Lessons of Repentance from an Unlikely Teacher

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Jonah is part of the minor prophets who are showing that the people of Israel will return to God, will have their messianic King, and will have their place in this world. More importantly, they'll have salvation from their sins, and the Gentiles will be part of God's plan.

Even those who seem far away from God can be saved. The word that we translate for repentance means “to turn.” It’s to move your eyes off of idols that attract you and move toward God.

From Jonah chapter three, we learn four characteristics of repentance.

First, the beginning of repentance is grace. Repentance actually starts with God acting toward us. In Jonah chapter one, he hears the call of God, and instead of going to Nineveh and crying out the message God told him to proclaim, he flees to Tarshish.

When he is on a boat, instead of praying to God, he'd rather just go overboard. He never really takes responsibility for what he's done.

He obeys God, but in chapter four, he still has not changed to desire what God desires. He wants to retain faith in God, but he doesn't want to have repentance.

Jonah decides to follow what God has called him to do. He called out, “Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” There's no call to repentance, no promise of salvation, but it’s clear that Jonah preached exactly what God had said.

God does not need to give the Ninevites a warning. He could have simply destroyed them. He gives them time to get their house in order, and it does what it's supposed to.

Secondly, we have the attitude of repentance, which is humility. True repentance requires a turning to God in faith, but that will not happen when we don't realize that we need Him and that we need His ability. Verse five from chapter three says, “And the people of Nineveh believed God.”

They called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. The response for their belief is repentance. There could be no believing God without repenting from their sins.

Thirdly, the core of repentance is responsibility. “And he issued a proclamation and published it through Ninevah, ‘By the decree of the king and the nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water.”

The king wanted to take responsibility, and his people needed to take responsibility. The king deals with the general sins and the specific sin that the Ninevites were well known to have done for their violence.

Finally, the outcome of repentance is blessing. If we are a Christian university, we'll not just be marked by higher learning, but a higher view of God. We need knowledge with repentance, recognizing our need before God, and the fact that He's the only solution to our eternal problem.

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