

Fasting

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a solemn assembly in seeking God's presence and repenting of sins, highlighting the role of fasting and sackcloth in humbling oneself before God.

Duration: 1:09:26

Scripture: Joel 2:12-13, Jonah 3:5-10, Matthew 6:16-18, James 4:8-10

Topics: "Fasting And Prayer", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the need for extraordinary fasting and prayer in times of emergency, drawing parallels from the story of Jonah and the repentance of Nineveh. It highlights the importance of returning to the ancient paths of Scripture, practicing fasting not as a routine but as a heartfelt response to the urgent state of the church. The speaker shares personal experiences and challenges the congregation to recommit to seeking God through fasting for revival and transformation.

Transcript

We express deep gratitude, Lord, that you have never dealt with us according to what we deserve, but always with extraordinary mercy. We are thankful that you are truly a long-suffering God. But you have made it clear to us that the time can come when all mercy is withdrawn and when justice must be established.

You've given us the example of Israel. Now, you've warned us in Romans 11 that eventually the Gentile church would be removed and Israel restored. But right now, you've made it clear to us that we are in a wonderful season of grace and mercy.

In the book of Acts, you made the statement that the former times of ignorance you determined to overlook. But the time had come when all men everywhere must repent. And we know that that is the season in which we live.

So as we meditate upon your word tonight, as your Holy Spirit establishes matters within us that are essential for us to know, will you accompany your word with those two extraordinary and necessary gifts of repentance and faith so that in every area where change is needed, we will be quick to respond? And wherever the application of faith is called for, we will without hesitation cast ourselves in entirety upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our burden for this church that it will know the extraordinary work of God in revival and that you will work in such a way in the days immediately before us that full preparation will be made

for the coming of the King to reign in the life of each individual and this congregation to a degree he has not before and to a degree that will utterly amaze this community and transform multitudes to saints in Christ Jesus. So we gladly commit this time to you in expectation and thanksgiving.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. Before you get up here to speak, I've got to do two things. Ask you a couple of questions, Mr. Roberts.

Now, you promised us something tonight. Did y'all remember what he promised? He spoke on Sunday morning from where? What book of the Bible? Joel. And he said there were 10 things.

How many of y'all got them? Now, my question, Mr. Roberts, is not just what are those 10 things, but in that list there's a reference to sackcloth because it says in Joel 1, and you may not want to answer this tonight, but this is a question that's come up. Come lie all night in sackcloth and sackcloth is a public display of fasting. But the New Testament talks about not making a public display of fasting.

So as you talk about that, that was, I think, number six in the list from Joel, if you'll explain that. And God's led Mr. Roberts to what he's speaking on this morning, yesterday morning and evening and tonight. Could I be bold enough to say that I need you to pray for God to lead me to, because as I think about the Sundays that lie between now and the solemn assembly, those are crucial opportunities, and we want to be ready, and we want to be ready.

So would you join me in praying for a clear direction that every opportunity will be anointed of God? Now, several of you have come in since we started, and let me say that we do not have evening service tomorrow night. Our board is meeting, and Mr. Roberts will be meeting with the elders and deacons. And in our staff meeting this morning, we asked the question that every group in the church has been charged to ask, how have we contributed to the spiritual need in our church? And so that's the question that the deacons and elders need to ask tomorrow night, that the staff asked this morning, that we ask you to get your group together and ask that question.

And it might be well to do some praying. You know, we didn't get all the answer to that question this morning. We started asking the question.

So I wanted to be ready to let him preach at 7.30. So at 7.30, God bless you. Thank you, Mr. Roberts. It's obvious that I have the responsibility of clarifying the confusion that I created on Sunday by telling you I had 10 things to mention.

And then I'll not tell you why it happened, but something happened to me personally that made me lose track of where I was at. And so anybody who got all 10 down got something of their own, because I never laid the 10 out. But just to simplify it, I'll repeat the 10 matters this evening and expand just a wee bit upon the sackcloth aspect of it.

