

REPENTANCE

Message 5

Text: Revelation 3:14-22

Date: March 7

Words: 6016

INTRO: There is an area of repentance I had never given much thought until I read this in Richard Owen Robert's book on repentance. He says:

It is generally understood that every individual sins and needs to repent. Many, however, have never considered the problem of corporate sin and the mandatory nature of corporate repentance. Yet it is a fact that just as every individual sins, so does every corporate entity. One of the most damaging mistakes of the present day is the prevailing tendency to overlook the problem of corporate sin and the need of corporate repentance. (Kindle Locations 655-660). Kindle Edition.

He says that a thoughtful analysis of the OT indicates that numerous calls to repentance are calls to God's people, as a whole, to repent. So turn with me to 1 Chronicles 7. Solomon had just completed his long prayer at the dedication of the newly constructed temple. The movable tabernacle that was constructed in the wilderness would now give way to the permanent temple in Jerusalem. When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. God was pleased! God's glory came down and the people bowed their faces to the ground and worshipped and then they praised the Lord. For seven days they kept the feast. And when this was done the people were sent to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the good the Lord had done to them.

After all this was done we come to verse 12:

12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.

13 "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people,

14 *"if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

Look now at verse 13. The Lord sets out three things here that He may do to call His people to repentance when they fall into sin. He might shut up the heavens so they don't have rain. Or He can command the locusts to devour the land. Or, He may send pestilence among His people.

Although I would like to place this message later in the series, I give it now because I want to raise this question in our minds: Could it be that the Lord is trying to get the attention of the Church, both local and universal, through the present pestilence; covid 19? Could it be He is seeking to call Christians to repentance? Could that be the case and we are not even taking a look at ourselves as the potential reason for it? Some time ago I spoke to a man in Vancouver who used to come teach in the Bible school here. And he was fasting, I think 2 days a week; and his thought was that God had sent this pestilence to wake up the church. It took a while for that thought to sink in. We'll consider that thought in light of the subject of corporate repentance.

Numerous times the Lord sent an ungodly nation to punish Israel. Before such times came, God warned Israel to repent. We are just studying the book of Amos in our Bible study time. It was a prosperous time for Israel, but they were spiritually bankrupt. Amos prophesied and warned the nation but they did not want to hear from him. Amaziah, who had the spiritual oversight in the northern kingdom tried to get rid of this prophet. Amos 7:12-13 says this:

12 *Then Amaziah said to Amos: "Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, And there prophesy.*

13 *But never again prophesy at Bethel, For it is the king's sanctuary, And it is the royal residence."*

"Amos, please do not ever preach repentance to us again!" Well, Assyria came and the horrors of what they did to this nation would be hard to describe. And not only did God allow that to

happen, He called for it! Israel needed corporate repentance and they had their fingers in their ears! Could we, the Church, be there today?

IV. CORPORATE REPENTANCE

A. The Local Church

So consider first that there are times when a local church needs to repent. As far as I recall I have never heard of this happening. Before a church repents, the same thing that has to happen to one individual before repentance takes place has to now happen to a whole group and especially the leadership. But leaders are among the last to repent. By far the majority of churches do not even recognize their sin. It may be much worse than that. A church may well think it is in the center of God's will!

The passage we looked at earlier, 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, was directed at Israel. Let me draw our attention now to the Church. Turn to the book of Revelation. In Revelation 2-3, I believe we have a picture of the Church age. And I believe the church of Laodicea, the last church, pictures the age in which we are. Of the seven churches addressed, 5 were called to corporate repentance. Look at the first one, Ephesus in 2:5:

Re 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

This is corporate repentance. The church is called to repentance. Four more churches are called to corporate repentance. Go to 3:19. To the last church, the church of Laodicea the Lord said:

Re 3:19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

What is noteworthy is that in these passages, corporate repentance is called for. No doubt it is true that the bulk of the onus falls to the leadership to initiate

such repentance. The letter to each church begins like this: "To the angel of the church of..." and then the name is given. The word *angel* literally means messenger, and I do not doubt it refers to the head pastor. The last Christians you will usually find that repent are church leaders.

It is my view that the letters to the seven churches of Asia do not speak only to those seven local churches at that time. I expect that any true church could find itself pictured in one of those seven and could take the message to heart. But today I expect that the majority of churches are pictured by the church at Laodicea.

