

## 11/September/reflections on repentance

It's a beautiful Saturday night [here](#). I'm sitting on my front porch. It's the eleventh day of September, in the 21st year, of the 21st century of our secular calendar.

I've got about 15 minutes in front of me here, to share what I've written for this particular day. Let me read it for you, if you're so inclined.

It's been over a year since my last video-piece. It was sort of a travelogue from Lawrence, Kansas. Eleven minutes long—eleven, slow, long minutes. It took as long as it took.

In that video I talked about the 9th of Av. It's a certain day on the Hebrew calendar. And I talked about a certain—Jewish—Sampson. The real, flesh-and-blood-and-bone, Shimshon. And I talked about a little nothing of a place, called Timnah—not even least among the cities of Judah.

And then at the very end—if any of you made it that far—I said I wanted to share a song with you the next day.

See, I had already made a short video that morning before I left for work. Right here on this porch. In the early morning hours, before dawn. It's a simple video that zooms-in on a lyric sheet of a song, called, "Galilee."

If you listen closely, you might hear the sound of rain drops. The song sheet was a little wet from the rain that morning. The first time I tried to film it, the breeze blew it off the porch, down into the wet flowers below. So I put a rock on it to hold it down. A rock, if you like irony—as in Simon Peter. As in Shimon Kefa—Kefa's the Aramaic way to say, Rock.

So I suppose you could say that the video, in and of itself, was a song of sorts. You can even hear the wind. Moving through the wind-chimes on the porch. Just like tonight.

But the lyric sheet pointed to the actual song that I wanted to share with you.

But I didn't want to make it too easy for you to click and go.

But all you had to do was notice the song's title and the writer's name. And then a quick search.

The song's about Peter, the Galilean Jew—and his Messiah.

Simon Peter was caught—in the mystical middle—between two Jews, and three opinions (if you've heard the joke). He was caught between Sampson, a judge of Israel. And Jonah, a prophet in Israel.

The Jewish Peter was so much like the Jewish Sampson and the Jewish Jonah. The sons of thunder had nothing on him.

He had all of the courage of the Prophet Jonah; and all the determination of Sampson, the Judge. He was a true son of Jonah, in his going out; and he was a true son of Sampson, in his coming in. Especially in his end.

We Christians, we think we know who Peter is. And we think we love him so. But I dare say, that he'd be stunned by the way we characterize Sampson and Jonah.

And I'll tell you, we do slander the real Yonah and the real Shimshon.

And with such casual self-assurance.

Without even bothering to ask the Jews.

Without even thinking to ask the son of Jonah's people or the daughter of Sampson's people, about the two of them—their fathers, their champions.

Earlier today, before the sun went down, it was the Jewish Sabbath. And in particular, it was the special Sabbath that falls between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It's called, Shabbat Shuvah. The Sabbath of Return. The Sabbath of repentance.

:In repentance and rest you will be saved,: it says in Isaiah, :In quietness and trust is your strength.:

So.

We stop what we're doing. We cease from the works of our hands. We quiet ourselves.

And we turn around, and listen for God's Voice in His Scriptures.

And in His commandment to repent—we hear His Voice.

And as we obey His Voice—He gives us repentance through His commandment.

We don't keep His commandment by obeying it. We keep His commandment by obeying His Voice.

I'm not talking about some clever sleight-of-hand with word-games here. It's about an emphasis on directionality.

The commandment doesn't point to a Jew. The commandment points a Jew to the God of Israel.

Look in the Books of Moses, and see what God keeps saying. Over and over. He doesn't command the children of Jacob to keep His commandments so much as He commands them to obey His Voice.

If sometimes—maybe even oftentimes—we take a commandment and make it our own; and keep it for our own sake; and turn our back on the origin and the source of the commandment. Well then. Our resulting self-sanctification and the sense of righteousness in ourselves doesn't nullify the Spirit of that commandment, or do away with it.

And our inward disobedience to the Voice of that commandment doesn't silence that still small Voice—that still, small Voice of the grace and truth of that commandment.

But we can't hear His Voice.

And we don't even notice—we don't even realize—that we can't hear His Voice.

And if we ever heard it to begin with, we forget what it sounded like.

There's no greater, sustaining joy in this life, than to hear and obey His Voice as we go about our day.

Can you hear that Voice? In your innermost being?

For real.

Do you know what it sounds like? Or can you remember what it sounded like, when you used to be able to hear it?

:Be silent and listen, O Israel!: Moses said, in his final words to them, :This day—you have become a people for the LORD your God.:

The Jews bless their God every time they receive a commandment from Him.

They say, “Blessed are You, O LORD our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us by His commandments.”