I was speaking about the Book of Joel, and within the passage, we were looking at the 10 urgent matters that were unfolded in that book on the subject of the Solemn Assembly. So most of you who were seeking to make the list in writing got the first four, possibly five, without difficulty. And from then on, it became kind of uncertain.

Yeah. And by the way, if at any juncture tonight I leave you dangling, stand right up. Now, please give me a chance to finish the sentence, but I want to encourage you, because the purpose of our being here is to help one another to move forward in a very strong and persistent way.

And if I leave something dangling and uncertain, that's not going to help. Now, I've been at this long enough so that I honestly think I can safely say an interruption from you will not throw me off course. So don't you worry if something needs to be clarified.

Just be polite about asking for that clarification. So the ten points. Number one, the magnitude of the need.

And that is spelled out in numerous ways within those two chapters of Joel. And it is emphasized in the opening question, has anything like this happened in your day? And that was referring both to this fourfold infestation of locusts, but also the solemn assembly that followed. It was truly an extraordinary event.

Number two, I ask you to focus upon the place of God-ordained leadership. Number three, the all-inclusive nature of the solemn assembly, that nobody was excluded, that everybody was required to be in attendance. I even cited the passage out of 2 Chronicles where Asa said anybody who did not come would be put to death.

And we're not going that far, but we must feel the urgency of the matter. Number four, the heart attitudes necessary to an effective solemn assembly. And may I simply share with you for encouragement, some incredible things have happened in solemn assemblies.

But I'd like to share just a beautiful little incident that came out of a solemn assembly. In one of the churches in Texas, the leadership had pinned me down and asked just a host of questions about the solemn assembly. And I answered them the best I could.

And they went ahead and had one. I was not there. I had no participation in it.

But I was in that church preaching a few weeks after the solemn assembly. And at lunch one day, a group of people wanted to entertain me. And there were about 10 or 12 people at the table.

But I noticed a young woman on the other side of the table who kept looking like she had something she wanted to say. And eventually, the person sitting on my left slipped out, I suppose, to go to the restroom, and immediately that young woman raced around, sat down to me, gave me the warmest smile, and she said, Mr. Roberts, I have to thank you for encouraging my church to have a solemn assembly. I went.

And I was converted in the solemn assembly. And I will never forget what God did for me that day. Now, they didn't have the solemn assembly for the purpose of the conversion of lost church members, but an awful lot of churches have lost members.

And wouldn't it be beautiful even if something, by way of an added blessing, were to happen? But the heart attitude, the preparation of the heart is of such maximum importance in a true solemn assembly. Number five, the place of fasting. And that, by the way, will be our theme tonight.

So I will hold any further comments on that until later. Number six, where I created the confusion. Even the outward appearance of people who come together at a solemn assembly should be appropriate.

And in Joel, the putting on of sackcloth. And that, for many, is a mystifying thing. And they're sure that New Testament Christianity has nothing to do with sackcloth.

But here is something you need to know. Remember that verse. I have been reciting it to you and many of you memorized it long ago.

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, in some translations, it appears as afflict themselves. Now how would one go about afflicting themselves? And do you remember the passage from James last night? The last instruction of the seven. Be miserable.

And again, some translations have make yourself miserable. Now what better way to make yourself miserable, is there, than putting on a garment next to your skin that is constantly irritating you, rubbing you, making you feel uncomfortable. The purpose of sackcloth is to make a declaration.

That which we are facing is of such incredible consequence that we must afflict ourselves. We must make it clear all the normal aspects of life which God himself has created and made to some degree necessary are of much less importance than getting right with God and shaking his face in a solemn assembly. So if sackcloth will help, put it on.

I'm not saying it's mandatory. I'm simply stating that sackcloth is a means of afflicting yourself. As is fasting.

Do whatever it takes so that you are faced in a fashion that you cannot mistake with the urgency of the need. So fasting is number five. And sackcloth or appropriate affliction of oneself as number six.

