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Tillamook, Oregon

***You Must be Born Again!***

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## ***Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah***

God's Word is Always Opposed

***July 4, 2021***

**Sermon Text: Jeremiah 23 et al**

**Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 23**

Last time we saw, after the fall of Jerusalem, that God (through Jeremiah) had told the survivors to remain in Judah and not to go to Egypt. This was their response (after they had claimed they would obey whatever the Lord told them) –

Jer 43:1-4 When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, (2) Azariah the son of Hoshaiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to Jeremiah, “You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say,

‘Do not go to Egypt to live there,’ (3) but Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon.” (4) So Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD, to remain in the land of Judah.

There is a recurring pattern here that it is crucial for us to see and apply to our own lives and time, or we are going to be in great danger. Here it is:

*Whenever God's Word is preached, whenever the gospel is proclaimed, whenever Christ is presented to man, that Word is going to be opposed, twisted, perverted, and denied by evil men. It happened right at the beginning in Eden (“indeed, hath God said...?) and it has been happening constantly ever since.*

We heard it already in the Scripture reading of Jeremiah 23. The false prophets who constantly opposed Jeremiah's messages. And think now, what was always the essence of their

message? To answer that question, let's thing about what God said over and over again through Jeremiah:

1. God was bringing judgment upon Judah (as He already had brought it to Israel) by His instrument, the Babylonians.
2. This judgment was coming because of the people's sins and unrepentant hard hearts. They refused to obey God's Law.
3. If the people were going to escape this judgment, they must humble themselves, confess their sin, repent, and obey.

Now, what was the message of the false prophets? Exactly the opposite-

1. God would never allow Jerusalem and the people of Judah to be destroyed.
2. The Jews were God's people by covenant and He would always favor them.
3. The sins of the nation were not so serious as Jeremiah announced.

I want to warn you all this morning. I want to give a very sobering warning. *These very same false prophets are filling the pulpits of local churches today, opposing God's Word, leading*

*people astray and off to destruction, and we are very foolish if we think that such a thing would only happen in "Bible times," but not in our day.*

***Most Christians...aren't. Most people who profess to be Christians do not in fact know the Lord. They are not born again. How can we tell? Because they are pleased with the message of the false prophets in their churches.***

What is that message? Essentially, distilled down to its essence, it is this-

***Everything is good. God is merciful. Everyone who believes in Jesus is going to heaven. None of us are perfect. We are all sinners. God knows this and loves us anyway. There is no way in the world that He is going to allow people who say they believe in Jesus, people who have been baptized, people who are members of a local church...to perish in hell. Even if their lives are characterized by ongoing, habitual, unrepentant sin, God is going to forgive them and take them to heaven.***

We will come back to this in a few moments and I will give you specific examples of how this false gospel is indeed all around us. But first, let's

consider this matter of the false prophets, false preachers, and remind ourselves of this constant, prevalent, and expected danger.

False Prophets are Always With Us –  
And there are LOTS of them

Jud 1:3-4 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (4) For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

2Pe 2:1-3 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (3) And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Jer 29:8-9 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, (9) for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.

Luk 6:26 “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Rom 16:17-18 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. (18) For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

(Mic 3:5) Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry “Peace” when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths.

Mic 3:9-11 Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, (10) who

build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. (11) Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.”

Eze 13:22 Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not grieved him, and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life,

**Lam 2:14 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.**

Notice that last one in particular. Think carefully. *What is the essential message of all the false prophets?* To help with this, let me show you some examples from Jeremiah:

Jer 7:3-4 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. (4) Do not trust in these

deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

Luk 3:8-9 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (9) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Jer 6:13-15 “For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. (14) **They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.** (15) Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,” says the LORD.

What is the essential message of the false prophets that is running through all of these passages? The answer from my friend Christy –

*"Everything is going to be ok. God loves everyone.*

*Jeremiah provided a clear warning for churches today, yet history continues to repeat itself."*

This is why the false preachers are so popular in local churches. People are told that they are all Christians, that they sit in the temple of the Lord which God will always bless no matter what, that even though their lives show no fruit of the Spirit but in fact are characterized by sin, "peace with God, peace with God," is the message they are hearing preached.

*They have healed the wound of my people lightly.* What is that wound? It is sin. It is being dead in sin and headed for hell. But the false preachers apply a false salve, a false gospel that announced God's peace when in fact the wound is still uncured, God's wrath is still upon them, and in the end they are cast into hell.

Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,"

says the LORD.

Look at God's warning to us again:

2Ti 4:1-4 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (3) For the time is coming when people **will not endure sound teaching**, but having itching ears **they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions**, (4) and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Now, let's all ask ourselves this question:

*Knowing what we know about the experience of God's real people down through the Old Testament and throughout the New Testament, and continuing through church history, do we truly believe, do YOU really believe that most – the large majority – of the people who claim to belong to Christ are the ones Paul is warning Timothy about here?*

That is to say, *do you believe that the typical scenario in the large majority of the visible church today consists of people who accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions?*

Do you believe that in these days we must expect that the majority of people who claim to be Christians *will not endure sound teaching*? That they will hate God's truth, despise those who preach it, and go away to seek out teachers and preachers whose message will *suit their own passions*? Satisfy their sinful lusts? Give them a false gospel that says God loves and accepts them, that everyone is ok and on their way to heaven? Do you believe that? Because this IS what Paul is saying.

