

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
SIGNS OF REPENTANCE

Wednesday, July 8

Reading: Jonah 3:5-9

Jonah 3:8 *Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish."*

The ministry of Jonah is very ironic. When we read through the prophets of Israel, we find that their message was usually rejected or ignored by their own people. The prophets themselves were often persecuted or killed. Now, here is Jonah, proclaiming God's message to a heathen, hostile people, and they believe his message – a message Jonah never wanted to preach in the first place!

Jonah 3:5 gives us a summary of the Ninevites' response. Notice first that they "believed God." These were not Jonah's words, but God's Word. While Jonah was the messenger, these people realized that the message was from God Himself. The first step in repentance is believing God's Word. It is accepting that what God says is true!

Next, they did something about it. Fasting and sackcloth showed their sorrow over their sin and an earnest seeking after God's mercy. The king's actions are telling. He stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. These pictured his authority and power. He laid them aside to humble himself before God. His royal robes were replaced with sackcloth and instead of sitting on his throne, he sat in the dust! Repentance requires coming to God in humility. We must lay aside our pride and desire to have our own way and sincerely seek God's forgiveness and mercy.

The king issued a decree for the people of Nineveh to do the same. They even put sackcloth on their animals in a sign of widespread sorrow. Fasting from food AND WATER also showed the urgency of their plea. While you can survive several weeks without food, you will only last a few days without water.

All these actions were backed up with urgent prayers to God. Literally the Hebrew reads to "cry with all your strength" to the Lord. This sincere repentance would be followed by changed lives. They were to "give up their evil ways and their violence." This change was general (evil ways) and specific, as Nineveh was known for its brutality and violence. The same Hebrew word is used for their turning from their evil ways and God turning from his fierce anger. The Ninevites have no guarantee of God's mercy, but only a hope that their changed lives will appease Jonah's God.

Too many people believe that repentance is just about their words. If they say the right things or confess their sin out loud that is enough. But true repentance requires a changed heart and a changed life. It does no good to say you're sorry if you have not committed yourself to not doing it again! While repentance can be a struggle, we must always be moving our lives and hearts in the right direction – turning away from our sin and turning to God!

Are there any sins that you need to repent of?

What sins in your life do you need to get serious about and give over to God?