Then number seven, which I don't think I made clear. The declaration of the call must be so certain that nobody misunderstand. I have been in churches where solemn assemblies have been called and people are asking the question, what's this all about? If you've got people who don't even know why they're being asked to come together, they haven't heard an acceptable call in the passage in Joel.

Sound the trumpet! Sound the alarm! And in many places where I've been, they secure one of those old-fashioned horns that they used. I was going to give you the name of it and it slipped my head at the moment, but it doesn't matter. You got it? Yeah, sure.

And they blast on that horn. I mean, that isn't a horn that's blasted away on every day. But when you want the people to know the significance and the urgency, a call to a solemn assembly must leave no one in doubt as to the urgency and the expediency of this gathering together in fasting, in prayer, in seeking God's faith.

Then number eight, which I think I did make a bit clearer, but I had by then thoroughly confused the numbering for you. The clarity of the call, the purpose for which the solemn assembly is called. So there are many reasons for calling solemn assemblies.

And so let the people know why exactly, precisely they're being called together for this particular solemn assembly. And number nine, the place, the necessity of both repentance and public confession. And then number 10, the results that can be anticipated.

And the last half, basically, of chapter two of Joel sets forth the wonderful prospects. And it's capped off, I believe, with the words, then I shall make up for you the years that the locusts have eaten. And isn't it a sweet and a precious thing to know that a church can drift along for eight years with nothing really serious happening.

And then a solemn assembly is called and everybody becomes urgent and serious. And God steps in and he accomplishes in six months more than has been accomplished for 50 years prior. Well, hopefully you're straight now, but again, if you have any confusion, if you don't feel up to standing now, don't hesitate to

approach me afterwards.

I don't have anything to do this week, but to try and help you. That's the sole purpose of being here. So don't you hesitate in any way if there's anything at all that I can do.

Now, I want to move from that to a word that I think is a great consequence. Soon after Maggie and I were married, there came into my possession a set of books of nine volumes called The Annals of the American Pulpit. A very serious minded and dedicated pastor in Albany, New York had taken years to gather together the records of every pastor, of every church, of every denomination from the beginning of the nation until the time that his set was published.

And they were arranged by denomination. And I began reading that treasure house and I discovered something of such great consequence that I would feel as if I had failed you if I did not draw this to your attention. There were pastors by the hundreds who were ordained into the ministry in a given church and they stayed there the whole of their life.

But I'm thinking of a pastor in Lee, Massachusetts who was in the same church for 47 years. And during those 47 years there were 7 wonderful seasons of revival. And I'm making up the figures because my mind isn't sharp enough to recall all the statistics but I just want to give you the picture.

For the first 8 years they just moved along gently added a few members each year. But in the 9th year the Spirit of God came down upon the congregation. They had 280 people profoundly converted and radically transformed in a 6 to 7 month period of time and added to the church.

Then they went along another 4 or 5 years at the ordinary pace. And again the Spirit of God came in great power. And 420 were born out of darkness into light.

7 times in the course of that man's lifetime ministry. Now here is where I become very candid. I love older ministers.

Who have spent their lifetime with the same congregation. And I vowed long ago to do everything I could to help and encourage men like that. I believe you are an extraordinarily fortunate congregation.

To have a man who has stuck with you for more than 30 years. And I believe would be willing without any question if God made it possible to be here until he died. The story of another man comes to mind.

At 87 years of age still in the church he became pastor in his 20s. He preached a very powerful sermon on Sunday morning. And his wife went home.

While she was putting together the Sunday dinner he sat in his favorite chair. And when she was ready she called him and he didn't respond. And she went and found that he wasn't there.

That he'd gone home. What could be more wonderful than for your dear pastor and his wife to be taken out of the field of ministry right at the peak of their usefulness for the kingdom of Christ's sake. Will you recommit yourself tonight to standing with your pastor and encouraging and helping him and in joining him in the most fervent prayer that you will experience one of these incredibly glorious outpourings of the spirit of God.

I believe when I was here three years ago I made it clear that when true revival occurs there are two perfectly wonderful things that are always the most beautiful part of revival. Number one there is always

the nearness of Christ. He manifests himself in the church.

