

Have you ever blown it? Have you ever had one of those moments when you went off the “Christian” reservation and behaved so unchristian you gave people a reason to question if you were a Christian? I’m not proud to confess that I’ve unfortunately done that a time or two in my life – a moment of sheer spiritual humiliation. But what if your worst moment was captured in a book and broadcasted to the entire world – that’s what happened to our friend Jonah. In case you missed it, Jonah is the rogue prophet of the O.T. who modeled for the world how not to respond to God.

God called Jonah to go to the city of Ninevah, to the sworn enemy of Israel, to call them to repentance. But b/c Jonah didn’t like the plan; so he decided to go west when God called him to go east. And that’s when all heaven broke loose as God was waiting for Jonah in the storm and in the big fish to turn Jonah’s heart back to Himself.

As we pick up in ch. 2, let me remind you of the (5) truths we learned last week from our prophet turned fugitive:

1 God expects obedience when He calls

God's Word is God's will. If you run from His plan, you’ll miss His best for you b/c God can’t make a mistake.

2 If you run from God, it'll affect/infect others around you

When a person defies God's will/way, others (like the sailors) will be injured by the shrapnel of their defiance.

3 You can run from God but you can't hide

4 God will never chase after you b/c He's already there waiting for you

I love this truth b/c it testifies to the grace of God who is faithful even when we are faithless.

5 God longs to give you a 2nd chance if you'll trust Him

God wasn't trying to get back at Jonah; He wanted to bring Jonah back to Himself. God isn't looking to destroy people, but to love them. He's a God who gives grace to every fugitive – and His grace is sufficient.

In ch. 1 ends w/ Jonah getting swallowed by a big fish so when we pick up in ch. 2 – we find Jonah in the belly of the big fish. (**Read *Jonah 2:1-10***) Can you imagine? I'm going to go on record as saying this isn't a top 10 vacation spot. It has to rank as one of the least desired locations in life. Can you imagine what was teeming around him..., and the smell? But Jonah's plight isn't about the fish. Nonetheless, Jonah's conditions make the Prodigal Son's pig sty look like the Ritz.

So what did Jonah do? Since we don't know if Jonah was conscious when he was ingested or if he woke up in total darkness not realizing what had happened, we have to speculate a bit. Likewise, we don't know if he prayed immediately or sulked for a couple of days. What we do know is sometime while vacationing in the bowels of a fish, he cried out to God. **If ever there was a time to cry out to God – this would have to be at the top of the list.**

Now personally, I imagine he started out as most of us would've started. Woe is me! I'm sure he wasn't happy w/ his new digs. **Instead of waking up in eternity w/ God like he thought when he was cast overboard, he woke up in stomach juices adorned w/ seaweed turban.**

Have you ever been there? You know you've blown it! You know you're on the run from God's heart and in your shame and guilt you're too afraid to look Him in the face and own up to your actions. Here's the thing about repentance and God. First, God isn't going to let you off the hook. He's not going to look at you and say, "It's okay. Don't worry about it! No harm no foul!" Nope! God takes sin/disobedience seriously – so seriously He entered time and space in Jesus to die for our debt of sin – and now, b/c of the cross, God's grace is waiting to be unleashed on every repentant heart. He wants to forgive your sin and release you from the power, penalty and pain of your defiance. But His gift of grace can't be applied to your account until you turn from sin to Him.

We call this repentance. Repentance is turning from sin to God. Mind you, it isn't just DOING the right thing; it is BEING right w/ God. This is important in the story of Jonah b/c it raises a difficult question that has confounded scholars for generations – Was Jonah truly repentant?

So after (2) weeks of praying, studying and talking w/ others about Jonah's repentance, I can honestly say I have no clear proof one way or the other. I've struggled greatly trying to determine if Jonah repented or just relented. What I can say w/ confidence is he desperately wanted deliverance from the belly of the fish. And while a cursory reading of Jonah 2 offers the appearance of repentance, ch. 4 begs to differ.

So here's what's going to happen this AM, I'm going to do something a bit unusual – I'm going to offer an alternative perspective (Perspective Slides). Our LIFE groups are going to pursue the idea that Jonah was repentant while I'm going to consider that he wasn't truly repentant. Before I make my case, I need to remind everyone of the Biblical standard of repentance – Turn to *Luke 15:11-32* and the Prodigal Son.

