

# “Sackcloth & Ashes”

## Full Sermon Transcript

This week, I had a sermon all prepared four weeks before I was scheduled to come here. Then, at the beginning of this week, God said, "No, I want you to talk about this." So, I thought I had heard all that the Holy Spirit said, and I prepared another sermon on Monday. I got it all ready, and as I was going over it in my mind, the Holy Spirit said, "Robert, that is not what I told you to prepare. That is what you want to talk about. This is what I want you to talk about." And that happened at 10 o'clock last night before I went to bed. So, this is what it is, and this is a message that, honestly, I'm nervous about.

One of the things I've seen floating around Facebook and other social media sites, as well as among many Christians, is the 2 Chronicles passage, chapter 7, verse 14. It refers to this country and what's happening and going on. It reads:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

—2 Chronicles 7:14

We need to explore what that collectively means for us to return to the Lord. We're talking about collective repentance. We're not talking about when you, as a Christian, make a mistake, sin, and ask for forgiveness. We are talking about what collective repentance looks like, specifically from a national standpoint.

So, if you would stand with me, if you are able, and turn to the book of Jonah, chapter 3.

\*\*Jonah 3:1-10 (KJV)\*\*

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

'Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.'

So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: 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?'

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."

Dear Heavenly Father, be with us all today as we explore what it means to collectively repent and what that should look like. Help us all to better understand as we are headed into darker days within this country. And it's in Jesus' holy and precious name we pray, Amen. You may be seated.

### **\*\*Collective Repentance\*\***

Christians—or I should say most Christians—everywhere understand that this country is in trouble. We make that call to turn back to the Lord, to turn away from sin, to do a 180 from what we were doing and turn toward God collectively, to be reconciled to Him as a nation. Nineveh gives us the example of what that looks like.

We all know the story of Jonah—how he was swallowed by a great fish and stayed in its belly for three days and three nights. We all know his reluctance. But a lot of people don't talk about what goes on with this whole message that he was given to deliver to a great city. This city was so large that it took three days' journey to walk from one side to the other. It was the capital city of Babylon, I believe, and there was a lot of sin going on. They loved war, they loved idol worship, they loved being cruel—they loved doing all these things that were against God.

And here comes this Jew, Jonah, who says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." I want you to think about what he said. He didn't ask for a call of repentance. He said nothing of the kind. He pronounced judgment that God had told him to deliver: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Think about that. What was the response from those people? The people of Nineveh believed God. Now, this is the thing right here—they were worshipping other gods, and I'm sure that Jehovah was thrown in there somewhere, at least they had heard of Him. But they believed those few words, and something happened to the people there—from the average Joes and Janes going about their day to the highest leader. They believed the prophet Jonah. I don't know if Jonah introduced himself, I don't know if he discussed God, but I'm not going to speculate because the Bible doesn't give us anything like that.

So, the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. They believed—not only through an intellectual turning of the faith, but by their actions. They decided to do this thing: to put on sackcloth, to sit in ashes, and to fast.

For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, laid his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. The very top man in that city said, "I believe." The robe is meant as a thing of glory and power to a ruler—it sets him apart and establishes his authority, a visual sign of authority so that people can understand who he is. And he took it off. He believed. Now, he just heard about this. We don't know his motivations, and we don't care about his motivations. The fact is, he believed, put his robe aside, put on sackcloth—which is a very rough garment, the closest thing would be burlap—and then sat in ashes and fasted.

And what did he do? He caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. 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."

They knew, just from that proclamation of Jonah, that what they were doing was evil in the sight of a God who could completely obliterate them. We don't know if they knew God, but

there was something there—it was the Holy Spirit, we know that now—convicting them. The same type of thing happened in Acts chapter 2 when Peter gave a sermon. He gave a sermon, and the people were pricked in their hearts: "What must we do?" That's what they said. They knew that they had done evil.

But this is the thing that many people skip over or don't really hit on too hard: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" This is what the king and the nobles said. "We don't know if God is going to spare us. We don't know." So, there was no guarantee that anything was going to happen. They were just going to do it because they recognized that what they were doing was wicked in the eyes of God. "We're going to do this thing, and if we get saved, fine. If we don't, we don't. But who knows? Who knows what's going to happen?"

And God saw their works, because from the heart they believed, and their works followed. This is what James later discusses—that faith without works is dead. Faith is an external personification of what happens inwardly, an inward change. It isn't the external stuff, but what happened is that they believed, their external works showed their belief, and they were saved for a generation. They turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not.