Look now at 3:14:

We go to verse 14:

14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

Some years ago we looked at these seven churches in some detail. In the message on Laodicea I quoted William Barclay who said: LAODICEA has the grim distinction of being the only church of which the risen Christ has nothing good to say.. It was founded in about 250 BC by Antiochus of Syria and was named after his wife Laodicē. Its importance was due entirely to its position.

In those messages some years ago we looked at the meaning of the name of each of these churches and where they were situated geographically. I do not suppose anyone would remember the meaning of the name, "Laodicea"? Let me quote J.B. Smith in one of the finest commentaries available on Revelation. He says, "The name of the city is a compound word derived from *laos* (people) and *dike* (judgment); hence judgment of the people. The literal sense is practically synonymous with the English word 'democracy'," which signifies the

people ruling. In other words, here is democracy in religion," end quote.

Smith points out that the name *Nicolaitans* who were prominent in the Church at Ephesus and Pergamos, the first two churches mentioned "denotes conquerors of the people in reference to priestcraft, or 'lording' it over people." That clearly points to Catholicism. But today we have the people lording it over the church. I believe that the church of Laodicea pictures the last stage of the Church age, and it is characterized by people rule.

If it is correct that the Laodicean church pictures the church of our age, when did this age begin? From my own studies, I would say we entered this age in the early 1900's.

Today, just over 100 years later, churches by and large are following what is called the seeker sensitive approach to doing church. A man from Britain traveled across the US to check out mega churches. These are the seeker friendly type. When they visited Rick Warren's church he writes:

Finally we visited Saddleback Church, led by the irrepressibly energetic Rick Warren. The church was founded in his front room in 1980 but now draws up to 25,000 people to its weekend services, making it the eleventh largest church in the country.

Basking in the year-round California sun, this multi-acre campus in Orange County felt like a holiday resort. There were beautifully landscaped grounds and water features. Deckchair seating on the shaded veranda outside the Worship Centre allowed visitors to watch on large outdoor screens. There were coffee and ice cream outlets, a restaurant, multiple worship venues and, of course, the out-of-this-world children's facilities.

He starts his article like this:

Our kids still remember the day we visited Saddleback in California. There was dancing, drama and singing. There were video games, themed play parks and an indoor aquarium and reptile display. They even came away with branded water bottles. But Saddleback isn't a theme park, it's a church.

This writer credits Chuck Smith for bringing in the seeker sensitive church movement. Smith started the Calvary Chapel churches. He writes:

The 'seeker sensitive' model of church growth has been almost universally adopted by growing churches today. Intentionally welcoming newcomers, an informal style and practical teaching are hallmarks of the approach. But while the seeker sensitive pattern was perfected by churches like Saddleback and Willow Creek, Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel was the person who started it.

When the pastor's preaching started to draw hippies into his hitherto traditional church, he saw the opportunity of embracing a new generation of believers by accommodating their musical preferences, long hair and hippy attire. Chuck spoke their language, while keeping to the gospel message.

Joycelyn Bell, a member of the church who joined before the hippy revival, tells how her brother once put a sign up saying "no bare feet allowed". Pastor Chuck promptly took it down again. What may seem obvious in modern church circles about welcome, and musical and cultural engagement, was revolutionary when Chuck Smith first did it in the 1960s.

Today an informal approach is the norm at most megachurches. At Saddleback, Rick Warren usually preaches in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts. The pastor is known globally for his bestselling book *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan). But its precursor was *The Purpose Driven Church* (Zondervan), the defining handbook of how to build a church on the principles employed at Saddleback.

The laid-back, Californian vibe at Saddleback is only made possible by an army of pastors, staff and volunteers engaged in intentionally reaching, welcoming and engaging new attendees. It's an approach which has seen them baptise a record 50,000 people. End quote.

<https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2018/May-2018/I-visited-six-US-megachurches.-Here-s-what-I-learned>

There are many truths taught in Rick Warren's book, "The Purpose Driven Life." But there is large deception and that deception has spread far and wide. I think it is beyond doubt that most mega churches need corporate repentance! If they would begin to preach on sin,

expose sin, deal with divorce and so on, they would shrink at a very fast rate.

Let me ask you, who runs the Church today? Who runs the seeker friendly church? Is it not the people? Here is what happened in seeker friendly churches. Pastors would go around in the community to see what keeps people from attending church and what they feel their needs are. Then they would go back and make the church fit the needs of unchurched people. Then they started small groups, and here the new converts learn deeper truths. This is done to attract the lost to church. But the church is not for the lost, it is made up of the saved and exists to edify the saved. It is the saved who are to reach the lost.

