

5/26 Repentance

Jonah 2:9

9 “But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.

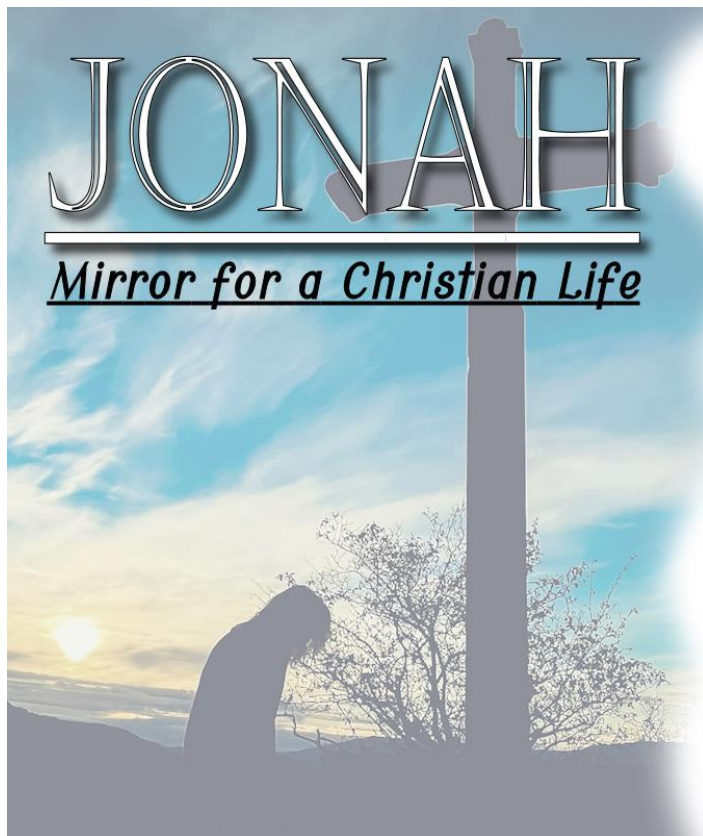
What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

Special Music: “I Repent”

Steve Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HO5nWZD8Tt0>



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FINDING GRACE IN REPENTANCE

Myron McIntosh stared at the ceiling above his jail cell. He had already counted the number of bars that made up his 5' X 7' numerous times. There were 46 with the back wall being constructed of concrete. The cell had a washbasin but no toilet. The deputies had been responsive to his personal needs and allowed him to visit the common bathroom down the hall, which also had a shower. The cot he had to sleep on was narrow and uncomfortable, just a flat steel pallet hanging from the bars with no springs and a very thin mattress. He was given a blanket but no sheets.

He managed to see his mother several times a day when she brought food for him. Daisy's Diner had a contract with the sheriff's office to provide meals for any prisoner. Myron liked to think that she spent a little extra time making his meals and there was always enough to keep him filled.

The jail in Parable didn't see much use, so there were only four cells and during the two weeks that Myron had been there, only one other had been occupied when Sam Krenshaw had been picked up for drunk and disorderly over at the "Never Too Early" bar. The proprietor, Jesse Wiggins, had called the sheriff's office when Sam started throwing dishes at the bar back, Santino Rodriguez. No one was hurt and Deputy Dusty Forrester had quickly gotten things under control, but Sam did spend the night in one of the cells to sleep it off. He was gone when Myron awakened the next morning.

Since Myron had pled guilty to the charges against him, all that remained to be done was his sentencing, and then completing his time and service. Judge Darling could easily have sent him over to the county jail where confinement was more like a barracks, but she chose to keep him in town. Myron wasn't sure why and he didn't ask. At least he was able to see and speak with his mother every day, who also brought him a copy of the weekly newspaper, books from the library, and a few magazines, mostly borrowed from Doc Adams' office. She wasn't very discerning regarding the reading habits of a teenage boys, and he wasn't really interested in gardening and beauty magazines, but at least it was something to read when things got too boring.

The deputies allowed him out of his cell for an hour every day to get some exercise and occasionally, the sheriff would let him out to do some cleaning around the office. Myron really looked forward to those times because anything was better than being cooped up in that jail cell. When he was out of his confinement, the deputies didn't particularly keep a close eye on him. Probably because there wasn't any place he could go without being found.

