

# (Audio Book) City Wide Repentance

by Harry Ironside

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance at both individual and city levels, drawing examples from biblical narratives like the repentance of Nineveh and the lament of Jesus over unrepentant Jerusalem. It explores the responsibility of cities to obey God's word and the impact of ministers who boldly address civic unrighteousness. The message underscores the need for preachers to proclaim the gospel, denounce sin, and call for repentance, highlighting historical figures like Savonarola, Calvin, Wesley, and Moody who influenced civic life through faithful preaching.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 12:41, Luke 19:41, 1 Peter 1:23, John 3:3, Acts 3:19, Matthew 23:37, Psalm 119:105, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Romans 1:16, Acts 26:20

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Civic Responsibility"

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## Description

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## Transcript

While repentance is distinctly an individual exercise, yet we have in the Word of God, as we have already seen, churches called upon to repent, and we learn from our Lord's words, in Matthew 12, 41 and Luke 11, 32, of the repentance of a city, the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. This is most suggestive, particularly in view of the failure of the cities wherein Christ had done most of His wondrous miracles, to turn to God, if, He declared, the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. This was one of the passages that caused great distress of mind and absolute bewilderment to the sensitive souls of Charlotte Bronte and her gifted sisters.

If Tyre and Sidon would have repented under such circumstances, why did not a loving God give them a similar testimony in order that they might have been saved from destruction? One answer, of course, is, that the men and women of these ancient cities will be judged at last only for rejecting the light they had, and not on the ground of knowledge they did not possess. But from these scriptures we learn that a city in

God's sight is a responsible entity, and that He holds it accountable to obey His word and walk in His truth. This raises a question as to how far ministers of Christ ought to concern themselves about the sins of the cities wherein they labour, and to what extent they should lift up their voices against the evils of the day, when tolerated by those in authority.

Many preachers take the ground that the servant of God is to confine himself wholly to explaining the gospel and to calling individual sinners to repentance. The Lord will deal with civic unrighteousness in His own way and time, we are told, and it is best that pastors and evangelists ignore what it is not in their province or power to correct. And yet God has unquestionably set His seal in a remarkable manner upon the efforts of some of His honoured servants who in their day and generation battled against entrenched wickedness in civic and national affairs.

Think of the influence exerted for righteousness by Savonarola in Florence, Calvin in Geneva, Luther in Erfurt, Knox in Edinburgh, Wesley in London and all England, and a host of like-minded men who cried out unflinchingly against the iniquities of the times in which they lived. It is written, The wicked flee when no man pursueth. But our own Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst, whose name was a terror to privileged sin, well exclaimed, But they go a lot faster when the righteous get after them.

The prophets of old were set by God over cities and peoples and nations to call them to account for their evil doing and to summon them to prepare to meet their God, the Saviour, as we have noted, dealt with cities as such, and nothing is more pathetic than His lament over unrepentant Jerusalem. And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation, Luke 19, 41, 44.

Link with this His impassioned cry, as recorded in Matthew 23, 37, 39, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Surely none can read such passages as these without recognizing the civic consciousness of Jesus. He yearned over men, not only as individuals needing personal salvation, but as community groups which would be blessed on earth if they would only heed God's word and repent. To many of us the story of the repentance of Nineveh is far more wonderful than that of the miracle of Jonah and the sea-monster.

People object to the latter as being unheard of elsewhere, and so contrary to ordinary human knowledge that it is unbelievable. But where else in all human history do we find a great, godless, pleasure-loving city brought to its knees as in the case of Nineveh, if it were not written in the word of God and so definitely authenticated by our Lord Himself as also the instance of the experience of Jonah we might hesitate to credit it. But here it is, solemnly recorded on the pages of Holy Writ, a great city containing sixscore thousand souls that knew not their right hand from their left, that is, little children must have had a very large adult population indeed.

This vast throng were given over to impiety and wickedness of such gross nature that God could tolerate it no longer and sent His prophet to announce its summary destruction, as in the case of the cities of the plain, whose stench had reached to heaven, He would blot Nineveh from the face of the earth. But the word of the Lord came home so convincingly to the hearts of the king and his counsellors of state that they not only repented themselves, but called upon all in the city to do the same. The results were unparalleled in the history of religious revivals.

The entire populace fell down before the Lord in sackcloth and ashes bemoaning their sins and crying for mercy. And God heard and pardoned much to the disgust of Jonah, who was more concerned about his own prophetic reputation than about the salvation of an entire people. Perhaps the nearest thing to this in secular history is the story of Savonarola and Florence, Italy.

The impassioned monk, moved to deepest concern by the lasciviousness, the licentiousness, and the godless luxury of the Florentines, invade against the city, threatening dire judgment from heaven if there were no repentance, and move the populace almost as one man. Drawing his messages largely from the last solemn book of the Bible, he preached in the Duomo month after month expository addresses on the Apocalypse. The awful figures of judgment depicted therein he declared to be about to find their fulfilment upon the Florentines and all Italy unless the people repented and turned from their corrupt behaviour.

Nobles, merchants, and labourers alike felt the power of his words, and at his call they brought their treasures of gold, jewels, and objects of art and piled them in the public square at his feet, to be sold or distributed for the relief of the poor and needy. The churches were crowded with penitent suppliants confessing their sins and seeking divine forgiveness. For a time at least the city was largely purged from its iniquity and men realized their responsibility to seek to glorify God in their lives and with their means instead of living in lusts and pleasures on the earth.

It is true Savonarola was burned at the stake in the end, because of the hatred of a corrupt clergy, in that he but shared the baptism of his Lord and participated in his cup of sorrow. He was, undoubtedly, the most Christ-like man of his generation, and he suffered as his master suffered because he was a witness to the truth. His own words were really prophetic.

A Christian's life consists in doing good and suffering evil. After the lapse of centuries the church that decreed his martyrdom honoured him as one of its outstanding apostles. Like Israel of old, the fathers slew him and the children built his sepulchre.

So it ever is in this inconstant world. Calvin's outward regeneration of Geneva is another marked instance of the power of the word when faithfully proclaimed to influence civic life. Unhappily there was a great deal of Old Testament legality about it all, and like most men who really amount to anything, Calvin made some stupendous blunders.

As in the case of Servetus, for which the world has never forgiven him, but his influence throughout was on the side of righteousness and truth, and for this he will be remembered for ever and shine as the stars eternally. Macaulay declared that the Wesleyan revival saved England from the horrors of anarchy and revolution, yet Wesley's great work was preaching the gospel and calling sinners to repentance. That message stirred London and the other great cities of Britain to their depths, and even where it did not result in actual conversion to God it made people ashamed of the enormities they had condoned in church and state and led to a national renovation that was an untold blessing to millions.





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