

True Repentance

Growing up in Southern California, I was blessed with the opportunity to attend many different crusades in packed arenas and stadiums.

Especially in the summer time.

Greg Laurie would have the Summer Harvest Crusades and Raul Reis would have the Somebody Loves You crusades.

These events would usually have different music groups leading worship and then the pastor would come up and preach the gospel.

The events would end with an altar call.

One of the most memorable ones I attended was Billy Graham's second to last crusade.

I believe his last crusade was in New York City.

This event was held at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena and there were about 80,000 people there. This was in 2004. I think Billy Graham was about 87 at that time.

One of the things that I remember most about him was the way he lifted his bible with one hand as he preached.

I grew up watching Billy Graham on television. They would show many of his crusades on Saturday nights and I remember watching him preach the same message to the multitudes.

A message of hope – that Jesus Christ died for our sins and that He resurrected three days later.

Billy Graham was able to preach the gospel in a way that it would be easily understood. He would say,

God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.'

This is the message of John 3:16...

However, Billy Graham would also stress the importance of repentance.

This morning, we are going to look at one of the greatest evangelical events recorded in scriptures.

No packed stadiums, no worship bands, no pulpits. It was one man, Jonah, delivering the message that God had told Him to give to the wicked city of Nineveh.

A simple message of repentance.

Let's pray...

[Jon 3:1-10 CSB] 1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." 3 Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the LORD's command. Now Nineveh was an extremely great city, a three-day walk. 4 Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished! " 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast

and dressed in sackcloth; from the greatest of them to the least. 6 When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he issued a decree in Nineveh: By order of the king and his nobles: No person or animal, herd or flock, is to taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. 8 Furthermore, both people and animals must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing. 9 **Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish.** 10 God saw their actions; that they had turned from their evil ways; so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.

The God of Second chances

One of the most amazing verses in the entire book of Jonah is the first verse in this chapter.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

Think about everything that Jonah had done up to this point.

- Rebelling against God's commission to preach against Nineveh.
- Hiding from God in the boat that was going to Tarshish.
- Getting thrown off of a boat in the middle of the storm and ending up in the belly of the great fish that God had appointed.

The price of rebellion and disobedience is always high and in many cases, will impact other people.

Not only did Jonah almost lose his life in the boat and in the sea but, his actions also affected the other people that were on the boat. He almost got them killed.

Like a disobedient child, we saw God put Jonah in a well-deserved time out.

The belly of the fish, this was his time out, this was his isolation time that God created specifically for him so that he would be able to reflect on the cost of his disobedience.

Despite all this, the amazing thing about verse one is that God in His amazing grace, came to Jonah a second time.

Now people will ask, what would happen if Jonah was disobedient again regarding God's commission?

God is all knowing, he knew Jonah's heart while he prayed in the belly of the fish.

It is important for us to realize that God does not react to our decisions.

If Jonah was going to suddenly disobey God – God would have a bigger fish waiting for him already.

God could also have prepared someone else.

Turn to the book of Esther 4.

The book of Esther is one of my favorite books. It details Esther who being Jewish is selected as queen to the most powerful man in the world at the time, Artaxerxes.

During this time, there were people plotting to have the Jews killed and Mordecai, who is Esther's uncle sends her this message.

[Est 4:13-14 NKJV] 13 And Mordecai told [them] to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for [such] a time as this?"

Mordecai knew that the only reason God had placed Esther in the position that she was in was to deliver the Jews.

Mordecai knew God was faithful, so his message to Esther is – guess what, if you don't help us, you will die and God will use someone else.

Esther, you are in that position for a reason.

Church, God's will, will get done.

Whether we are going to be obedient to His will or not.

It's not that He needs us. He simply wants us to be a part of His will and for us to see the amazing things that He does.

So Jonah, after the fish pukes him out, is obedient to the word of God and proceeds to go into Nineveh. The scriptures tell us that it was a three day walk for Jonah as he preached throughout the city.

His message: In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!

Can you imagine someone going to Los Angeles or New York and proclaiming this message?

They would probably be locked up.

We live in a time where people do not want to hear a message of judgment.

