

# America In the Crossroads

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*This sermon by Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the importance of repentance and turning back to God as seen through the analogy of a vineyard. It highlights the consequences of a nation turning away from God, the need for earnest prayer and seeking God's face, and the call for revival and restoration to avoid destruction.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 5:1, Psalms 80:1, Isaiah 57:15, Psalms 66:18, Proverbs 28:9, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 59:2, Jeremiah 29:13, Hosea 10:12

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Revival and Restoration"

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## Description

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## Transcript

If you've happened to be with us anytime throughout this weekend, then you know that the person I'm about to introduce and the person you're about to hear is someone that God uses and has used in a phenomenal, phenomenal way. Richard Owen Roberts has been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ for more than 70 years. He's 84 years of age, and I gotta tell you, as I watched him throughout this weekend, I can only pray that I will have the kick in my step at 84 that this man has, as he is an instrument that God has greatly used.

From the first time I heard Richard Owen Roberts, I was convinced that God had raised up and kept this man alive in this generation to speak as Jeremiah spoke, to speak as Elijah spoke. Never before had I heard a more prophetic voice in our day than when I heard Richard Owen Roberts. All I can ask you to do today is to have your Bibles opened and ready, have your ears opened and ready, but most importantly, have your heart opened because God speaks through this man.

What he isn't going to be easy to hear, but if you brought your still-toe boots, you're going to be okay. But the truth is, God's Word aims for our hearts, and I believe today that God's going to do something special and unique and that He will use this man once again here at First Baptist Charlotte. Would you give a warm First Baptist Charlotte welcome to Richard Owen Roberts.

There's a question for you. If there's a vineyard, who has the right to decide what to do with it? Well, hardly a difficult question. Obviously, the owner.

Listen to these words. Words. Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song concerning his vineyard.

My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill, and he dug it all around. He removed its stones. He planted it with the choicest vine, and he built a tower in the middle of it, and he hewed out a wine vat in it.

Then he expected it to produce good grapes. But it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judea, indeed, even all Americans, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes, did it produce worthless grapes? Now, let me tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it will be consumed. I will break down its wall, and it will become trampled ground.

And I will lay it waste. It will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it, for the vineyard belongs to the Lord of Hosts.

It is the house of Israel. The men of Judah, his delightful plant, then he looked for justice. But behold, bloodshed.

For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress. Not so terribly long ago, a band of people from another nation who were oppressed and kept from worship decided they'd had enough, and that they did belong to God, not to the King of England. And they fled that place in rickety ships that eventually reached the shores of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

And there they planted a new vineyard. You may not think they were very smart. You may, in actual fact, think they were wrong in what they thought.

But they thought they were the new Jerusalem. They thought they were the new Israel. And so they built a country that belonged to God Almighty.

They developed a government that was under God. They practiced Christianity as God taught. Christianity was to be both taught and lived.

But in time, their great, great, great, great, great, great grandsons thought their parents and their grandparents all the way back didn't know what they were doing. But the owner of the vineyard still owned the vineyard. And although it has become perhaps the most corrupt and rotten nation on earth, it still belongs to God, and he can do what he likes with it.

Now, we don't like what he's doing with it right now. And he doesn't like what we're doing towards him right now. And if we keep doing what we are doing, he'll keep doing what he's doing, and soon there won't be anything left.

Some are predicting perhaps 10 years. Some are thinking the election coming on will be the determination of what really happens. But what do you think? Oh, what do you care? After all, you're comfortable.

You've got enough to eat. What difference does it make what happens? Who cares if their grandchildren are raised under the dictator? Who cares if the whole of the nation becomes atheistic? Who cares whether

God has his rights? This is not the first time a nation arrived at the juncture of incredible consequence. Maybe somebody here isn't very alert, and you wondered where I got that song from that I read.

Well, I got it from the fifth chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. But I want to read another portion to you. This time I'll tell you in advance where it is, and you can look it up yourself and follow and see whether I'm making up a lot of baloney or I'm speaking the word of God.

Isaiah 5 is what we looked at. Psalm 80 is where we now turn. Psalm 80.