One pastor who came out of that movement said:

"The basic logic of the seeker sensitive movement was that we would get people in the door by playing contemporary music, singing contemporary songs, speaking contemporary jargon and addressing contemporary issues. Then at some unspecified point in the future we would transition into more meaty and substantial things."

<https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/abandoned-seeker-church/>

Let me ask you how much more precisely could you not describe the name, "Laodicea"?

We go on in verse 15:

15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

16 "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

If it is correct that this church pictures our age, this church is enough to make the Lord vomit. And if they don't repent, He will get sick of them and vomit

them out of His mouth. And we ask, what is the problem with this church?

Verse 17:

17 *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-*

This church has no idea it is in bad shape. How many churches recognize they are in bad shape? The church of Laodicea thinks it is in great shape. They were wealthy, so they thought. Laodicea was a banking city. When it was destroyed by an earthquake, they had the finances to build themselves back up. The Christians at Laodicea fit right into their wealthy culture. They needed nothing. Are we like that today? Yet in the Lord's eyes they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked! How much worse can you get? I ask you, is that a picture of the church of our age?

Laodicea had textile mills. They produced garments. Barclay says: *The sheep which grazed round Laodicea were famous for their soft, violet-black, glossy wool. The city mass-produced cheap outer garments.*

Then Laodicea was a famous medical center. Barclay says: *Its doctors were so famous that the names of some appear on the coins of Laodicea... Its, medical school was famous throughout the world for two things - ointment for the ear and ointment for the eyes.*

Yes, this city was rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. I ask how many churches think they are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing! We would, of course, never say that. But is that how we live?

How many churches would stand in need of corporate repentance if the Lord would stand in their midst? How many, if Jesus stood in their midst, would say, "Who is this Guy? Who does He think He is?" We have looked at the seeker sensitive church briefly. That led to the emergent church, which is worse yet.

Do we recognize that the picture of the Jesus of love we have in our mind today, may not be accurate to the Jesus of yesterday? Did you know that the true Jesus of today is the Jesus who told Israel at times to go and destroy man, woman and child? Did you know the same Jesus that died for us on the cross is the one who instructed Assyria to take the northern kingdom captive? He is the same One who allowed Assyria to treat Israel with such terror that it is almost too horrible to describe? Do we not say He is the same yesterday, today, and forever? Yes? Could it be that we do not have an accurate picture of Jesus in our minds?

The practices and many of the teachings in the church today have almost entirely removed the fear of God from Christians. We have such ungodly teachings as unconditional love, or unconditional grace or unconditional forgiveness or unconditional eternal security. So ingrained are these teachings that younger Christians of today would say, "What is wrong with that?" These teachings have so removed the fear of God that we do not fear sin. And the result is a luke-warm church and whole churches need to repent.

If Laodicea pictures the Church of today in general, and it surely seems to fit, who is running the Church today? Is it not the people who run it? The church in America, is it rich and increased with goods and has need of nothing? So listen to what the Lord says to the church at Laodicea. Verse 15:

15 *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.*

16 *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

17 *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-*

18 *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that*

you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Of how many churches would that be an accurate picture today? If the seventh and last church of these chapters pictures our age, that is a picture of us, in general. I am thankful that there are still many good pastors and churches. But their number in comparison to the rest is small.

For Christians who are younger than 30 or 40, it is almost impossible to recognize the changes that have happened. Then there are older people who have decided, "If you can't beat them, join them," and so they have. And having sat in many of those churches for a while, they have become like them. Old landmarks are gone. Others, who desire truth, can't find a church. For many, it is not that they think they are too good for most churches. It is that they recognize what is happening and they are afraid of identifying with what is happening by going to those churches.

If you care about prophetic truth, you will be hard put to find a church. If you care about church discipline, you will be hard put to find a church. If you care for truth that deals with sin, you will be hard put to find a church. If you want a church that sings hymns, you will be hard put to find a church. If you care about doctrine you will be hard put to find a church. If you want a church that takes a stand on such issues as divorce or alcohol, you will be hard put to find a church. And what we are left with in many churches is a Laodicean, luke-warm church.

Verse 19 then says:

19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

May I raise this question in your minds? Is the Lord rebuking and chastening the Church with covid today? Should we be asking if it is not the Lord that is

closing our doors? Could we be complaining about how we are being unfairly treated by the sinful world, and we, in fact, are the reason or a big part of the reason for this pestilence? Is the Lord seeking to get our attention? Are we fighting the system when we should be repenting? Is it time for corporate repentance?