Now, this lasted a generation. Unfortunately, if you read other prophets, you'll see that Nineveh didn't last—they went back to their old ways. You know, this cycle happens to all cultures, not just the Jews. But we see this type of thing going on.

So, whenever we go into the 2 Chronicles 7:14 passage that I read earlier, I don't think the people who post that understand the gravity and the depth of what collective repentance looks like. I think they want to just say, "I'm sorry, God. We're sorry. Everything's good. Are we good now, Lord? Is everything fine?" That's not what collective repentance looks like.

In fact, we have not had a collective repentance like that since the Great Awakenings and since the Civil War. The last time the United States bowed down like Nineveh was during the Great Awakenings in the 1700s and in 1863. The last time a U.S. president officially called for a national day of prayer and fasting was on March 30, 1863, during the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation for a day of national humiliation, fasting, and prayer. Like Nineveh, Lincoln saw that the Civil War was displeasing to God. So, from the very top down—and I know that the southern states had seceded, but Abraham Lincoln was the leader of this nation as a whole—he recognized what was going on. "We're under God's curse right now. We are sinning in the eyes of the Lord. We need to call for a national time of humiliation, fasting, and prayer." This was the last time that it happened.

He urged Americans to seek God's intervention and guidance during the nation's crisis, reflecting on the sins of the country and asking for mercy and forgiveness. He recognized that America was sinning. He recognized that America needed to ask for forgiveness. And then, on April 30, 1863, it remains one of the most significant calls for national prayer and fasting in American history. While subsequent presidents have proclaimed national days of prayer, none have specifically called for fasting since Lincoln's proclamation, and none have attached collective sin to it. None of them have.

Nineveh's repentance is an example of sackcloth and ashes. We have many instances of God interceding on behalf of nations in this form. We have Daniel in chapter 9, verse 3. The prophet Daniel sets himself to seek God through prayer and supplications with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes as he intercedes on behalf of the nation of Israel, confessing the sins of the people and seeking God's mercy. You see, the sins that they committed over generations led to their captivity.

That's the thing that we have in many churches and among many Christians—we think we're hunky-dory. "Oh, that's Old Covenant stuff. That doesn't happen now." It does happen. We're living in it right now. Take a look through Deuteronomy chapter 28, starting at verse 15, all the way to the end, and look at the curses. Look at the curses that are there if the people do not follow God, and compare it to what's going on in this country. It's a checklist: health, natural disasters, economic disasters, being infiltrated by foreign armies, people not prospering, people not profiting, people acting in ways that are an abomination unto the Lord. It is a checklist.

There are consequences to not listening to God and being disobedient to Him. We saw that in Genesis chapter 3. Eve listened to a snake. Her husband was right there—he was listening to the snake too. But God said not to eat of it. Eve added a little extra: "Nor to even touch it." That's not what God said. And she did it and offered it to her husband. What happened? Disobedience. Consequences. It's still going on.

Just because we're under the covenant of Christ, for those who have put their belief in Him, does not mean that we will not see consequences if we continually sin. It means that this country, which has been given so much, will not escape consequences through their collective sinning and turning away from God.

We read in Esther, after Haman's decree to destroy the Jews in the Persian Empire—Persia, by the way, is Iran—the Jews responded with great mourning, fasting, weeping, and wearing sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:1-3). Mordecai himself put on sackcloth and went into the midst of the city to cry out about the dangers facing the people. Israel's national repentance is seen in Nehemiah chapter 9, verse 1. After the completion of the walls of Jerusalem and the reading of the law, the children of Israel assembled with fasting, sackcloth, and dust upon their heads to confess their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. This shows another example of a national group turning to God in repentance through these symbolic acts.

It's this whole thing of showing that we are sorrowful—not just because we have done things to harm other people, but because we have collectively done things that have been rebellious against God. Rebellious against God.

Oh, there have been national days of prayer. There have been things that have called the nation—you hear from the reporters, you hear from groups and things like that—but nothing like Lincoln. He was the last one, or one of the last ones.

Let me find my spot here. There was the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 and post-World War II revivals that were driven by fears of divine displeasure and nuclear war, prompting increased religious participation. The Jesus movement, however, focused on disillusionment with the Vietnam War. After 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, Sandy Hook, and COVID-19, panic responses were largely centered on comfort and healing rather than repentance, with short-lived increases in religious participation.

Unlike Nineveh's immediate and collective repentance, most U.S. responses have been more focused on individual reflection and grief, with few long-lasting calls for national repentance in either of those cases. And I'm going to say something controversial in a minute, so prepare yourselves.

