

JONAS WAS A SIGN

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Many will know who Justin Bieber is. He is a music artist who has sold over one-hundred million records in the United States of America alone, and has won a number of awards. His net worth is estimated to be nearly three-hundred million dollars. From the time he was a child, he was taught something of the Christian faith, but he did not live as a follower of Christ ought to live. After several years of indulging in sin, he has repented and devoted himself to Christ. In a recent interview he said:

I never really ... When it says, following Jesus, it's actually turning away from sin. What it talks about in the Bible, there's no faith without obedience. I had had faith about like, 'I believe Jesus died on the cross for me, but I never really implemented it into my life.' I never like, 'I'm gonna be obedient... I think it was my perception of who Jesus really was. I'd had really bad examples of Christians in my life, who would say one thing and do another, so they were my direct example of who Jesus was. (Interview with Zane Lowe of Apple Music, February 15th, 2020)

One of the great errors of modern evangelicalism is its neglect of repentance. Repentance is crucial to Christian faith, and there is no forgiveness without it.

God is gracious and longsuffering, and ready to forgive, but only on condition of repentance. When God revealed His glory to Moses, He said:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

Through Ezekiel the prophet, He said to His people Israel, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." (Ezekiel 18:32; compare 33:11) Repentance is not simply an acknowledgement that one has done wrong; it is heartfelt sorrow for sinning against a holy God, and against men who are made in the image of God. After David took to himself Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, he wrote:

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:15-17)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question and Answer 87, read: What is repentance unto life? Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of

God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

One of the best examples in Scripture of repentance is the repentance of the city of Nineveh. Ancient Nineveh was a wicked city, and it was so wicked that God dispatched Jonah the prophet to denounce God's judgment against it. God told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." (Jonah 1:2) When Jonah finally came to the city, he proclaimed, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." God might justly have destroyed the city with no warning, but He gave them fair warning, and opportunity to repent. This was the hope of the king of Nineveh. When word of Jonah's preaching came to him, "he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." The king, in order to show his repentance, removed his robe, the sign of his royal standing, and put on sackcloth, a coarse garment fit for a humble peasant. Then he sat in ashes, a sign of death and destruction, a sign of judgment. Then he issued a decree to the subjects of his real, a decree which stated:

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? (Jonah 3:7-9)

He commanded them to abstain from eating and drinking as signs of their self-denial, and of their dependence upon God. Furthermore, he commanded them to stop their sinning, especially their violence. He hoped that, because of their repentance, God might forgive them, and not destroy them. His hope was well placed. The Scriptures say, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." (Jonah 3:10) God is gracious, and ready to forgive, but not without repentance, and good works in keeping with that repentance.

At the Son of God's First Advent, some in Israel were worse sinners than the Ninevites. They were worse because their hearts were harder. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, the generation of Jews of Jesus's time would not repent at His preaching. Jesus said, "The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." (Luke 11:32)

Let us always strive not to sin. If we do sin, let us be quick to repent, and to do the good works of repentance. Let us always look to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.