I spoke yesterday of his nearness. I cited those wonderful words from Psalm 73. The nearness of God is my good.

All of you who are older Christians I trust can remember seasons in your life when Christ was so near you almost felt as if you were back in the garden with Adam and Eve walking and talking with God in the cool of the evening. So there is always this glorious sense of the presence of Christ. That immediately impacts everyone because when Christ is present we see sin in ourselves we never knew was there.

And we go to levels of repentance deeper than we ever dreamed possible. And the transformation of the church by the manifest presence of Christ leads to an awakening in the world. But along with the glorious presence of Christ there is something else that always accompanies true revival and that is the word of God itself takes on dimensions of power and spreads like a giant tidal wave of blessing.

Now in my earlier years I regularly saw entire congregations weeping as the word of God was preached. And it was not at all uncommon to see conversions day after day after day. And no fall away rate really they were true converts totally transformed by the word and the spirit.

But now we rarely see it here. There is an incidental convert here or there and once in a while several at once. But just imagine now let your spiritual imagination loose and imagine what it would be like as your dear pastor Paul is in the pulpit preaching for every word he speaks to be made beautifully alive by the Holy Spirit in a fashion so gripping so moving so transforming that the congregation was ignited with holy fire and the whole community radically impacted by your transformed life.

I'm not speaking about silly stuff. I have a series of meetings next month in a Florida city where some of the churches had a lot of this silly stuff a few months back laughing and rolling in the aisles and behaving like jerks and calling it revival. The true revival when Christ is wonderfully near and when the word of God is spread with amazing power the kind of power that God and God alone could bring about.

Now Lord having shared these matters so dear to my heart will you now help us as we focus our attention on fasting. This is a subject where there's a lot of tension in the churches. Some stating as if they knew that fasting has nothing to do with Christianity that is an Old Testament concept.

Others fasting like the Pharisees fasted twice a week with just as much consequence as it meant for them but most of us not really knowing much about it and having had very little experience. So help us tonight open the inner eyes of our souls that we may see all that you have for us in your word this evening. Make it precious.

Let it quicken us. Let it set new standards in our lives for living all out to the glory of King Jesus in whose name we've met and prayed. Amen.

Let's turn to begin with to a perfectly extraordinary book of the Bible. One of the most confusing on the surface that you could possibly imagine. The book of Jonah.

If you have studied the book of Jonah recently your head may still be swimming. There are issues in the book of Jonah that just leave you wondering how could any of that be so? It's not my purpose to go through the book in its entirety just simply to say enough to get your attention focused and then to deal with the subject of fasting. You all remember, I trust that God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh.

And instead of obedience he bought a ticket on a ship to Tarsus. Fleeing, we're told from the presence of God. God brought a great storm upon the sea and that ship was in terrible difficulty.

The sailors began tossing overboard the non-essentials. Then they began tossing the cargo itself. And still the wind was howling and the ship was rocking and looking as if it was certain to sink.

They began to call upon their God. And they discovered in consternation that Jonah was asleep. And the captain gave him a good shake-up and said, get up and pray to your God.

And eventually the sailors cast lots because they couldn't discern the cause of the sea and uproar. And the lot fell on Jonah. And he came clean.

He told them plainly that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. And he told them their only hope was to throw him overboard. And they had hardly completed the task of throwing him out of the ship when the waves calmed and the wind ceased.

And as Jonah was sinking, a giant fish swallowed him up. And in the belly of the fish he recovered at least a small measure of his intelligence. And he prayed a prayer.

The book of chapter two deals with that prayer. And then after three days and three nights the fish vomited him up on the land. Now we're not told where, but we gather it must have been within walking distance of Nineveh.

And he started for the city. And he had as a message it would appear on the surface one single sentence. Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed.

But turn now to chapter three and join me as we read. Chapter three, verse one. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I'm going to tell you.

So Jonah arose. And he went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day walk.

And Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk. And he cried out and said yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. And the people of Nineveh believed in God.