There are people that believe that “God is a God of love – He won’t judge us. He loves us!”

There are churches today that preach this. There are individuals on television who do not even mention the “s” word from the pulpit (sin).

They do this because they want to tickle the congregation’s ears. They compromise on the word of God and provide a gospel that is all about grace and had nothing to do with repentance.

There is a problem with this church because **God is just and He is holy.**

And He will judge the unrighteousness. Listen to the words of Paul,

[Rom 1:18-25 NKJV] 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown [it] to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible [attributes] are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify [Him] as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The book of Hebrews states that it is appointed for men to die once and then judgment... This is why God is about to judge the people of Nineveh – because of their unrighteousness.

Now, let's take a look at Nineveh's response.

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth; from the greatest of them to the least.

The people of Nineveh believed God – but that is not where it stopped.

[Jas 2:19 NKJV] 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!

The question is church, can we really say we believe in God, if we keep going against God's will.

Repentance begins with believing God. And as we believe Him and His Word, we have the power to transform our lives according to His wills.

We can do many other things associated with repentance, but if they do not begin with believing on and trusting God, they are all useless works of the flesh.

The scriptures then tell us that the people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth.

They deprived themselves of all fleshly desires. Food, water as well as what they were wearing. Sackcloth was usually made out of goat hair - it was very uncomfortable.

Now, fasting alone is useless if done with the wrong motive.

[Mat 6:16-18 NKJV] 16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who [is] in the secret [place]; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Fasting is supposed to be between you and God. It doesn't mean we go on a hunger strike, we can skip a meal and consider that a fast.

But we do it unto the Lord and if done correctly, it is beneficial.

Fasting will strengthen the effect of your prayers if it is accompanied by an effort to also turn away from sin.

This wasn't only handful of people that were partaking of this fast. This was being done by everybody including the King of Nineveh himself.

[Jon 3:6-9 CSB] 6 When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he issued a decree in Nineveh: By order of the king and his nobles: No person or animal, herd or flock, is to taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. 8 Furthermore, both people and animals must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish.

The response of the people of Nineveh to the message of judgment was to humble themselves before the Lord and to call upon Him.

With the understanding that whatever God decides, He decides.

Church, this is true repentance!!!

In scriptures, we have many examples that illustrate the differences between true and false repentance.

Take note, just because we acknowledge that we have sinned – this is not repentance.

Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus Christ speaking to the religious rulers states (Matt 27:4) "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood"

King Saul is another example of someone who often claimed he sinned yet failed to repent.

Turn to 1 Samuel 15,

The Lord commands Saul to attack the Amalekites and he gives Saul the specific instructions that we wanted them to be completely destroyed – men, women, child, animals – all were to be destroyed.

Saul partially obeys, he keeps the King of the Amalekites as a prisoner and some of the soldiers kept some of the animals.

The word of the Lord came to the Prophet Samuel and he goes to confront Saul for his disobedience.

[1 Samuel 15:18-30 NKJV] 18 "Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" 20 And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 "But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." 22 So Samuel said: "Has the LORD [as great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, [And] to heed than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness [is as] iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from [being] king." 24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I

have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25 "Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD." 26 But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." 27 And as Samuel turned around to go away, [Saul] seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. 28 So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, [who is] better than you. 29 "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He [is] not a man, that He should relent." 30 Then he said, "**I have sinned**; [yet] honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God."

King Saul felt that all he had to do is proclaim that he had sinned and that God would simply restore him to the position that he once had.

Notice the last verse that we read, Saul was more worried about his reputation as he seeks a blessing from Samuel in front of the elders.

That is why he stated "I have sinned"

A few years ago, I knew a brother in Christ who got involved in a sin. His wife caught him multiple times and finally, she left him.

His comment to me was that he repented from his sin and now he couldn't figure why his wife (who was also a believer) had failed to forgive him.

He was in effect blaming his wife for not being a true believer.

Church, there is a big difference between remorse and repentance.

Remorse is simply being sorry for getting caught while repentance means turning away from that sin.

Does the wife have to forgive him according to scriptures – yes.

However, forgiveness doesn't automatically lead to restoration.