Judge Darling had not set a date for his sentencing. It was as if she was enjoying making him wait. His lawyer, Alice Charm, did come to see him occasionally if only to let him know that things were still in limbo. Mr. Sanders was still threatening to press charges in the loss of his dog, Maggie. But even that seemed to be on pause. While Myron continued to hold himself accountable for the accident and the problems he had caused his mother, he felt most guilty about the loss of Maggie due to his negligence. But he hadn't really had a chance

to make his peace with Mr. Sanders. The man had simply continued to refuse to talk with him. It was probably due to Mr. Sanders' grief and anger, and a strong desire to see Myron suffer. Myron could understand that. He would give anything to make it right.

On her last visit, Myron had asked Alice Charm to speak with Mr. Sanders and see if he would please come to the sheriff's office so that they could talk about what happened. Ms. Charm was convinced that Mr. Sanders still had no desire to converse with Myron, but she did promise that she would try.

So, here Myron lay on his cot staring at the ceiling as his mind went through all the events again for what seemed like the millionth time. He had finished reading the books his mother had brought him and didn't want to read another article on how to plant petunias, the best way to rearrange living room furniture, or the proper skin care for freckles (although the magazines kept telling him that freckles were back in style). His mother was late with his lunch today. The dinner must have been busy, and he wasn't there to help.

The door to the cell block opened and Deputy Wagner came to his cell. She took out her keys and opened the cell door saying, "Myron, you have a visitor. Please follow me." She did put handcuffs on him so he knew he wasn't going to be cleaning the office, but who would be coming to see him. The deputies always let his mother in to come to his cell, so this couldn't be about her. They usually left the steel door unlocked when she visited, and he was never handcuffed during those visits. Deputy Wagner led him to a small office where there was a table and two chairs. She directed him to sit in one of the chairs and wait for a

few minutes. There were windows in the room, but they were obviously reinforced with steel mesh. It was probably the interrogation room, but there were no cameras. That would have been a little much for the budget of the Sheriff's office in Parable, TX.

After a short wait, the door opened, and Deputy Wagner stepped inside and held the door for a frowning Mr. Sanders. It was obvious from his expression that he didn't want to be there. "Thank you, deputy," Mr. Sanders said.

"Not a problem, Max. You two can talk for as long as you want. I will be right outside the door. Just push this button when you are finished."

Mr. Sanders stared at Myron for several minutes before he reluctantly took his seat. The chair let out a soft screech as it was pulled back from the table. Even then, there was only silence as Mr. Sanders continued to frown, deep in thought concerning what he wanted to say. When he did speak up, Myron was surprised at what came out of his mouth. "Myron," Mr. Sanders started biting his lip in the process, "How you holding up, son?" What was this? Did he hear compassion in the voice of this angry old man or was it just a conversation starter?

Myron's emotions came bubbling to the surface. There were so many things he wanted to say. He could see the pain in the eyes of the man sitting across from him. Something about him seemed defeated, his face showing extreme grief and depression. It was so very obvious to Myron that just being in this room was a struggle for Mr. Sanders, but something that he felt needed to do.

Myron opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. He tried to speak again but all that came from his throat was a croak followed by an unbelievable ache that traveled through his whole body. He reached across the table with his cuffed hands and grabbed at the old man's forearms. Mr. Sanders didn't move, but Deputy Wagner threw open the door and said in a loud voice, "Mr. McIntosh, you are not to touch the visitor. This kind of behavior will not be tolerated." She reached out to remove Myron's hands, but Mr. Sanders waved her off with a nod. "It's alright, deputy. Myron and I have a lot to work through. Everything is fine. Please don't fret. Myron is not going to hurt me."

"Max, we have rules for a reason. Myron, let go of Mr. Sanders."

"Deputy, please step back outside. I know you have rules, and I know you mean well, but Myron and I need this time. Please step back."

"Alright, Max," the deputy said reluctantly, "but do know I am watching carefully. Do not hesitate to push the button or call out for me."

"Thank you, deputy, I appreciate it."

Deputy Wagner left the room still giving Myron an eye that said "Don't make me come back in here," heavily closing the door behind her.