Rebellion (choice to sin) – Result (pig sty/fish stomach) – Realization (w/ God is better) – Repentance (getting up and getting right w/ God) – Restitution (getting right w/ people) – Retribution (willing to face the consequences) – Reconciliation (releasing the regret and bringing conciliation) – Restoration (wholeness in relationship).

If repenting is turning from sin and coming into agreement w/ God – then did Jonah actually repent? What if he just gave in so God would rescue him from the fish? Have you ever done that? **Told God you were sorry in the hope He'd get you out of your mess?** I think Jonah realized his circumstances and recognized God wasn't going to let him off the hook – so he relented (conceded). Here's the thing – **relenting is not repenting.**

Relenting only requires an external behavioral adjustment. It is stopping what you're doing, but it doesn't mean you're coming into an agreement w/ God. **Let me ask it another way** – if Jonah was repentant, then why did he get so upset w/ God in ch. 4 when God didn't punish the Ninevites? It seems to me Jonah would've been like – Go God... You're awesome! But Jonah resented God for His goodness and mercy which indicates he had relented but not repented.

What's wrong w/ Jonah's prayer and psalm? At 1st glance, his words sound like he's repenting. He appears to be turning from sin to God, but there are (4) problems w/ his prayer.

Problem 1 – Jonah DENIES His Sin

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. 1-2

While some people want to give Jonah the benefit of the doubt by saying his prayer was a prayer of repentance, ***I'd submit his words weren't a prayer of repentance; but a cry for help***. He was in a bad situation and he wanted out. The sailors threw him into the sea and he knew only God could rescue him – he wasn't as ready to die as he initially led on.

But if you look at his words carefully, you'll notice that **Jonah never mentions his own sin**. In fact, the bulk of his words weren't even his own, he borrowed them from the Psalms of David. He quoted from Ps. 3, 18, 42, and 66.

I also find it interesting Jonah willingly admitted his guilt before the sailors, but he never acknowledged his sin before the God that he was sinning against. **The prodigal son did, but it seems that Jonah is more like the older brother than the prodigal.** Maybe, Jonah wasn't sorry for his sin but just that he was getting punished for his defiance.

As a dad, there's been more than one occasion where my sweet, precious, angelic children have copped an attitude and engaged in activity unbecoming of my heart and will for their lives. And when caught in the pickle of my love and my discipline, they've rattled off a desperate – "I'm sorry!" but are they really sorry or just saying what they must to avoid being punished? I think most of the time I can tell the difference – while can tell the difference every time – which speaks to His sovereign love and grace.

Biblical repentance is a heartfelt remorse and sorrow that leads to forgiveness by turning from the activity and attitude of sin and coming into agreement w/ God about it.

A person can feel bad or guilty for what they've done and still not repent. They can even weep over what they've done but not agree w/ God about it. And that could be what Jonah is doing here. He isn't remorseful in his heart – he simply wants to get out of a really bad situation.

Never forget – **repentance is not just about your actions – it is first and foremost about the heart.**

Problem 2 – Jonah DENUCIATES His God

You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. 3-7

Instead of accepting his circumstance b/c of his actions, Jonah blames God – the pinnacle of rebellion and pride.

Jonah is refusing to own his issues. He's looking for someone to blame and he begins w/ accusing God. Sounds a lot like Adam in the Garden of Eden – “The women You (God) gave me...”

Why is it when life isn't going the direction we think it ought to be going – most likely b/c we're living by sight rather than by sound – by flesh instead of by faith – that we feel compelled to blame God for our plight in life?

Problem 3 – Jonah DISPARAGES Other People

Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. 8

After failing to blame God, Jonah shifts his frustration to other people by putting them down to prop himself up. do you know what he's doing, he is comparing himself to other people to win God's favor. It's like he's saying, “I'm not the bad guy here.” But the simple truth is **Jonah is so obsessed w/ the sin of others that he is oblivious of his own.** He's still thinking about Ninevites and sailors, but has failed to take the beam out of his own eyes so that he might recognize that he is equally in need of God's grace and mercy. **That's what sin does to us – it gives us 20/20 vision for others people's sins while making us blind to our own sin.**

Let me illustrate. Let's say you get invited to a dinner w/ 10 other people. While everyone else is served soup, you're served spaghetti in red sauce. As you begin eating you start getting sauce all over yourself and there isn't a napkin to be found. Pretty soon, it's all over your face, your clothes – it's everywhere. You look like a toddler w/out a bib – you're a total mess. But then you spot someone across the table who just dribbled a little bit of soup on his chin. You say, "Look everyone! That's disgusting! Someone get him a napkin! Don't you know how to eat?!" And the room is thick w/ irony. No one is looking at the man who dribbled some soup on his chin. Everyone is looking at you. You're the one. You're the mess. You're the one who needs to be cleaned up – and that's what the gospel does. The gospel shows us who we are. It points the spotlight onto us so we look to God and say, "O God, clean me up from the inside out."