In all of these cases, the focus has been to heal. "Let's heal the nation because we feel bad. We feel terrible. You know, we've done some bad things, but oh, love us, Lord. We don't want to change; we just want to continue doing stuff."

Now, this is the controversial part, so don't throw your hymnals at me—I know they're hard copies. After 9/11, the only ones who really said why 9/11 happened were the Westboro Baptist people. Now, I do not like how they do things. They state the problems, but they don't state solutions. And I truly and honestly believe that that collective body kind of does things for attention. I think that plays a part. But they were right on the money with that. I believe that 9/11, I believe that COVID, I believe that a lot of stuff that happens within states and collectively as a nation is a direct result of God saying, "Thy will be done." You have done this so long against Me that this is a consequence of your actions. You have not turned back to Me. You want healing, but you have not acknowledged your collective sin against Me. So, these are the things that are happening right now. These are the things that are going on.

And from the time that I read after post-World War II and going into the Cold War, many of the seminaries were teaching a very literalist view of the Bible. The Reformation taught the most literal view of the Bible. But within the seminaries, what started happening is that more secularism started increasing. God's will and the consequences of that stuff started getting pushed off to the side. I've heard people say, "Well, the demoniacs were suffering from epileptic seizures." They weren't suffering from epileptic seizures—they were suffering from demons because it says it right in there. But there's been this collective thing within seminaries to go more toward a secular direction and more toward communist directions. And what that does is it bleeds down to the preachers, and the preachers who graduate from these institutions give it to the congregation. So, they can't even recognize the collective sin that they are in or the individual sin that they are in. They think that their lives are hunky-dory, and they put too much emphasis on grace. "Grace covers everything." Sure, grace covers a multitude of sins, so does love. But you can't escape the fact that the things you do have consequences, especially for Christians. Judgment comes upon the house of the Lord first.

And in every single one of these things that I've mentioned here, it came upon the houses first. During COVID, when that happened, what happened to the churches? Churches started shutting down because of their own will. They didn't have enough faith in God to keep themselves open. And I know that's a harsh declaration toward a lot of churches, but that's exactly what happened. So, God ripped those churches apart that weren't a part of the faith that God would protect them in.

Collective sin breeds collective responsibility and collective consequences. And one of the biggest collective sins that this nation has done is abortion. It is an absolute abomination. The worst part of it is that our politicians and those in authority and those in power like to make it a political issue. It is not a political issue. Politics deals with the economy, with education, with infrastructure, with healthcare—all that stuff. Not abortion. Not the lives of babies. Not the lives of the innocent.

And we, as a nation, are dealing with the collective consequences of having gone along with Roe v. Wade for so long. Now, it is incumbent upon the states to decide whether this is right or wrong. This is one of the reasons why I have departed from the Republican Party. They have changed their stance on this. They say, "Well, we're going to let the states decide." And that sounds all great and freedom-loving, but that's just being chicken. That's being chicken because at least the other side, those that are pro-choice, are saying, "Well, this is what it is, and we stand by it." The Republicans are kind of shuffling off the responsibility.

Logically, that doesn't make any sense. If I were to take the logic that was employed in the Republicans' view and in some other people's view of making it the responsibility of the states, well, let's take murder off the federal books. Let's take pedophilia off the books. Let's take rape and arson and all those things—let's let the states decide. And if the states decide that pedophilia is okay, well, it must be fine because they decided. No. There are things that are

collectively wrong. They're collectively wrong because it's not the people that decide the sin—it is God. It is God Almighty who decides it. It is in His holy Word that decides it.

And we are coming upon a time when each one of us is going to have to go to God in prayer and make a decision within the state of Missouri. Now, I am not going to tell you how to do your politics. I want that understood. I am not telling you how to do your politics. But I am going to read Amendment 3 that is coming up on the November 24th ballot.

**\*\*Summary of Missouri's Amendment 3:\*\***

Missouri's Amendment 3, which will appear on the November 24th ballot, seeks to overturn the state's current abortion ban by establishing a constitutional right to reproductive freedom. Folks, these are their words, not mine. This includes decisions about abortion and contraceptive use. Specifically, it would legalize abortion until the point of fetal viability, which is when a fetus can survive outside the womb. After this point, abortion will only be restricted or banned except in cases where the life or health of the woman is at risk.

A "yes" vote on that amendment would enshrine the right to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, in the Missouri Constitution, remove the current abortion ban in Missouri, allow for regulation to ensure the health of patients and prevent discrimination in government programs for those providing or seeking reproductive care, and permit restrictions on abortion after fetal viability.

A "no" vote would maintain Missouri's near-total abortion ban, which has been in place since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022.

