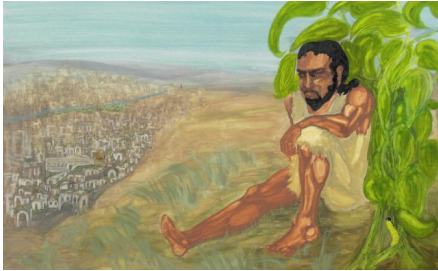


The Power of Repentance



Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:1-5.10)

The book of Jonah is a parable of repentance that in reality never happened. Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria, never repented of its cruelty, idolatry, and astrology. At the height of its power it claimed: “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I remove the boundaries of peoples, and plunder their treasures; like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones” (Is 10:13). In 721 BC, it destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

When the book was written, the great city Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria, was already in ruins. It never came to know the only and living God. What would have happened if the powerful Assyrian empire repented of its cruelty, wars, and violence?

Our Repentance

Bible is filled with the stories of repentance. We have David acknowledging his sin after having an

affair with the wife of one of his best officers. We have Zaccheus giving half of his riches to the poor and Peter crying after denying Jesus. They realized their wrong doing and turn back to God. From that moment life took different direction.

In the story of Jonah, the whole city embraces fast and everyone turns from their evil ways.

And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them (Jonah 3:5).

In Paul’s letter, the realization that this world passes away and life is fleeting leads to different perspective in life.

There is no time to waste, so do not complicate your lives. Keep it simple—in marriage, grief, joy, whatever. Even in ordinary things—your daily routines of

shopping, and so on. Deal as sparingly as possible with the things the world thrusts on you. This world as you see it is on its way out (1 Cor 7:29-31).

In the Gospel, leaving behind everything to follow Jesus exemplifies repentance (Mark 1:20).

Bible is also filled with the stories in which the call to repentance was not heeded. It usually had dire consequences. The cities were destroyed, the tribes perished, and the entire nation went into exile. Ten just person could not be found in Sodom (Gen 18:16-19:29). The streets of Samaria and Jerusalem were filled with cries of the orphans and widows being abused and sold into slavery. The rich young man went away sad unable to give up his riches in order to follow Jesus (Mark 10:17-22). Yet another rich man ends in hell for not seeing the poor Lazarus at the doorpost of his mansion (Lk 16:19-31). Lack of repentance leads to personal and national tragedy.

God Repents

Not only we repent, but God repents as well. We repent of our evil acts and God repents of punishment. Punishment does not bring God joy. In his conversation with Abraham, God hopes to find at least ten just people so he could forgive the entire city. Yet the only just person in Sodom was Lot, Abraham nephew, and he was saved. Prophet Ezekiel expressed this truth with this statement:

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? (Ez 18:23).

Repentance brings joy to God's heart: "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). A repenting person takes God

seriously. Repentance springs from faith. Only someone who believes God's words spoken by the prophets can change God's plans through prayer and repentance. When Hezekiah got a news about his approaching death he burst into tears and prayed. God changed his mind and added fifteen more years to his life. When prophet Amos saw the incoming punishment against Israel, he cried: "O Lord God, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!". The Lord repented concerning this (Amos 7:2-6).

Conclusion

A sincerely uttered word "sorry" can melt an angry and a bitter heart and combine with change in life-style, it can do wonders for a strained relationship. That is the solution to the crisis of our cities, communities, and our families. Our God has a very soft and tender heart. As He was concerned about Nineveh, so He is also concerned about us. If He will see us united in repentance, He can still avert the worst.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it (Jonah 3:10).

There is power in repentance. Turning back and leaving our sinful past behind can be compared to new beginning. Ask yourself what you need to repent of and leave it behind. Do not remain where you are. Turn back and head towards God and His commandments.

May God bless all of you who remember us in prayer and support our ministry here.

New Life Asia Team