The Ravi Zacharias ministry has said this in recent days:

We are shocked and grieved by Ravi's actions. As Ravi Zacharias was the founder of our ministry and the leader of our staff, community, and team, we also feel a deep need for corporate repentance.

And if you read their letter, they did a thorough job of corporate repentance. What is the Lord's advice to the Laodicean church? We go to verse 18 where we have the Lord's counsel to them:

18 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

I ask you, is that us? Is that the Lord's word for the Church today? Is it His word to me and to you?

Verse 19:

19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Does that sound like 2 Chronicles 7:14? Could it be that the Lord is rebuking and chastening the Church today by closing its doors? Could it be we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and could we in fact be the reason for this pestilence? Is the Lord seeking to get our attention? Is it time for corporate repentance?

B. The Universal Church

Let us consider now the universal Church. If Laodicea pictures the state of the universal Church in the last

stage of its existence, and that age began as I suggested, around 1900 then we are likely in the last days of the last stage. And I ask, could God be calling us to repentance today by closing our doors or partly closing them? Is God calling the Universal Church to repentance with this present pestilence? Has anything ever affected the Church universally like this pandemic?

Earlier we read 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. Let me read those again:

13 *"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people,*

14 *"if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

That is God's Word to Israel as a corporate people. In our Bible studies we have been studying the book of Amos. Turn to Amos 6. God warned the northern kingdom over and over again, but they persisted in sin. And in 6:14 God said:

Am 6:14 *"But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," Says the LORD God of hosts; "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the Valley of the Arabah."*

Then in verse 21 and on He says:

21 *"I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.*

22 *Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.*

23 *Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.*

Do you wonder what the Lord thinks of some of the noise of the songs in so many churches today? Does He say, "Take away from Me the noise of your songs. I am not going to listen to your stringed instruments"? What does He think when the pastor is up on stage with his shirt hanging out over his short pants or blue jeans?

Verse 27:

27 Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus," Says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

Do you know who sent Assyria to destroy Israel? It was God! It was the Jehovah God! Could the Lord be sending our governments to close our doors, and we complain about them, when in fact we are failing to hear His voice to us? I am asking, could it be?

Turn to Daniel 9. When God called Israel to repentance, it was a national call. Daniel was a righteous man, but when he prayed to God he identified himself with the nation. He did not say, "They," like Saul. He said, "We." Do we, as part of the universal church, identify ourselves with its sad condition? Or is that *them*, and we are *us*?

We begin in verse 4 and note his use of the pronouns *we* and *us* and *our*:

4 And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,

5 "WE have sinned and committed iniquity, WE have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.

6 "Neither have WE heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to OUR kings and OUR princes, to OUR fathers and all the people of the land.

8 *"O Lord, to US belongs shame of face, to OUR kings, OUR princes, and OUR fathers, because WE have sinned against You.*

10 *"WE have not obeyed the voice of the LORD OUR God, to walk in His laws, which He set before US by His servants the prophets.*

Daniel did not say, "They have sinned." He said, "We have sinned." And toward the end of his prayer in verse 17 he says:

17 *"Now therefore, OUR God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.*

This is his personal prayer but the concern is national. I ask, do we identify ourselves with the universal Church? Do we accept that we are part of the universal church? Hopefully we are not personally involved in sin, but we are part of the local church and thus also part of the universal Church. Do we see ourselves, as part of the universal Church, in any way as being rebuked and chastened by covid? Should we pray and repent instead of complain?

The Lord said in Revelation 3:19:

19 *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

Turn to Ezra 9. After 70 years of punishment in captivity, some of the Jews have come back home to a devastated land. The northern kingdom went into captivity for sin in 722 BC. In 586, the southern kingdom, after many warnings, went into captivity. And Ezra 9 tells us some of what took place. We begin in verse 1:

Ezra 9:1:

1 *When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples*

of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

2 "For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."

3 So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.

I would say, "Ezra! You have been scattered among those nations for 70 years, and did you expect your people would not intermarry? That is an impossible expectation! Ezra, is that not a little over the top?" But Ezra was astonished! He couldn't believe his ears. And to top it off, leaders among the people were foremost in this sin! Later in this chapter you can read a list of the names of those who were involved and some of them had children by these wives and Ezra required them to put those wives away.

