

How Long Will the Church Do Wrong?
Advent #3 | Jeremiah 23
December 13, 2020

Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Week 3 of Advent | How Long series | personal>societal>kingdom>next week: cosmic

PRAYER

Introduction

- Some days, I don't want to be a Christian | Not about Jesus, but about the people
 - Stadium Bullhorn Guy, Prophecy Prediction Lady, Weirdo Televangelist
- The one that hurts the most: Disgraced Pastor
 - *Recent weeks:* Hipster Cool Pastor | Carl Lentz
 - Hardcore Homeschool | Bill Gothard
 - Rock Solid Baptist | Jerry Fallwell Jr.
 - Intellectual Giant | Ravi Zacharias
 - **David French** It's tempting to simply cite Reinhold Niebuhr's famous maxim that the doctrine of original sin is "the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith," note that every class of person is susceptible and vulnerable to sin, and move on. [Public figures] are human, and we know that human beings are fallen, and thus there will always be spectacular falls from grace. Yes, but must they be so frequent? Must they be so constant?
- Not just leaders who make mistakes, as pastors we see the members who shipwreck
- With all of this, it's tempting to give up on the church. But there's a big problem: you can't.
 - First, we're saved into a family
 - Second, still associated even if disconnected
 - Third, it sure seems like Jesus loves the church | **Ephesians 6** ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. ²⁷ He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.

Big idea: The church is...

...a giant mess

...loved by Jesus

Jeremiah's Concern | 23:26

²⁶ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart?

- This portion of Jeremiah is before the exile, he can see Nebuchadnezzar coming
- Prophets in his day saying "don't worry about it, good things are coming"
- He is frustrated! "How long???"

He is frustrated with the widespread ungodliness that he sees

Widespread Ungodliness | 23:9b-11a

⁹...My heart is broken within me, and all my bones tremble. I have become like a drunkard, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord, because of his holy words. ¹⁰For the land is full of adulterers; the land mourns because of the curse, and the grazing lands in the wilderness have dried up. Their way of life has become evil, and their power is not rightly used ¹¹because both prophet and priest are ungodly, even in my house I have found their evil.

1) God's house first

- *Even in my house...* is an important statement | like “can you even believe?”
- Before we point fingers at society, the house of God must look in the mirror

2) Leadership matters

- Prophet, Priest, King | Three offices of leadership in ancient Israel
 - Distinct, yet overlapping | societal vs. spiritual
 - All three are referred to as shepherds, in this chapter and elsewhere
- Everybody is responsible for their own sin (**Jer. 31:30**), however...
- Leadership carries an extra weight of responsibility | **James 3** ¹ Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment.
- Some of you have formal leadership. But ALL Christians are prophet, priest, and king
 - **1 Peter 2** ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The Sins of the Leaders

1. Idolatry | 23:13 The prophets of Samaria...prophesied by Baal.
2. Sexual sin | 23:14 The prophets of Jerusalem...commit adultery.
3. Dishonesty | 23:14 The prophets of Jerusalem...walk in lies
4. False prophecy | 23:16 This is what the LORD of Armies says: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They are deluding you. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the LORD’s mouth.
 - a. This is the big one! Takes up the rest of the chapter.

On Prophecy

1. More proclamation than predictive (still the same today)
2. Different after Pentecost | Sam Storms “democratization of the Spirit”
 - a. In ancient Israel, a select few operated as prophets
 - b. Both men and women, speaking truth on behalf of God
3. Covenant-enforcers
 - a. Test of truth (Deut. 18:22) and the test of covenant faithfulness (Deut. 13:1-3)
 - b. Death penalty for being a false prophet!

With such high stakes, why was false prophecy so widespread?

- The usual suspects: power, money, sex | But also: being liked by people (king could kill you!)

