

What do Governor Mark Sanford, President Bill Clinton, and Senator Larry Craig all have in common? Each of these men experienced a moral failure while in office. But that's not all they have in common. When confronted with the evidence of their betrayal they responded in the same way; first denial then confession followed by a refusal to leave office. It is one thing to confess – it is quite another to repent. Repentance requires humility.

Last week Jonah cried out to God from the belly of the beast. He felt the full weight of God's discipline. But was he changed by the experience? You've heard the expression, "Confession is good for the soul," but confession is just the first step in a process the Bible calls repentance. That's what Jonah 3 is all about. When we are ready to repent God is ready to relent.

I. Jonah repents and calls on the Lord...Jonah got a second chance...vv. 1-2. Jonah's preservation was followed by his restoration. Restoration begins in the very area where the rebellion began. Repentance means to return, go back, change direction. It's not enough to "just move on." That's not repentance – that's denial. The Prodigal Son traveled the same road BACK that he traveled AWAY from his father. Repentance is essential according to Jesus. His first recorded words are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." **Mark 1:14-15**

So, "Jonah arose and went." He got back on the road to Nineveh. The difference between confession and repentance is the difference between words and deeds. Confession is done with the lips but repentance is done with your life. Confession is good but it's just the first step. There is also an important difference between remorse and repentance. In **2 Corinthians**

7:9-10 he writes, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

II. Ninevah repents and turns from sin...5-9. Many observers have pointed out that the greatest miracle in the book of Jonah is not that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish but that the Ninevites actually repented. Ninevah was the largest city in the Assyrian Empire. It was known for its ruthless cruelty and debauchery. They worshipped the goddess, Ishtar, with the accompanying cult prostitution, and they were a blood thirsty empire as we saw in the first week of the series. But our missionary God was just as interested in the Ninevites as He was the Israelites. It is estimated that Jonah would have preached in Ninevah around 759 B.C. Before he arrived, two plagues had broken out in the city and there had been a total eclipse of the sun on June 15, 763. God had been preparing the Ninevites for the arrival of His messenger Jonah.

God always gets there before we do. John Maisel tomorrow because Governor Perry is sharing his faith at a luncheon for over 500 people. John will follow with a clear presentation of the Gospel. I'm convinced God has an appointment with some of those people tomorrow. The repentance of the Ninevites may have been short-lived. By 722 Assyria is up to her old tricks and Israel is invaded and carried off into captivity

III. God repents and has compassion on the Ninevites...10. This is not the only place in scripture where God is said to repent.

Genesis 6:6-7 ⁶ The LORD was sorry (repented) that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

Jeremiah 18:6-10 ⁶ "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter *does*?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; ⁸ if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent (repent) concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. ⁹ "Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant *it*; ¹⁰ if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.

The reason the translators change the word from "repent" to "was sorry" or "relent" is because the obvious question arises, "Does God change His mind?" The answer is no, the Lord doesn't change His mind. "If He could change His mind He would not be God. "What does it mean for you to change your mind? At the very least, it implies that **unforeseen circumstances** have arisen. Or it may be that **your earlier decision was wrong** and needs to be corrected. Or it may be that you were **powerless to carry out your intentions** and have been obliged to change your approach. But **God is not ignorant of the future, or guilty of erroneous opinions, or powerless to carry out His will. He is not a man that He should change His mind. He is the eternal I AM who knows the end from the beginning. He is the Lord; He does not change.**" Gordon J. Keddie, (*Preacher on the Run*, p. 97)

What then does it mean that God repents? The word "repent" is used to describe the change in relationship between God and man. He appears to change once the people of Nineveh repent. Let me illustrate: If you are walking into a stiff wind you will say, "The wind is against me." If you turn around you will say, "The wind is with me." What changed? It wasn't the wind. It was your relationship to the wind. Don't forget, God is ready to relent when we are ready to repent.

Are you off course? Repent. "But I have repented so much God must be tired of it." The message of the Gospel is that God is for you. He will never give up on you. If God refuses to give up on you who are you to give up on you? If God is for you - UB4U2!