Make no mistake, most professing Christians have an itch. They want it scratched. And that itch is an itch for a false gospel that pronounces them to be just fine with God. They will not tolerate a message that doesn't suit their evil passions and desires. So they go looking and in our day they don't have to look very long before they find a preacher and church that will scratch their itch.

Now, lest anyone think I exaggerate, listen to God's Word again:

Mat 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it **are many**. (14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, **and those who find it are few.**

Many. Few. Many. Few.

Rom 9:27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,

1Pe 3:20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

Now, let me add one more plank to the foundation before we look at specific application for our day. Listen very carefully to these truths about *who is a Christian*.

1Jn 2:20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

Isa 30:21 And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Isa 48:17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.

1Jn 2:26-27 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. (27) But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

1Th 4:9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,

Heb 8:11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

This then is God’s truth. This is who a Christian is. Without exception, so that

the Apostle John can say-

1Jn 2:4-5 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, (5) but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

1Jn 4:20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Now, I am going to say something that you are hearing me say increasingly – I have been a pastor for nearly 40 years. In the course of that time, I have seen a very clear and repeated pattern. Namely, that many if not most people who claim to be Christians, aren’t. I have known them. In many cases I have known them very well. I have had the opportunity to see them in action behind the scenes – not just the persona they exhibit on Sunday mornings in church. Many of these people were regarded as pillars of the church – Christian counselors, Bible college graduates, movers and shakers in various ministries, enjoying a reputation in the community of the just

the finest, sacrificing Christian you could know.

But this was in fact not who they were. One of the most common traits these people shared was that they were *mean, bullying, self-glorifying people*. They did not love others, they loved themselves. Let me give you examples:

- One such man who enjoyed accolades in the community, whose pastor boasted about his godliness, had been abusing his wife for years. I know. She told me.
- A woman who was widely regarded in her church as just the finest example of a Christian was in fact a very mean, cruel person habitually. Just ask her children.

And I could go on and on and on. *But because, just as in Jeremiah's day, the pulpits of our day are filled with so many false prophets who please the people with itching ears, telling them the message of "God loves everyone. Everything is fine. We are all on our way to heaven if we just believe in Jesus. God knows you are a sinner and He forgives you no matter what" guess what happens when they die?*

Well, here is where one of the greatest sources of deception by a false gospel is going to come at you today. The false prophets are going to say in the eulogies of such people, "Peace, peace." But there is no peace. Glowing accolades will be announced. The departed is now in "a better place." Their wonderful "Christian" life is "celebrated."

*You cannot be a habitually, characteristically MEAN and bullying, and selfish and arrogant person and inherit the kingdom of God! You cannot be a phoney, and inherit heaven – because you can't deceive the Lord. He sees right through it. He is not deceived for a moment by the lying words of a false preacher announcing to everyone at a funeral that the dearly departed is most certainly with Jesus!*

Do you see the dangerous deception here? Make no mistake, we live in the midst of false prophets. And we live in the midst of people who were just like the people Jeremiah lived among. They insist that they are "children of Abraham," standing in the unquestioning favor of God – yet they are of the world and Christ does not know them. *And incredible pressure is being put upon us to conform to it all. If we won't conform, we will be labeled as*

*judgmental, harsh, and unkind.* We will be hated and scorned.

So here then is the question we leave off at –

***What has it cost you to follow Christ? Has your profession of Christ ever cost you anything at all? Have you ever been hated for being a Christian?***

Because if there has not been a cost, something is very wrong. If you are popular and well-spoken of by all, something is very wrong. On that day when we all stand before the Lord, the truth about each of us is going to be known. There will be no more façade. No more disguises. No more wool to cover the wolf. We will be, well, here it is-

**Heb 4:13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Those people, so many of these people who have successfully deceived others with their “appearance of godliness,” and who have now passed out of this life, no longer have a false preacher or false Christians to praise them. They no

longer are given the accolades of people they have deceived. They no longer have the comfort given by a false gospel that assured them they were justified before God.

For them it is too late. They are cast out of Christ’s presence and the words which are such a comfort to the real Christian – “when we’ve been there 10,000 years, we’ve only just begun...” – have now taken on a new and terrible meaning for them. 10,000 years, and no closer to the end. Hell always will be, just beginning. THAT is existence cast out of the presence of God.

Do not be deceived. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself. Allow the Lord by His Word and Spirit to search out your heart and show you your true state.

Because we live in a time when THIS is the characteristic description of most of what claims to be the church-

**Lam 2:14** Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.