The fiscal impact is uncertain, but local entities expect some reduction in tax revenue if the amendment passes. So, that's how they're doing it: "Hey, you know, if you vote yes, you may get a financial break. If you vote no, maybe not."

Again, I'm not telling people how to vote, but I am telling you what the Bible says about abortion. It is an abomination unto the Lord. Absolutely. Along with the LGBTQ agenda, along with this whole gender craziness that's going on, this is a sign that we're nearing the end of this shoot and match. We're nearing the end of the show. This is a sign of the end times.

But this is also right here, right now. This is collective sin. And people wonder what's going on with this country. "Well, we're seeing more health issues. We're seeing more natural disasters. We're seeing more of this." And I know that it kind of—it used to do this to me—I used to cringe whenever I'd hear preachers and other Christians talk about that because, "Where's your data? How can you do this?" Well, you can't, because you can't apply the scientific method to historical things and theological concepts. The disciplines don't jive. You can't do that. So, you have to look at historical evidence. You have to go back to the Old Testament and look.

This is the problem with a lot of the seminaries now, especially the more liberal ones. They want to unhitch that Old Testament. They want you to forget about it. "We're under the New Covenant now. Our Bible starts at Matthew." Yeah, I'm making fun of them because it's stupid.

In the Old Testament, what you get is historical evidence of what happened when this stuff starts up—when sin starts up, when they're in the midst of it, the warnings that come, they ignore the warnings, here are the consequences, and then they repent. It's this cycle that goes on. We can derive from historical evidence from the Old Testament that this country is under a curse. It started up in the early 20th century. I'd say it started probably around the mid-1800s.

It's gotten worse, and especially during the countercultural movement in the 1960s, it got extremely worse. And it's kept getting worse and worse and worse.

So, what does collective repentance look like? Well, I'll tell you something. Now, this is my view. I get pretty cynical when it comes to this stuff, and I know that's not a good thing. But I do not see our current president, Kamala Harris, or Donald Trump saying, "Our country has sinned against God. We need to put on sackcloth and ashes, and we need to collectively take a fast because of our collective sin." That's just not going to happen. If it does, oh my gosh, I will never be so glad to be so wrong in my life. And that could happen. That could happen. But I just don't see it happening.

So, this country is sinking. It's sinking. I am not going to waste my energy grabbing a bucket and trying to throw the water out of the lifeboat. My energies are going to be best spent on doing things like this—preaching the Word of God, giving the gospel to those who are lost, helping my brothers and sisters when they need help, and accepting help when I need help, and becoming more like Christ. That is our goal. Christ is the answer. We spread Christ throughout this nation.

And it may seem old-fashioned to talk about sin and hell and why we are estranged from God at birth. We have this enmity—nice fancy word meaning separation—because of our sin nature. We have this separation, and Satan and his demons are working non-stop. And they have put their foot on the gas with regard to what they are doing to try and keep you, to try and keep the lost people from hearing the life-saving waters of Jesus Christ in the form of the gospel.

If you but believe in who Christ was—that He was born of a virgin, that He led a sinless life, a spotless Lamb of God, and that He willingly went to the cross, died for our sins, and three days later rose—if you believe in that, you become a child of God through Christ, our elder brother. You become that by belief and by belief alone. There's no working to keep your salvation. You are immediately a new creation in Christ. You have the mind of Christ, meaning that you're able to understand His will. Lost people can't understand His will. They can't. You are immediately given the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You have the Holy Spirit as a down payment for the future things that are coming. You have these things, and you have the ability to resist temptation and to resist sin. And when you don't, when you sin, you have the ability to humble yourself and say in your own way, "Jesus, I'm sorry. I messed up. That was not good."

And the Holy Spirit is there to convict you—not in a bad way, but just to say in His own gentle way, because the Holy Spirit is meek and gentle just like Jesus was, because they are one and the same. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. He is very gentle in saying, if you're able to hear Him, "You messed up, Robert. You need to reconcile this." And if you don't, well, then God's going to be chastening you.

One of the things that's in the King James and in the New King James Bible, whenever Paul was on his way to Damascus, is, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard to kick against the pricks," or "hard to kick against the goads." Now, you won't see that in a lot of modern-day translations. What that refers back to is a parable that the Jews used to hand down. The pricks or the goads were these long iron rods with points on the end of them, and they would put them on the side—I don't know the technical name—but they would drive the bovine, you know, the heavy animals, to do a straight line. And if they would start moving from this way to that way, they would get pricked in their sides. It would hurt them. It was a proverb to say, "You're going against God. You're going left or right, and it's discomforting. It hurts you."