If this individual had truly repented, he would have been ok with the consequences.

Because he was not ok with this – as he wanted everything to go back to the way things were before he was caught in sin, we can say that he truly never repented.

Just like Saul. All Saul wanted was a blessing to show the people that he was still king. He was sorry he got caught as we also see him pointing the finger at everyone else.

Now, I want to show you what true repentance is...turn to 2 Samuel 19

King David commits adultery against Bathsheba. He then proceeds to cover it up and eventually had Uriah killed.

The prophet Nathan is the one who confronts David.

[2Sa 12:9-20 NKJV] 9 'Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife [to be] your wife, and have killed

him with the sword of the people of Ammon. 10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 "Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give [them] to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 'For you did [it] secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' " 13 So David said to Nathan, "**I have sinned against the LORD.**" And Nathan said to David, "**The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.**" 14 "However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also [who is] born to you shall surely die." 15 Then Nathan departed to his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. **16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.** (Notice how this is the same thing that the people of Nineveh are doing) 17 So the elders of his house arose [and went] to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. 18 Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, "Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!" 19 When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And

they said, "He is dead." 20 **So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.** Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

King David, admitted to Nathan that he had sinned against God. God forgave him of his sin – but David still had to deal with the consequences of his sin. His child is dead.

How does David react, he gets up and he goes to the temple to worship. He accepts whatever is coming to him.

In the book of Psalms we see what David was thinking during this time as he writes in Psalm 51

[Psa 51:1-4 NKJV] 1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin [is] always before me. 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done [this] evil in Your sight--That You may be found just when You speak, [And] blameless when You judge.

What a big difference between true repentance and counterfeit repentance.

The people of Nineveh are showing true repentance – they were not given one ounce of hope by the message that Jonah brought to them.

However, what if the story of Jonah had reached the people of Nineveh prior to him arriving there.

The sailors that were in the boat they must have told everyone how the God of the Jews calmed the seas when they threw his disobedient prophet overboard.

Think about the way Jonah could have looked after being in the belly of the fish for three days. His skin bleached by the stomach acids – think of what he smelled like.

It could be that maybe as Jonah was proclaiming this message of judgment, that the people looked at Jonah and told themselves, if the All Powerful and Almighty God can have mercy and grace upon one of His disobedient prophet, maybe He can exhibit the same grace and mercy toward us.

9 Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish. 10 God saw their actions; that they had turned from their evil ways; so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.

God held back his judgment on the people of Nineveh because they turned from their evil ways.

Now, God does judge Nineveh later on – as a new generation of Assyrians forgot about God's grace and mercy.

One last thing regarding repentance, we cannot obligate God to forgive us from our sins.

We must remember that,

Justice is getting what we deserve.

Mercy is not getting what we deserve.

Grace is getting what we don't deserve.

When we repent, we appeal to His great mercy.

In conclusion, there are many that ask if what happened to Nineveh can happen today?

I believe it can, we haven't had a big spiritual awakening here in the US since the 70's with the Jesus Movement.

If it is to happen, it will start within the church first. We are the ones who have to take an inventory where we stand in our walk. Just like Jonah.

We must remember that Nineveh **(the world)** could not get the message until Jonah decided to be obedient to God's word.

I believe that the only reason Jesus Christ has not come back for His church is because of his grace and mercy.

There are still many people that have not heard the gospel.

Someone once said, If God doesn't punish America, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.

God is just.

If America repents, then God wouldn't have to. Amen

Let's pray...

Today I want to give an opportunity to anyone here that has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior –

We just read that salvation is from the Lord and through no one else.

Admit that you are a sinner,

Believe that Jesus Christ died for you

Accept Him as your Lord and Savior

Repent of your sins.

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned against you. I know that I am not perfect and that I cannot please you through my own efforts. I know that I deserve to be judged according to my sins. And, I know that I have nothing to offer you.

Lord Jesus, I ask you to forgive me of my sins. Please cleanse me and make me right before you. I trust in what you have done on the cross. I do not rely on myself but only on you and I receive you as Lord of my life and as savior of my soul. Lord Jesus, save me. I look to you alone.

In Jesus name.