And they called a fast. And they put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh he arose from his throne.

He laid aside his robe from him. He covered himself with sackcloth and he sat on the ashes. And he issued a proclamation.

And he said in Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth.

And let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows God may turn and relent and withdraw his burning anger so that we shall not perish. When God saw their deeds that they turned from their wicked ways then God relented concerning the calamity which he had declared he would bring upon them.

And he did not do it. About three years ago a total stranger called and asked if he could come and visit me. He came and identified himself as a pastor of a new church in Chicago.

Shortly thereafter he called again and asked if I would come and lead a series of meetings there. The very first night I could hardly believe what I saw. There were all these little children with huge brilliant eyes and black hair that was curly but not the curl of the black people.

And I kept wondering where do all these beautiful children come from? What's behind all this? And it so overwhelmed me and my curiosity was so piqued that finally I said to someone will you explain to me what's going on here? I don't ever remember being in a church where there were so many children with huge brilliant eyes. And they said to me we're Ninevites. I said excuse me what did you say? We're Ninevites.

Ninevites? Yes, yes, of course. We're Assyrians. We're descendants of Nineveh.

Do you realize that what happened in Nineveh is still bearing fruit today? But let's think about what happened there. A man who hates the Ninevites and is not all that keen about the Lord himself has a command to go and minister to them and as we noted goes in a different direction but God enters the picture in a powerful way and forces his hand and his message is simply yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed. And if you remember chapter 4 it gets even muddier because Jonah is really angry at the very reason I didn't want to go there.

I knew precisely what would happen. Demonstrating his contempt for the Ninevites and his desire that they be consumed in almighty destruction. And we remember the vine, the gourd, its death.

But now suppose that you had seven very keen teenagers approach you and say we've been reading together the book of Jonah and it doesn't make sense. Will you explain what really happened? How well would you do? Have you got a hold of the true picture? Some of you will remember that twice in the gospel of Matthew when the religious people of Christ's day were clamoring for evidence he said there shall no sign be given you. And then he made reference to the sign of Jonah.

And he stated plainly as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. So the son of God and the son of man will be three days and three nights in the belly of the earth. Now listen friends.

There was a larger message that Jonah was giving. Imagine now the great fish vomits him up on shore. We don't know as I said already what the distance was between the landing place and the city.

But let's pretend that he walked there within a day. And as he entered the city he said I was sent here by God but I hate you and I've been hoping for your destruction because the Ninevites had been brutal in their treatment of the Jews. And when God told me to come I refused.

And I went in a different direction but the Lord God Almighty intervened sent this great storm I was tossed into the sea swallowed by a fish after three days and three nights vomited up on shore and here I am with a simple message. Nineveh has forty days. When you understand the sign then you begin to understand why the remarkable impact of that simple one sentence message.

But I've drawn your attention to the passage not merely because Jonah in and of itself and in its entirety is indeed a profound lesson but because of the focus on Fasting. Isn't it remarkable that a pagan city, now it was a large city, estimated by some as having at least two million inhabitants took three days to walk

across it. But immediately when they heard the message they set their hearts to fast.

And that ungracious and ungodly king immediately issued a command that every person and every beast must be covered with sackcloth and fast in the hopes that God might somehow have mercy upon them. And God had such glorious mercy upon them that there are bands of Ninevites here and there across America today who love the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that's a story worth knowing and surely worth my telling.

But in the light of that immediate response of the Ninevites and in the care and urgency with which they gave themselves to fasting is it not all the more remarkable that we know so very little about it. John Wesley the founder of the Methodist Church made the statement centuries ago, the man who never fast is no more on his way to heaven than the man who never prays. Now I didn't make that statement.

I wouldn't dare. But I mentioned that because two, three hundred years ago, one hundred years ago, Christians everywhere saw fasting of incredible importance and practiced it. The great Puritan writer Thomas Brooks has a very powerful material on fasting.

And he made this point very clear to his congregation in England. We do not fast for ordinary things. We fast for extraordinary things.