As soon as the door clicked shut, Myron called out, forcing the words he had to say. They were much louder than he wanted them to be, but it seemed the only way to get them to come out. "Mr. Sanders, I am soooooo... sorry about Maggie. I didn't mean to hurt her. I did everything I could to not hit her. But it was dark, and raining, and she was in the middle of the road, and yes, I was

drunk! I can't make up for all the pain I have caused you. I have no right to ask for your forgiveness. I know I took something very dear from you. I deserve to be punished. But I truly want you to know how sorry I am. I would take it all back if I could. I want you to... I beg you... I really..." Myron's voice trailed off as he broke down in sobs and clung to Mr. Sanders' arms in his hands. His head fell to his chest in shame.

Max's eyes began to tear up as he looked at this young man who truly realized what he had done and the cost that had come with it. There was nothing that Myron could do to relieve the pain that Max felt, but it meant a great deal that Myron understood and wanted his forgiveness. He rolled his hands over to grasp the boy's forearms, and the two sat like that holding onto each other for a very long time. They had both needed this and Max realized that he had been so immersed in his own pain that he hadn't realized the pain that Myron must be suffering under the guilt of his actions. It hadn't been the request by Alice Charm that had brought him here to talk to Myron, but a phone call from Trudy Darling who convinced him that this was the best way to start resolving things. He had been reluctant, because he hadn't been sure of Myron's sincerity, but now he knew that the boy was at the point of repentance. Maybe... just maybe, they could get passed all this pain.

Eventually, Myron loosened the grip that he had on Mr. Sanders and slowly sat back up. He looked at the old man and saw the water in his eyes. He felt the tension ease as Mr. Sanders released his arms and stood. "Thank you for asking me to come see you, Myron. Maybe now, we can both start to heal." With that, he

stepped back, quickly wiped his eyes on his sleeve, and pushed the button for the deputy to open the door. “I would like to talk some more, if that is okay with you, Myron.”

Myron tried to smile but could only manage to nod his head. “Maybe he was right,” the boy thought to himself. “Maybe this could be the start of healing. Isn’t that what repentance is all about? An opportunity to reboot and start healing?”

He watched as Mr. Sanders left the building. Deputy Wagner returned him to his cell and removed the cuffs. He knew that he would see Mr. Sanders again soon. There was so much more they needed to talk about.

I grew up hearing that “Repentance is good for the soul.” I wish I could document a good source for that quote. When looking to validate the originator of the phrase, all I could find were references tied to recent history. But in his book “The Problem of Pain,” C. S. Lewis says this:

“We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. I have heard others, and I have heard myself, recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were no concern of the present speaker’s, and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of a sin. The guilt is washed out not by time but by repentance and the blood of Christ: if we have repented these early sins, we should remember the price of our forgiveness and be humble.”

There are so many scriptures that deal with the matter of Repentance, but I want us all to think beyond that, because repentance is not about saying the right words, or performing the right action. It isn’t about making sacrifices or trying to make someone whole after our pride or arrogance leads us into compromising positions where people get taken advantage of or people get hurt. No. There is a lot more to it than that. Repentance is a real value, deeply personal, gut wrenching tearing of our soul that occurs as a result of our understanding of our responsibility and guilt, holding ourselves accountable. It is an impossible need to feed, stomach churning reaction as we desperately search for a way to correct our mistakes, seeking to right our sinking ship in the middle of the chaos of the storm that we have created through our transgressions. It is that moment when we understand that saying “I’m sorry” just isn’t going to cut it. Repentance is a

fall on our knees with a full admission of our guilt, knowing that we deserve the harshest of punishments, and yet our only desire is to fix the problem, take it all back, change the outcome, remove the pain. Even when we know that simply isn't possible.

I have heard many a sermon over the years where a minister has said that Jonah wound up in the belly of a big fish because God was punishing him for his disobedience. But I would like to offer an alternative interpretation, knowing that God is patient, God is kind, God is just, and God loves us.

Yes, Jonah was disobedient. Yes, he addressed his accountability by having the sailors throw him overboard into the chaos of a storm that was surely going to sink the boat. But at that point, while Jonah held himself accountable, he hadn't yet repented of his disobedience. It is often difficult for us to find our repentant nature while we are still struggling in the storm. He had not fallen to his knees and asked God's forgiveness. He hadn't reached a point where he was truly sorry for the pain that he caused.

