fell to a coalition of the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC  
 "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished."
  - c. So was this true repentance?
9. We also need to understand the nature of the Old Covenant.
- a. The Old Covenant was preparatory. It looked forward to Christ. No one has ever been saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. This means salvation for the OT patriarchs involved believing in God's salvation through a future Deliverer, although their understanding of this Deliverer was greatly veiled.
    - (1) We believe in progressive revelation. God has revealed His redemptive purpose little by little. We have the benefit of looking backward at God's full revelation of His redemptive purpose. They were looking forward at a time when there was still much to be revealed.
    - (2) Even though they had limited understanding OT saints were still saved by turning from their sin and trusting in God's promise of salvation.  
**Romans 4:3 NAS** - "For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."  
**Galatians 3:6 NAS** - "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
  - b. It is also true that in the Old Covenant we find God often bringing temporal judgment upon the wickedness of men. We can see this with the flood. The Egyptians suffered the plagues of God's temporal judgment as God repeatedly warned them to repent. Israel often suffered the temporal judgment of God. This means that Nineveh's repentance could have merely been a turn from their wickedness resulting in deliverance from God's temporal judgment while having no effect upon their eternal condition.
10. The question we must ask, was the repentance of the Ninevites genuine repentance? Based upon the future judgment of God upon Nineveh we would have to say it was not genuine repentance to the saving of the soul. Rather it was a temporal turning away from sin that resulted in God's turning away from His judgment upon them.  
**Jonah 3:10 NAU** - "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*"
11. While Nineveh's deliverance was most likely of the temporal sort their repentance bore some amazing marks of genuine repentance.

Perhaps it would be good to look at the nature of true repentance. The catechism answers it well.

**Q.** What is repentance unto life?

**A.** Repentance unto life, is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose to strive after new obedience.

## I. True Repentance is a Saving Grace

**A.** Our salvation from start to finish is by God's grace

God has determined to save His own and He has accomplished everything necessary to bring it about.

\* It is absolutely stunning that this pagan people responded to Jonah's preaching the way they did. Only a miracle could have brought about such a change.

**B.** God makes demands of the sinner but the sinner's corruption makes it impossible for him to meet God's demands. God must make him able to meet His demands. This comes as an act of grace.

1. God demands that we turn to Christ in faith and then gives us the faith  
**Ephesians 2:8 NAU** - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"

2. God demands that we repent, and then He grants unto us repentance

**C.** The Book of Jonah is a wonderful testimony to God's sovereign mercy and grace

1. We find God sending His prophet Jonah to these pagan people to preach the message of repentance. His mercy is to every tribe and every nation.

2. We've already seen God's grace upon the pagan sailors.

3. This is the glory of the New Covenant

**Acts 11:18 NAU** - "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

## II. True repentance presupposes an acknowledgement of personal Sin

Repentance unto life, is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin . . .

**A.** The problem with a man lost in his blindness is that he fails to see himself as wicked and worthy of God's condemnation.

1. Jesus made it clear that He came not for those who see themselves as good, but for those who see themselves as wretched sinners

**Mark 2:17 KJV** - "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

2. The New Testament presupposes sin and the condemnation of man

a. The Gospel of John speaks of Jesus Christ as Judge

**John 5:22 NAU** - "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,"

b. It presupposes that all are under His condemnation

**John 5:24 NAU** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

- c. This is the universal condition of man  
**Romans 3:23** – “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”
3. True repentance is a complete admission of our guilt before God – true confession of sin  
**Psalm 32:5 NAU** - "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin."  
**Psalm 51:3-4 NAU** - "For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge."
- B. Did the Ninevites meet this test?
1. Back in **Chapter 1** God declared His judgment upon Nineveh because of their wickedness.
  2. Here in **Chapter 3** we find the entire city acknowledging their sin. The king decreed that every man call upon God confessing his wickedness  
**Jonah 3:8 NAU** - "let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands."
- III. True repentance demands sincere sorrow for sin  
**2 Corinthians 7:9-10 NAU** - "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. <sup>10</sup> For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret"
- Children’s Catechism – Question 56
- Q.** What is it to repent?
- A.** To be sorry for sin, and to hate and forsake it because it is displeasing to God.
- A. True repentance is a recognition that our sin is an offence against God
1. It is not just a sorrow because we have been exposed
  2. It is not just as sorrow because we fear the consequence
  3. True repentance fills our heart with bitter grief  
**Psalm 31:9-10 NAU** - " Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; My eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also. <sup>10</sup> For my life is spent with sorrow And my years with sighing; My strength has failed because of my iniquity, And my body has wasted away."
- B. This sorrow creates in us a great sense of shame
1. The sinner feels degraded – not just because his sin has been detected  
A thief may feel remorse when caught but it is a selfish shame
  2. True repentance brings shame because of our wrong doing against God; because we had sought to keep God completely out of our life
- C. Did Nineveh meet this standard?
1. Sackcloth was an ancient demonstration of mourning  
**Jonah 3:5 NAU** - "they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them."

2. Jacob mourned when he thought his beloved son Joseph had been killed  
**Genesis 37:34 NAU** - " So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days."
3. Jesus used sackcloth as a sign of the sorrow of repentance  
**Matthew 11:21 NAU** - "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."
4. There is no way for us to know their heart. Their sorrow was likely a sorrow because of the coming judgment. Yet, the text tells us they called upon the name of God earnestly. And the king humbled himself taking off his royal robes and replaced them with sackcloth.

#### IV. True Repentance is the fruit of saving faith

- A. Faith and repentance are an inseparable element of our salvation
  1. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of this work of his ministry  
**Acts 20:20-21 NAU** - "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."
  2. Faith turns our heart towards Christ in love. Our heart rests in Him as the only solution for our sin.  
Repentance turns our heart away from sin
- B. Did the Ninevites meet this standard
  1. The text tells us they believed.  
**Jonah 3:5 NAU** - " Then the people of Nineveh believed in God"
    - a. The Hebrew word used here is אָמַן
    - b. It is the same word used to express Abraham's faith  
**Genesis 15:6 NAS** - "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."
    - c. Paul described Abraham's faith as the model of saving faith  
**Galatians 3:6-7 NAS** - "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."
  2. They heard Jonah's message and called upon God. These were pagan people who had little regard for the Hebrew people and their God and yet the text tells us they now trust Him.
  3. They also declared a fast testifying to the seriousness of their turning from sin - True repentance always results in a changed life  
**Acts 26:20 NAU** - "kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."
  4. Spurgeon's Catechism - with full purpose to strive after new obedience.

5. True repentance demands turning *from* sin and *to* God and His authority  
The Ninevites declared the authority of God  
**Jonah 3:8-9 NAU** - " let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. <sup>9</sup> "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

#### Conclusion:

1. Most important, faith and repentance results in God turning from His condemnation  
**Jonah 3:10 NAU** - "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."
2. So was their repentance genuine? Was Jonah's repentance genuine?
3. It isn't important for us to know whether or not their repentance had any eternal significance. We don't have enough information regarding Jonah's preaching. And we certainly cannot know the hearts of the Ninevites.
4. What is essential is whether or not we bear the marks of genuine repentance.  
"Repentance unto life, is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose to strive after new obedience."
5. Has Christ had such an effect upon your life that you have fled from your sin and are now following Him with all your heart.