We know, don't we, that the Pharisees abused fasting. Remember when the Pharisee and the publican went into the temple to pray and the Pharisee lifted up his eyes and boasted to God and made God aware that he fasted twice a week. Now what did that mean to God? Obviously nothing.

A systematic practice of fasting is not necessarily of any value whatsoever. Indeed, it might do vastly more harm than good. I'm not here to call you to set aside one day a week for the rest of your life for fasting.

If God calls you to do it, you better do it, but you're certainly not going to get that call from me. Let me say it again. Fasting is not for ordinary purposes, but extra ordinary.

And that's what I tried to point out in Joel, that the cause, the purpose behind the solemn assembly was an extraordinary need. And I hardly need to tell you, dear folks, that we are living at a time of extraordinary need. We know that in the Southern Baptist denomination alone, in the year 2010, 14,400 pastors were thrown out of their churches.

An average of 1,200 pastors every single month. The church is splitting and creating such havoc and confusion in the municipality where they are, that the whole world is looking at the church and laughing up its sleeve and saying, Christianity's sheer nonsense. And they're justified in doing so because our practice of Christianity is nonsensical.

We pretend that a person is a Christian because they give mental assent to truth. I mentioned this on Sunday. Faith is not mental assent.

Faith is active obedience. That's why I emphasized last night the two words Yes, Lord. A person of faith is a person who lives in obedience to Christ.

That's why Christ said, Why do you call me Lord, Lord? And yet you don't do what I say. He who loves me, said our dear Savior, keeps my commandments. But because we have strayed so far from biblical Christianity, because we have named so many false converts, because the majority of our churches are

packed full of unregenerate people who are as bad off as the Pharisees of the New Testament, we are faced with an extraordinary situation.

If Christ does not come back among us, if his manifest presence is not again known, if his word doesn't take on great aspects of power and sweep across the city and the state and the nation, we're doomed. And then of course there are the local issues in addition to the national problems that Christianity faces. I don't see how anyone in the right mind could question but what we are in need of extraordinary nations.

So this is the time for fasting. Not as I've said, the systematic kind of stuff where every third week you fast for three days without any particular purpose. But fasts that are called because of the emergency state of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Now as I pointed out earlier, often when the word humility is used in our Bible text it is actually referring to fasting. And when, as I reported to you earlier in passages like James 4, James 4 talks about be miserable or afflict yourself. It's talking about fasting.

Now we have those people who honestly think fasting is an Old Testament custom that has no place today. Now I may say something in the next moment or two that some of you will distinctly dislike. But if that should happen, I'll honestly tell you it won't be the first time in my life somebody didn't like what I said.

And I'm not about to change because of that possibility. A grievous error is being committed in much of the church. We are treating the Old Testament as if it had expired.

And that we're living solely in an age of grace. The simple truth is the whole of the Bible is the word of God. If I may personalize this, when I went to seminary a lot of the faculty had studied so-called higher criticism and were giving us all the possible problems in various Old Testament texts.

And as a seminary student I began to realize that my faith was being shaken. And after months of this turmoil, trying desperately to believe that the New Testament was surely the word of God, but maybe not the Old, I went to the dean of the seminary and I told him the struggle I was having. And he looked me squarely in the eyes and he said to me, Now, I want you to do what I'm going to do at the end of this quarter.

I said, What's that? He said, You trusted me enough to come and tell me what's been happening. Now, I want you to trust me enough to do what I'm going to do. No, I said, I'm sorry.

I can't. I have to know what you're going to do. He said, I'm leaving here at the end of the quarter.

I almost shouted Hallelujah. I said, I can do that. Now, dear friends, listen to this.

I had graduated from college in Spokane, Washington. And I'd had, by God's grace, a very widespread ministry throughout what they call the Inland Empire. Dozens and dozens of churches where I had held series of meetings as a college student.

And I'd had a large ministry in the rescue mission in downtown Spokane. I had no money. If my parents knew I had quit seminary, they would have been broken hearted.