I don't know about you, but I grew up being told that when things go bad for us in life, it is God driving us to repentance, that things will not get better if we don't repent our sins, that our status in life is determined by our repentant natures. But look around you, folks. There are plenty of people in this world doing just fine without having a repentant nature or seeking a closer relationship with their Creator. Thinking that repentance is tied to our relationship with the chaos found in this world comes from a very Old Testament viewpoint. Just read through Proverbs and count how many times it says that if you humble

yourself before God you will be healthy, wealthy, and wise. And if you don't humble yourself before God you will wind up poor and destitute. But that just doesn't seem to be the way it is in our world, does it? There are plenty of people that are healthy, wealthy, and wise and claim how foolish it is to trust in an invisible God.

Jesus teaches us that the abundance of grace and mercy we receive cannot be associated with our status on earth. We are called to **“store up our treasures in heaven,” not here on earth.**

So, taking this idea and applying it to Jonah, perhaps having a big fish swallow him was God's way of saving him from drowning in the storm of a turbulent sea, so that he had time to think about his transgression. He had already admitted his guilt, but maybe these three days in the belly of this fish gave him the opportunity he needed to truly understand his own response to his guilt, and to humble himself before his Creator. Maybe it wasn't a punishment at all, but instead a path to redemption.

Don't forget, the fish didn't stop swimming towards Nineveh. God was moving Jonah to where he needed to be to serve the purpose that his God had given him. But he needed for Jonah to have that “Come to Jesus” moment, that conversation with his Creator to let him know not only that he admitted to his disobedience, but that he was sorry that he had let God down, that he had failed in his moral obligations to the God he served. Maybe... Just maybe we shouldn't consider this as a punishment, but an opportunity to begin to heal and set things right.

I can hear the wheels churning in your head. “So, preacher, what does that mean for us?” Let me start by saying that we all need to expand our view of our relationship with God. We need to stop drinking the mother’s milk of our early Christian beliefs, and start eating meat and vegetables. Hey, I won’t tell you that there isn’t comfort in sticking with a diet of mother’s milk. There’s are not a lot of challenging thoughts there. We always know where our next meal is coming from. But if we don’t allow ourselves to mature in Christ and move on to the meat of his teachings, we will never be the hands and feet that he desires us to be. And one of the ways we change our spiritual diet is to take the opportunity to examine why we believe what we believe, to challenge our beliefs, to mature to a point where we no longer need a booster seat at the table of Christ. And that takes faith; faith that our triune God will meet our needs as we humbly bring ourselves to the table to accept the fullness of his teaching; faith that even when we feel challenged, the Holy Spirit is there to guide, protect, and nurture us.

But to embrace that kind of relationship, we need to be mature enough to accept the fact that we are going to mess up. Do we really think that our teenage children are always going to do the right thing? But we need to let go and let them make mistakes so that they can learn. That doesn’t mean that we ignore them and aren’t there to catch them when they fail. God treats all of his children the same way. We are going to have moments of disobedience. We are going to mess up. We are going to make bad decisions. **“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”** But our first step to correct our mistake is that moment when we accept that we are disobedient, that we are accountable for our

actions, that the way we live our lives is far from the perfection of our savior. It is THAT realization that leads us into a true moment of repentance.

Isn't it a revelation when we realize that Jesus Christ died on the Cross and took the sins of the world, our sins, onto himself and paid the price before we even committed them? And to accept his grace, all we need to do is come to him with a repentant heart, accepting what he has already done for us. He didn't make our repentant nature a requirement before he died for us. He made the first move. He beat us to the punch line. He died so that we might live. He died so that we can spend the time that we need in the belly of the fish and ponder how we lost our way as we reflect on our selfish natures and our disobedient hearts. He didn't do this to make us feel guilty. He didn't do this to punish us. He did this so that we can understand how very much he loves us in spite of the way we treat him, in spite of our disobedience, in spite of our wandering nature that causes us to lose our way.

I want us all to think about that this week, not because of our guilt (because Jesus never intended for us to wallow in our guilt), but to embrace the truth about how much he loves us, the lengths he was willing to go to return us into his fold.

This process that we are looking at through the eyes of Jonah and also our friend Myron in Parable, TX, is hard. It takes us to the very basement of humility. It makes us realize that we are not the most important people in the world, but are called to be servants to those around us. Humility is hard. Repentance is hard. But both are necessary as we accept what Christ went through so that we can

**humbly kneel at the feet of our Creator. Without Christ, that wouldn't be possible.
But with Christ, all things are possible.**

**“But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
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What I have vowed I will make good.
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”**

God bless you all!

AMEN

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