True repentance doesn't think: "My sin isn't as bad as the sin of others. True repentance says, "My sin is the greatest. My sin is always before me, not someone else's. But mine."

Do you remember when Nathan came to David after David committed failure – he told David a story about a rich man who stole a lone sheep from a poor man? David became indignant about this until Nathan said, "David, you're the man. And so it goes for us. **We must always guard against being more aware of the sins of others than we are of the sins in our own lives.**

Problem 4 – Jonah DEFLECTS the Issue

But I, w/ shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'” 9

The final problem w/ this prayer is that *Jonah replaces genuine sorrow for sin w/ promises for future obedience.*

Again this sounds pretty good. Jonah made a commitment to offer sacrifices to God and to do what He asked. This by itself isn't a bad, but Jonah was replacing genuine repentance w/ promises for future obedience. Jonah was basically saying this, “I didn't obey God before but I will from now on. I can be and do better.” Only we'll find later than Jonah really doesn't get much better.

Repentance doesn't require that we make promises to God. Quite to the contrary, God doesn't want us to put confidence in what we can do in our flesh – He wants us to set our sights on Him alone and in what He can do through us.

Col. 3:1 – *Set your minds on things above...*

Heb. 12:1 – *Fix your eyes on Jesus...*

To truly repent means you acknowledge your sin and guilt before God and then let it go! God want us to admit it and to turn from it to him – not toward a promise to be better.

True repentance means we don't avoid sin and try to find ways to fix it. Satan would prefer we linger in our sins for decades. He doesn't want us to let it go. He wants us to hang on to it, to think about it, to regret it, to be stuck and unable to get over it. If that's where you are, then you haven't experienced true repentance. True repentance says, "This is no longer my sin – it has been taken from me. Jesus took it off my shoulders. He took it to the cross where He bore the wrath of God in my place and now the demand for justice has been satisfied. There is no sin left. It's been removed. It's been nailed at the cross.

Repentance is shedding that old skin. Repentance is getting out of those old dirty clothes and putting on the pure righteousness of Christ. That's repentance. Repentance is a change of heart and a mindset shift. You're no longer consumed w/ your own failure. You're no longer consumed w/ what you have or haven't done. You're filled w/ love and adoration for what Christ has done for you.

If the sum total of your spirituality is the prayer you prayed when you were 6, then you don't get the gospel. The gospel is more than a prayer or a commitment; it is much more than a change of mind or behavior. It is a change of affection and attitude toward God. To be saved is to be given a new heart that loves Jesus and wants to obey Him. The alternative is spiritual superficiality.

Superficial spirituality is adept in following the approved religious forms and in the use of pious platitudes. B/c of this, it initially looks holy and good. But a little probing reveals its true character. I might say that a little persecution and suffering quickly exposes the spiritual reality. I greatly fear that superficial spirituality is the norm in America, rather than the exception. I fear there's much of this in my life and in our church. Yet superficial spirituality has several tell-tale symptoms. For one, it relies on the wrong things. It relies on one's background, one's ancestry, one's denominational heritage, one's position (an elder in the church, etc.), or one's knowledge. **None of these constitute spirituality. Many of them are used to counterfeit it.** Superficial spirituality relies heavily on forms. It borrows much from others; it mimics piety rather than manifests it. Superficial spirituality prays only in dire circumstances; it is motivated by crises, and is manifested by foxhole prayers. It is self-ward in orientation, rather than Godward or man-ward. It seems insensitive or oblivious to personal sin, yet it recognizes sin in others. It lacks a depth of intimacy with God and has little evangelistic fervor. It has a very narrow band of concern, and is usually very introverted in focus. It tends to distort doctrines and to accommodate or excuse one's sins – such as Jonah's use of God's sovereignty, veiling his own sin.