As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit as our internal prick or goad, as it were. He loves us enough to keep us out of sin. But that's only if you believe in Him. If you don't believe in Him, you're on your own. You're doing your own thing, just like this country is doing.

When you individually see yourself sinning, you repent—or you should—and you get reconciled back to God. Reconciled meaning not losing your salvation, but it's like you're back in relationship with God. This country is out of relationship with God. It has been for about a century and a half, I'd say. They're out of relationship. They have no desire to do this. That's the reason why you're seeing that.

And I honestly believe that if it were to happen, that someone were to realize that, it would take a Nineveh-type event, where every man, woman, and child would stop what they're doing, fast, go out and buy burlap sacks, strip off their clothes, put those things on, sit in ashes, and have ash all over their body, crying aloud to God. That's what it's going to take for all the collective sins we've done. Because for all the bad things that Israel has done, we have done much worse. We have done much worse—not only in abortion but in promoting the homosexual lifestyle, in promoting all of this different stuff that's going on. We celebrate it. We light up the Empire State Building based on the LGBTQ and abortion stuff. We do all of these things. We give tax write-offs for something wicked. Our music is generated for the enjoyment of the masses, celebrating something that is sinful.

No more are we like David, being confronted by the prophet Nathan. When Nathan confronted him with his sin, David said, "I have sinned against God." He didn't say, "I've sinned against the kingdom," or "I've sinned against Bathsheba," or "I've sinned against this and that." He recognized who he sinned against. No more are we like that.

It's going to take a massive act by God. But in the meantime, until that act actually comes—if it comes at all—we are to be about the commission that we have been given since Christ: to "go ye therefore to all the world, teaching them to obey my commandments, preaching the good news, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." And there are things that will accompany those who are Christians who go out there to show the power of God. We're talking works of healing, we're talking driving out of demons, we're talking all these different things.

And I don't know how this denomination believes about this. I know that Baptists as a whole believe in the cessation of gifts—that it's done. That's simply not true. Sorry, not there. But they are meant to show as a sign for those who believe: "These people are from God because they can command demons." Only Christians are able to command them and get rid of them. Only Christians, because they've been given authority by Jesus Christ—not on our own authority, but by His.

That is our goal. We have these tools. We have these tools to live a righteous life, and our testimony gives credibility to where we are. In Revelation, it talks about how they overcame the dragon by their blood and their testimony. We have that ability.

So, we need to show the nation. We need to show them what it means to follow Christ. We need to show them what repentance looks like. We need to show them because dark days are coming ahead, and we can't escape them. I just thoroughly believe we have been handed over.

Romans 1, you get down near the end of that chapter, you start seeing what it looks like when God abandons a group of people. Now, we're in the midst of it.



But we don't lose hope. We rejoice because that means we're near the end. And soon, Jesus will come back and take the faithful—Adam's rib, as it were—take the faithful. There will be a bad time, but then there will be 1,000 years.

The whole thing we talked about earlier with regard to Israel and Iran—Iran has not gotten directly involved with Israel before. They've always worked through proxies. But see, we're moving toward that Ezekiel 37-39 prophecy. We're starting to see inklings of it. We're near the end of this, folks. Don't lose hope. The Holy Spirit gives us hope.

And I am excited to see—I lament and I'm saddened by where this country is, but at the same time, I'm also excited because we're living through prophecy right now. Prophecy that was given by the Old Testament prophets and by the New Testament prophets about what's coming. And it is exciting to be a part of that.

And you can be a part of that by spreading the gospel to a hurt and dying nation. And those people who believe are going to be saved. They'll be saved from God's wrath, but most importantly, they'll be reconciled to God, to have a right relationship with Him. And Jesus loved us so much that He went to the cross, in obedience, even for those people who hated Him. If you but believe.

And that's the medicine that we need to give to the sick people of this nation and to the nation as a whole.

Now, join me in prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You first and foremost for Jesus Christ, for He who is without sin became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God through Him. We thank You for Your Son. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit, who has come to live inside of us who believe, for the gifts of the Spirit. We thank You for a relationship with You. We thank You that, though You created the entirety of the cosmos, both great and small, You still love us and want to be a part of our lives and want to guide us so that we can be conformed into the image of Your Son, Jesus. We thank You and praise You for who You are.

We pray for this nation, that they will collectively snap out of it, that they can see their sin and cry to You, "We have sinned against You, God," so that they can turn and repent and believe, so that we as a nation can be in right relationship with You.

And it's in Jesus' holy, precious name we all say, Amen.