O give ear, shepherd of Israel, thou who dost lead Joseph like a flock. Thou who art enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up thy power and come to save us.

O God, restore us and cause thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. O Lord, God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry with the prayer of thy people? Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears, and thou hast made them to drink tears in large measure. Thou didst make us an object of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves.

O God of hosts, restore us and cause thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. Thou didst remove the vine from Egypt. Thou didst drive out the nations and its planted.

Thou didst clear the ground before it, and it took deep root, and it filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shadows, and the cedars of God with its boughs. It was sending out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river.

Why hast thou broken down its hedges, so that all that pass that way pick its fruit? A boar from the forest eats it away, and whatever moves in the field feeds on it. O God of hosts, turn again now. We beseech thee, look down from heaven and see the sun.

Take care of the vine, even the shoot which thy right hand is planted, and the sun whom thou hast strengthened for thyself. It is burned with fire. It is cut down.

They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou didst make strong for thyself. Then we shall not turn back from thee.

Revive us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O God. Restore us.

Cause thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. At one time, again not all that long ago, the Congress of the United States adjourned, and the House of Representatives adjourned, and they went together to a church where they heard a sermon entitled, The American Vine. And then they got down on their faces on the floor, and they pled with God to spare this nation.

And we're here, because they knew what to do. But if nothing changes, nobody will be here. The churches which have already declined from an average attendance of the nation of 38 percent in the last 10 years has dropped to 17 percent.

Another 10 years, we couldn't drop that much, because there's not that much left. The churches will be empty. If there are any left, on the other hand, if we follow the pattern of the nations from which we originally came, nations like the little country from which my family came, the Principality of Wales, or Ireland, Scotland, England, you drive around those places, and you see vast numbers of church buildings

where the roofs have caved in, the windows have been broken out, or perhaps it's been turned into an automobile repair shop, or a bingo palace.

The prophets knew what was coming and spoke to it, and the psalmists could see what was happening and described their situation and what to do, but most of us don't care. We're perfectly content to see the nation destroyed. Most professed Christians aren't even sure there is such a place as heaven or hell.

They just thought it might be a good idea to take out a bit of insurance just in case, and to accept Christ, which for them has meant nothing except a little religious tradition. But the psalmist speaks to the situation not only as it was in his day, but as it is in our day. Look at this psalm now.

Let us take it phrase by phrase. It begins with these words, O give ear, shepherd of Israel. Why would a psalmist ask God to listen? Is that just a little religious formula? Some nice words to begin with? Or is there reality? Some of you have children, as I do.

I was myself for the normal length of time a child. I had a tiny Welsh grandmother, and every once in a while she would become seven times her size, so it seemed to a boy, and she would shout, Kydegeg! And although we didn't know much of the Welsh language, we knew when grandma said, sit down and shut up. But when would you ask God to listen? When you finally sat down and shut up, and said, give ear, O shepherd of Israel.

Now I know some of you love sham and pretense, and you live in the listening to prayer. And if you choose to be stupid, and to believe falsehoods, don't seem as if anybody can shake you out of it. But God said, if I regard iniquity in my heart, he will not hear me.

And the psalmist understood that God wasn't listening, and so he pled with him to do so. Have you been wise enough to ask God to listen? Now it wouldn't pay to ask God to listen when you were intending to continue in the same pattern of behavior. It's not until you are ready to do what God says that there's any point in asking him to listen.

But see how he follows up that earnest request for God to listen. He adds, thou who dost lead Joseph like a flock. Well, surely he's speaking historically.

God did lead Joseph like a flock. God had incredible capacity to lead Joseph like a flock. God once led America like a flock.

God still has the capacity to lead America. But we don't have the grace to ask him in a serious way to do so. And because most of us aren't listening and won't do what he says, but prefer instead that to believe some silly notions that some unreliable preacher gave us.

We don't even understand his next words. Thou who art enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth. Now those are truly extraordinary words.

Some of you remember something about the structure of the temple. And remember the outer portion and the inner portion. You know that there was a place described as the holy of holies.