Listen carefully now to verse 4:

4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Here, in black and white, is our Laodicean problem! We do not tremble at the words of God! Transgression is so common we mostly fail to notice it!

Verse 5:

5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.

6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens."

Ezra was not personally guilty! Why was he ashamed? Why did he say, "OUR iniquities have risen over OUR heads?" Why? He saw himself as part of Israel! Do we see the condition of the Church universal as part of our own? Could we say, "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for OUR iniquities have risen higher than OUR heads, and OUR guilt has grown up to the heavens"?

Until I studied corporate repentance, I never even thought of my own identification with the universal church in this way. How could I come to a burden for the Church universal as if I am included in the wrongdoing? In light of Ezra, think of divorce in the church. Who is too ashamed and humiliated to lift up their face to the LORD because of divorce in the Church? When we look at the universal Church, of which we are part, have our iniquities risen higher than our heads. Has our guilt grown up to the heavens?

Consider one book that has become very popular among Christians. It is called, "The Shack." It is so ungodly, so horrible, so sinfully sick it should make us all cry out, "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for OUR iniquities have risen higher than OUR heads, and OUR guilt has grown up to the heavens." But it is lauded by professing Christian leaders as a wonderful book! That is just one book among many other misleading and ungodly books!

Listen Revelation 3:20:

20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

This verse is often used to evangelize the lost. But look at which door the Lord is standing at. It is the door to the Laodicean church! He is not welcome inside! Like Amaziah said to Amos, this church says to the Lord Jesus: "Go, you seer! Flee to some other church. There eat bread, And there prophesy. But never again prophesy

*at our church, For it is the sanctuary of the people,
And it is their place of worship!"*

If I and others are right, Laodicea speaks prophetically of our age. What does Rick Warren say about prophecy? He said: "When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, 'The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!'" Notice the error covered by truth in that teaching! Rick Warren did many fancy twistings and turnings in his books.

For how many professing Christian churches is the Lord standing outside while they profess to worship Him inside, and some with rock music and many other ungodly things?

I am grateful that there are still some wonderful churches and some very godly pastors. But what of the Joel Osteens, the Rick Warrens, the California Reddings, the Willow Creekers and a host of smaller ones that use their techniques? Where is the Lord outside or inside? I ask you: If we do not repent, where will we be in another 5 years?

When the rock music is blaring and the lights are flashing, where is the Lord? Inside or outside? But it may be much more subtle than that. We have plenty of modern doctrines that remove the fear of the Lord where is the Lord? Is He inside or outside?

Now there is a word for every believer in verse 21:

21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

It is not to the church that overcomes. That would be true too. But the counsel is to every individual believer. There is a promise given to every individual believer in the Laodicean church if that believer

overcomes. We would all do well to ask, "Lord, show me where I am."

But there is yet one more word for each of us in verse 22:

22 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

I ask, is covid a rebuke and a chastening from the Lord to the Church? Should every believer identify with the universal Church and say, *"O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens"?*

Is there some persecution for some churches in this pandemic? I think there is some. But should we not rather be asking if it may be we, the Church that are at fault? How did God seek to get Israel's attention when they insisted on living in sin? He might withhold rain, or send grasshoppers, or He might send pestilence. That is covid. But unlike pagan Nineveh, God's people in the past often failed to repent and then God sent some disaster. Sometimes they died by the tens of thousands in most gruesome ways and it was God who brought the sword on them. And I remind us that Jesus is the same, yesterday; in the OT, and today; and forever. He never changes!

CONCL: So we conclude. Corporate repentance! There is a time for it. I have heard of many shameful and even sinful things happening to Christian leaders in various capacities of service. I have seen it happen to men right beside me, and have heard of it from those far off. There were men like Jimmy Swaggart. What a talented man, and he fell, and refused to repent. He would not be disciplined. Some of you will remember Jim Baker or Bill Gothard or Doug Philipps or Mark Driscoll or Joshua Harris.

Most recently we have had Ravi Zacharias. He refused to repent and died in that state. Unless the Bible lies, he is in hell right now and this should shake us up. What we have to learn from him is that this is possible for each of us. What we have

to learn from this for churches and Christian organizations is that the leaders can fall and when they do, corporate repentance is in order. And what we should all learn is to repent from any sin even those we consider smaller things, because if we don't, we may meet the same doom!

And could the key to both local church and the universal Church repentance be the repentance of every individual believer? It is time for all of us to take a look inside. So listen to Revelation 3:22:

22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."