(Not) Funny Story

1 Kings 22 ⁷ But Jehoshaphat asked, “Isn’t there a prophet of the LORD here anymore? Let’s ask him.” ⁸ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “There is still one man who can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies good about me, but only disaster. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.” “The king shouldn’t say that!” Jehoshaphat replied...¹⁵ So he went to the king, and the king asked him, “Micaiah, should we go to Ramoth-gilead for war, or should we refrain?” Micaiah told him, “March up and succeed. The LORD will hand it over to the king.” ¹⁶ But the king said to him, “How many times must I make you swear not to tell me anything but the truth in the name of the LORD?” ¹⁷ So Micaiah said: I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the LORD said, “They have no master; let everyone return home in peace.” ¹⁸ So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you he never prophesies good about me, but only disaster?” ... ²⁶ Then the king of Israel ordered, “Take Micaiah and return him to Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king’s son, ²⁷ and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this guy in prison and feed him only a little bread and water until I come back safely.’”

Uncomfortable Speech | 23:29-32

**Remember vs. 16...They speak visions from their own minds, not from the LORD’s mouth.*

²⁹ “Is not my word like fire”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“and like a hammer that pulverizes rock?” ³⁰ Therefore, take note! I am against the prophets”—the Lord’s declaration—“who steal my words from each other. ³¹ I am against the prophets”—the Lord’s declaration—“who use their own tongues to make a declaration. ³² I am against those who prophesy false dreams”—the Lord’s declaration—“telling them and leading my people astray with their reckless lies. It was not I who sent or commanded them, and they are of no benefit at all to these people”—this is the Lord’s declaration.

Long Quotation | Ben Sixsmith, Spectator Magazine

I have no doubt that Hillsong NYC, under Lentz’s leadership, enriched thousands of lives. Even young Mr Bieber has avoided legal controversies and settled down with his wife since joining Hillsong. Good luck to him! Still, it seems to represent what I call the ‘...with a twist of Christianity’ trend. There is mainstream culture, celebrities, fashion, music, modish political activism and a message of self-love, but with a twist of Christianity. Most people stick with mainstream culture because they can have all those things and pre-marital sex.

We can see the ‘...with a twist of Christianity’ trend elsewhere. Falwell was representative of the right-wing, business-oriented evangelicals who offer capitalist self-enrichment and hubristic jingoism...with a twist of Christianity. Then there are progressive Christians of whom Nadia Bolz-Weber is an extreme example, who promote the usual left-wing causes...with a twist of Christianity. While different in beliefs, such people share patterns of thought: the [those on the right] believe secular individualists mysteriously share God’s wishes for what should be done with money while the [those on the left] think that secular progressives mysteriously share God’s wishes for what should be done with bodies. So, if Christianity is such an inessential add-on, why become a Christian?

I am not religious, so it is not my place to dictate to Christians what they should and should not believe. Still, if someone has a faith worth following, I feel that their beliefs should make me feel uncomfortable for not doing so. If they share 90 percent of my lifestyle and values, then there is nothing especially inspiring about them. Instead of making me want to become more like them, it looks very much as if they want to become more like me.

Where Is the Hope? | 23:3-6

³“I will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands where I have banished them, and I will return them to their grazing land. They will become fruitful and numerous. ⁴I will raise up shepherds over them who will tend them. They will no longer be afraid or discouraged, nor will any be missing.” This is the Lord’s declaration.

- Hope for good leadership! But it will come from one key leader

⁵“Look, the days are coming”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“when I will raise up a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land.

⁶In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. This is the name he will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.

- This is a promise of the messiah, the anointed shepherd from God

David’s Offspring | Matthew 1

¹⁶ ...Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Messiah, fourteen generations.

- Nerdy side note: David written in Hebrew numbers = 14 | Jesus is the Branch for David
- Jesus is the good shepherd, who *lays down his life* for his sheep | **CRUCIFIXION**
- Jesus is the true vine, and we are the branches who receive his life | **RESURRECTION**

Loving the Church

1. Commit to loving the church
 - a. Sometimes it’s a decision that precedes feelings
 - b. Jesus loves the church, and we’re called to follow him
2. Pray for your church | faithfulness, protection, transparency
3. Be willing to be fully honest
 - a. Not just in big/celebrity churches, but small ones too
 - b. At its worst, cover-ups of abuse | “*don’t be divisive*” — abusive saying
4. Dare to hope
 - a. Remember, celebrity scandals get online clicks
 - b. How many faithful pastors and church leaders are actually out there?
5. Consider your own witness
 - a. You’re not a celebrity, but you are a king, a priest, and a prophet