And you know that the Ark of the Covenant was there. And then there were cherubim above that whose wings touched one another in the center and touched the walls on either side. And some of you remember that once a year the great high priest was to enter that holy of holies after very carefully preparing his own

heart and life.

And then he was to enter and make sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the people. But because the one who dwelt above the cherubim shone forth with such extraordinary radiance, he could not enter, that is the high priest could not enter until first a smudge pot was pushed in and the hole was filled with smoke. And then before he dared to enter, they tie a cord around his ankle so that if indeed when he entered, God struck him dead, the others could pull him out by the cord and not be destroyed themselves.

But now the Sovereign is pleading that the one who dwells in the holy of holies shines forth. There was a time when he shone forth in America. I have preached many, many times when the presence of God was so real that entire congregations, often much larger than this would be if the place was packed, would break into weeping and cry out to God.

But now to see a tear in church almost seems amazing. Most of us never came even close to the qualification for a right relationship with God through Christ as detailed in Isaiah 57, brokenness and contrition. We arrogantly come to the Lord and say we accept him and then we pretend that all is well.

But here's the psalmist has been forced to reality. The fact that God's not listening, the fact that God's not leading, the fact that God's glory is not shining forth has become an immense burden. And so he says in verse 2, before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up thy power and come to save us.

I haven't heard that uttered with any real earnestness in the churches of America. No, we would rather pretend that he's listening, that his glory is shining forth, that he's busy saving us than to face the reality that God hates him and refuses to have any part of it. And all the evidence declares that the church in America has essentially the same rate of wickedness as the world with two single exceptions.

Among those that profess to be born again, the divorce rate and the remarriage rate is higher than it is in the world. And among the homosexuals, there are more homosexuals in the church than outside the church. And we like to think that all is well.

So much surprise was demonstrated when the Supreme Court made their godless decision that they were just deciding in favor of the majority who had determined that God doesn't know anything about sex, that every person has a right to be and to do whatever they please. But the prayer in verse 3 is still here and still of immense consequence. Oh God, restore us and cause thy face to shine, and we will be saved.

You observed already, I hope, that that same prayer is repeated in verse 7, and then it's repeated again in verse 19, and then in its basic form it appears as well in verse 14. Oh God of hosts, turn again now. We beseech thee, look down from heaven and see and take care of this mind.

But the psalmist saw matters that were factual that most of us prefer not to see and haven't seen. Or if we've seen some of these things, we blame them on the devil. Now the devil doesn't have anything to do with what's going on in America.

It's the church that determined the destruction of the nation. We don't want to do things God's way. We much prefer them done our way with a little religion tossed in just to make it look holy.

And then we don't like the consequences of what we've produced, and so we blame the media. Or the school system. Or the politicians.

But look at what the psalmist was looking at. Verse 4. Oh Lord God, how long would thou be angry with the prayer of thy people? Lots of professed Christians tell me God is never angry with our prayers. Isn't it too bad they weren't around to tell the psalmist that? So he didn't get carried away with the truth, but could live in the same crazy foolish fashion as those who believe God always hears and answers prayer.

He himself said, if you regard iniquity in your heart, I will not hear you. And why has the prayer meeting in the church across America disintegrated to sheer absurdity? Why is not everybody who's here on Sunday fervently in prayer here on Wednesday? And why is it when there's a handful that come to a prayer meeting, they focus on that which is indifferent, and they neglect that which really matters. They occupy themselves with prayer for little things that are going to pass.

Either they'll pass by healing, or by the natural healing of the body, or they'll pass by the death of the person. But what does the healing of the body or the death of the person compare with the death of a nation? You see, the psalmist was aware of something you may have missed. Prayer can anger God.

You say, what kind of prayer? Well, just let me give you an illustration that some of you may object to, but I can assure you won't have any effect on me by your objection. An awful lot of so-called Christian families have sons and daughters who are dying of AIDS. And, of course, many more will if things don't change.

When you ask God to heal a son who's dying of AIDS, you at least ought to know that you're going to anger God by that prayer. AIDS is a judgment from God against sin. Just one of a multitude that God has sent upon the nation.

