

## **“Repentance” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent Midweek 5 March 22, 2023**

- I. **Jonah 3:1-10** – previously read
- II. **The people of Nineveh were a violent, evil society.**
  - a. The last thing you might have in mind for them is hearing the voice of the Lord and repenting of their sins.
  - b. Yet, Jonah cries out, “in forty days, Nineveh shall be overthrown!”... and even to our surprise today, it actually worked.
    - i. Not only did it work, but these people repented through and through.
    - ii. They even got started before the king made a decree... and in the end, the king... all the way down through the animals were wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes.
    - iii. You might say that is the model of repentance in Scripture – and we’ll take some time to consider that type of repentance today.
  - c. When you think about it, they did way better than Adam... after he and Eve ate the fruit, God calls out, “Adam, where are you?” and Adam says, “I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself” (Gn 3:9–10).
    - i. When we are convicted by God’s call to repent, what is our response?
      - 1. Are we afraid and try to hide like Adam... or do we get honest about who are and sit in ashes?
  - d. Jesus tells us that “Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:20).
    - i. We can relate to what He says... because who in the world wants their sins exposed to the light?
    - ii. However, repentance means coming into the light... opening up and showing our sins and inner brokenness to God.
    - iii. It might be in silent confession, or it might be to the pastor or another Christian if it’s a sin that particularly bothers you (with a warning – make sure it is a trusted person, for example, a pastor is sworn to never divulge the confession of a penitent)
      - 1. This sounds scary and intimidating to bring our sins into the light –even if it’s in silent confession.
      - 2. Our natural tendency is to act like Adam... to be afraid and hide.
  - e. What does it mean to hide in this way?
  - f. Hiding includes only confessing the sins that we deem “socially acceptable”.
    - i. We freely admit that we are sometimes lazy, or unloving toward someone... that we get angry with family members on occasion... or we don’t always respect and obey our parents.

1. These things might be absolutely true... and sinful – worthy to confess – but they also might be the tip of the iceberg.
2. We might think we've done our duty confessing the basics, but what about the deeper sins of rage... or lust... or hatred... or unbelief that we would be mortified if anyone else knew about?
  - a. These are the sins that do the most damage to our relationship with other people and with God.
  - b. Now, please understand that repentance on any level is not false, it's just that sometimes we throw out basic stuff so we don't have to deal with the deeper issues.
- g. Another way we can hide is keeping our thoughts moving along quickly – with the idea that we can take the spotlight off ourselves as fast as possible.
  - i. Our confession goes something like this: “Yes, I'm a sinner, but aren't we all sinners? Besides, I will try really hard next time.”
  - ii. Maybe I've already tried “really hard” in the past, and I'm not too good at making the needed changes... but if I promise to do better, I can get past this very uncomfortable part of the service.

### III. **The Ninevites did not hide.**

- a. They sat in ashes... and spent a dedicated amount of time thinking about their sin... you might say that they were being honest about who they were.
- b. So what does it mean to sit in ashes?
- c. Go back to Ash Wednesday – After Adam and Eve sinned, God said, “Dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Gn 3:19).
  - i. Ashes remind us that our sins have devastating consequences.
  - ii. This is not just a matter of rebelling against some random rules... because remember when I said that God's law is what gives structure to the universe?
    1. Well, sinning against God's law is to sin against the way we are designed.
    2. Sinning not only opposes God... but opposes who we could be.
    3. Sinning is destructive, like knocking out the walls of your house until you are sitting in a pile of rubble... rather than within the boundaries that God set up so life can flourish.
- d. So we might think that the answer is to figure out what parts of us need to be cut out or taken away so that we do God's will without sinning...
  - i. A dark story comes from the real Cinderella – Grimm's fairy tale version – but the mean stepsisters tried to fit into Cinderella's glass shoe by cutting off a toe!
    1. Now, we sometimes think we can be the princess, or “right in God's eyes” by cutting off the parts that are sinful... like God's

law is the shoe and we must conform to it no matter what it takes.

- e. But honest repentance doesn't mean being able fit yourself into God's law.
  - i. It means recognizing our sin, grieving it, and sitting with it for a while.
  - ii. In fact, today I would ask you not to promise to do better, because it doesn't even matter whether you think you can do better.
  - iii. We will take that question up next week, but for now, just focus on being who you actually are before God.
  - iv. The reason I say this is because repenting is so much bigger than just doing better... remember when Isaiah says, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Is 64:6)?
  - v. None of us are pure or can act with purity... we are filled with sin through and through.
- f. Also, honest repentance isn't just feeling sorry for sins...
  - i. Because it includes faith in God's promise of forgiveness.
  - ii. It's kind of strange, but we can even find ourselves hiding here too!
    - 1. You've probably heard, "When God looks at you, He only sees Jesus" – which is true, but is the goal to hide behind Jesus for eternity?
      - a. That sounds more like Adam... "I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid."
      - b. What happens when we're in heaven and God peeks around Jesus – and figures out who we really are?
        - i. He might say, "Hey! How'd you get in here?"
- g. No, our faith is in the promise that Christ has reconciled us with God.
  - i. That means that God says to us, "I know exactly who you are, and with full knowledge of that, I welcome you into My kingdom.... I know your shame, and with full knowledge of that, I seat you in a place of honor."
  - ii. Your honored welcome into God's kingdom has nothing to do with how well you fit into God's law or your sincere promise to be better, or even your ability to do better....
    - 1. You are welcomed into God's kingdom solely by the work of Christ, whose death has redeemed you from every part of yourself that would destroy you.
  - iii. The issue of turning from sin and doing better is important, and we will take that up next week.
  - iv. But as you leave here today, remember that your success or failure at "doing better" for God can never add or subtract to what Christ has done. Amen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sermon based on "Honest Repentance", Copyright © 2023, Concordia Seminary Press, St. Louis, MO, and Dr. David Maxwell. Permission granted to the purchaser for congregational use