They clearly attest that it's God alone Who sanctifies them—by virtue of His commandments. Not by virtue of themselves, or even by virtue of their obedience to His commandments.

Like time's arrow—that only goes in one direction—this is the arrow of the Torah of the heart, that only points in the direction of the Giver of Torah.

Israel is set apart by God's commandments (because He—and only He—has the ability to set them apart). It is the Giver of the commandment Who sanctifies.

It's not the one who obeys the commandment of God who is sanctified, but it's the one who obeys the Voice of God. This is the Torah that's written on the heart. The one who obeys the Voice of God.

Paul talks about those of us who hold to a form of godliness, while denying its power.

What is that power of godliness that they deny?

That spiritual power of godliness—it begins in repentance.

But the outward appearance—of a form of godliness—that isn't founded in repentance—that outward appearance is a mask, which hides the secrets of a heart that's full of all kinds of evil.

And the mind of such a person becomes deluded by their mere mental assent—to that godliness. Always learning—mentally—but never coming to a knowledge of the truth.

Why is that?

Because they've never known repentance.

Because they've never known the truth—about truth.

So let me end here by re-telling you a story about Peter, the son of Jonah.

He'd been instructed by his Master to get into a fishing boat—he and the rest of the Master's instructees. And they set-off from the shore—to cross the sea of Galilee. But the wind was slowing them down instead of helping them. And it had gotten dark. And the waves were getting rougher and rougher.

But they had to press on. What other choice did they have?

And sometime in the early morning hours, when they were so exhausted—somewhere in the time between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning—they saw the Master walking toward their boat, across the sea.

Of course they couldn't believe their eyes. What would you think? They thought it had to be a ghost or something. Some kind of apparition. And they were scared senseless.

But Jesus called out to them and said, Don't be afraid. It's Me.

You remember Jonah in the ship. In the storm. He should have been terrified like the rest of the men in the ship (men who were sailors, by the way—who by their very nature were courageous—who weren't afraid of the sea and its storms). But Jonah, he was asleep down in the hold—and quite calm and matter-of-fact about the storm when they woke him up.

When Peter heard his Master's voice he knew it was Him.

So what did Peter, being Peter, want to do?

But what did Shimon Kefa, being a good Jew, end up doing?

He asked for a commandment. He knew he needed a commandment, or he was stuck, right where he was, between a rock and hard place. He said, Lord, if it's You, command me to come to You on the water.

I'm sure there are many things that Jesus could have said in response to him. But He went ahead and gave Peter the command—a one-time, one-place, one-man commandment—to come to Him. Not a command to walk on water, but to come to Him.

So Peter abandoned the safety of the boat—of that little ark in the storm—and he began to do what was humanly impossible for anyone to do.

But he was a Jew. And he had a commandment—specifically for him.

And so he began to keep it.

He began to go to Jesus. In circumstances that were impossible. He began to walk to Jesus. Across the Galilee of the nations.

But out of the corners of his eyes he thought he saw the wind.

But you can't actually see the wind. No one can see the wind.

It was the effect of the wind—on the waves of the sea.

And he began to lose hold of the certainty of his commandment. And he began to lose his focus on his Master. And he lost the courage of Jonah. And he began to sink into the waters of lawlessness.

So he cried out to his Lord, "Adonai! Ho sha Nah!" And Yeshua reached out His hand and saved him. And He brought him back to the safety of the fishing boat, that little miniature ark of Israel.

Some of our old country preachers like to say that Jesus cleans His fish after He catches them. By this they mean to say that He justifies a fish first—before He sanctifies it.

But Jesus wasn't a fisherman. He was a carpenter. And He actually did sanctify His Jewish fishermen, even before He saved them. He sanctified them by His word to them.

He made them clean. And sent them out, into the cities of Israel.

Eventually He even sent them out across the Galilee of the nations. To catch fish like you and me.

There's an order and a directionality to these things. You can't believe first, and then repent. You can't truly believe at all—unless it's first given to you to repent.

God created a sanctified people first. For His purposes alone. For His glory alone.

In order to justify the repentance of all of us who are given to repent—both Jew and gentile alike.

Both the Torah and the Gospel are to the Jew first. Because the God of both the Torah and the Good News—Is first to the Jew.

As Paul puts it in his explanation of the mystery of Israel and the commonwealth of Israel's nations:

There is one God, Who will first justify the circumcised by faith—by His gift of faith—and then, and only then—justify the uncircumcised by grace—through that same faith.

God saves the Jew by faith, through grace. And then He saves the gentile—by grace, through faith.

It's the same grace and truth. And the same faith.

But it's to the Jew first. This is the order of redemption.

These are God's terms for His peace. To anyone who can accept it.

May the God of Israel grant us all, true repentance in this new year.

Amen v' Amen