If my pastor knew, he would have disowned me. But I went back to Spokane. I went into the rescue mission and I explained my situation to the superintendent.

And he said, Now, you listen here, Dick. I've got a room for you right here in the mission. You stay in that room as long as you need to.

And you get this straightened out. You can come down to the dining room and eat with the men or we'll have the men carry the meals up to you. You stay as long as you need to for three months.

I locked myself in that room and went back and forth between the Old Testament and the New Testament and came to the conviction, if I'm going to toss the old, I'm going to have to toss the new. And then in the incredible grace of God, there settled over me an absolute certainty that the Bible is truly the Word of God. And when I come and speak to you tonight, I don't have any hesitation about using the Old Testament as thoroughly as the New.

In fact, there are two-thirds more in the Old than in the New. Why not? Heavy involvement in the Old Covenant. There are some things that the Scriptures make clear have found their completion in Christ.

So we don't go back to the ceremonial law. But my understanding is fasting is not part of the ceremonial law. Fasting is part of a right relationship with God.

And it's a behavior called for when the situation is in an emergency state. So let me simply pause and ask, are you ready for a thorough plunge into the Biblical world of fasting and prayer? Think again of the incredible results of the fasting that took place in Nineveh. Are these not wonderful words? Verse 10, Chapter 3, When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked ways, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared that He would bring upon them.

And He did not do it. Some of you remember the prophet Jeremiah. And you know that Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet.

He poured out his heart and soul before the people. And with what result? Essentially, no result. Was it Jeremiah's fault? Jesus came.

As we're told so beautifully, He came to His own. But His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him, He gave the power to become the sons of God.

So on the surface, it almost appears as if the treatment Christ received was hardly any different than the treatment that Jeremiah received. And yet, only 40 days after the resurrection, Peter stood before the vast crowd in Jerusalem and proclaimed the message of Christ. And thousands called out, what must we do to be saved? And the greatest revival in the history of mankind occurred in Jerusalem, starting at the day of Pentecost.

Listen, friends. I believe with all my heart that God knows where we're at and how we got here. I don't believe we're here by accident.

I believe what I said to you on Sunday morning, that when God is angry with the prayers of His people, He turns His back on them. God sometimes becomes His people's greatest enemy. Remember in Psalm 80, You give us tears to drink in great measure.

Instead of answering prayer, God sends tears. That's what we're dealing with in the church across America. I have asked countless times, Is there a single person in this meeting tonight who in their extended family has no great tears? Every family I've ever asked is dealing with drug addiction or

pornography or alcoholism, sexual perversion, divorce.

The church is visited by God Himself with tears. Why? To drive us to our knees. To help us to understand that we are indeed in an emergency situation and there's nothing that we can do to make it better.

All novelty approaches are doomed to fail. The only thing that's going to work is getting back into the ancient paths of Scripture and practicing what God Himself calls for. So in the Scripture we have fasting on a regular basis frequent in the Old Testament like the great day of atonement which they had set aside as a fast day.

Zechariah describes four of these regular annual fasts. But in the New Testament those who practice fasting in a routine way are, as I've already indicated, basically the Pharisees who made a program out of what should have been a heartfelt concern. But the fasts that are most prominent in Scripture are the emergency fasts.

When in the book of Judges the report is given that of the tribe of Benjamin there was this huge battle and 18,000 Israelites were put to death in a day. A fast was called. In 2 Chronicles chapter 8 as the Moabites attacked the people a fast was proclaimed.

I won't go into any great detail but I simply want to establish the fact that there are emergency occasions both in the Old Testament and the New. But sometimes fasts are completely unexpected, totally unprepared for. Maggie and I, she doesn't get to go with me very much, but once in a while, and on the occasion I now mention she was with me in one of the mountain states in a terribly difficult meeting where it just seemed hopeless and I was feeling I had made a terrible mistake in accepting the invitation.

It was an 8 day meeting Sunday to Sunday. On the second Sunday

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/D5GkPkO4GbQ.mp4>
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