To ask him to remove the judgment and yet not to deal with the sin that provoked the judgment is ludicrous. But notice what else he says on this matter of anger concerning prayers. Verse 5, Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears.

Thou hast made them to drink tears in large measure. I have often asked congregations like this, if there is a single family in the congregation who in their extended family knows absolutely nothing of tear. Thus far, every time I've asked, nobody has said my family's exception.

And my family, in its extended form, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc, knows a great deal of tears. Now, these tears are not the product of Satan's activity. These tears are the result of refusing to listen and obey the Lord.

And so he describes in verse 5, tears in large measure. In verse 6, he describes the consequence in the world around us. Thou hast made us an object of contention to our neighbors.

The world loves to find some rotten thing in a full-fledged Christian and fill the headlines with the details. And we're very glad to provide them more than ample material. Now, God did not create us to be the object of contention.

He made us to be the object of wonder and astonishment. And people beholding the church and gasping, how can those people be so radically different? How can there be all around them this sense of a holy and a divine presence? But we're just making believe when we say that's what we have today. But look at verse 8. Thou didst remove a vine from Egypt.

Thou didst drive out the nations and didst plant it. When our Congress and House of Representatives adjourned and met together in church and a godly man preached a sermon on the American vine, he

reminded the folk of the very thing that's said here. God went way down into Egypt and there he dug up the vine and he carried it for 40 years, keeping it alive through all their treacherous behavior, through all their ungodly words.

They sinned so badly they got their leader angry. And in a burst of anger, when God told him to speak to the rock, he took his rod and whacked the rock. And God said now, because you did not maintain my holiness before the people, you forced me to maintain it at your expense.

Now go up on the mountain, look across to the land of promise, lie down and die. And when Moses pleaded, oh God, please let me finish my work, the Lord said that's enough. And he lay down and died.

When you're talking about God, you're not talking about nonsense. You're talking about the truest reality of all. God did dig up that vine.

Some of you have perhaps in the morning passed by a marvelous new commercial building and you've been watching it over the weeks and now you see it looks as if it's finished. But all around it, just dirt. But when you go back that night, you find these huge trees, these beautiful bushes, flowers, grass.

In less than a day, the exterior transformed. Some of you have seen these giant things on the back of big trucks that go down and surround a large tree and transport it. God transported a number of weary pilgrims from the wickedness and oppression of organized religion in the old country, planted them in Massachusetts Bay Colony, helped them to send down deep roots, helped them to flourish so that soon the American vine had spread clear across the land from sea to shining sea.

And all around the American vine, God had built a hedge. But now the hedge is gone. God himself broke it down.

And as we read in this psalm, perhaps you ought to take another look. Verse 12, why hast thou broken down its hedge? So that all that pass that way pick its fruit. A boar from the forest eats it away, and whatever moves in the field teeths on it.

America, once a nation under God. But now God is told we don't want you messing around in our midst. And the church has supported the world in the ouster of God by making a shambles of the truth of scripture and worshiping and serving their own notions rather than the word of God.

And many of you have been participants in the destruction of America. You don't like it. You wished it could remain the same as Americans.

Are we not very, very good in saying, I have my rights? Well, yes, of course. But where did your rights come from? Well, our father said we were endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights. The right to life, to liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Now, suppose I told this fellow right here, I've been watching you, and I've decided to endow you with 10 million dollars. What ought this fellow to say? Yeah, you. He could say thank you, but he'd be much smarter to say, do you have 10 million? Not you, but do I? How am I going to give you what I don't have? And how many of us realize that if we rob God of his rights, we rob ourselves of our rights.

And that's what we've been doing in recent years. And now we don't like the consequence of what we've done. But we don't dislike it enough to change, just enough to blame it, as I've said already, on somebody

else.

But the psalmist is giving us the way out. Turn us again, oh God, and cause thy face to shine. And we shall be saved.

Ordinarily, it's our responsibility to turn ourselves. But when you've sinned a long time in the same way, and have grown calluses on your heart, you discover you can't even do it. But God can.

And now we have one single choice. Either obey God, or live with destruction.

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