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

False Shepherds

*March 7, 2021*

**Sermon Text:** Jeremiah 18-20

**Scripture Reading:** Ezekiel 34

The Bible regularly portrays God's people as His *flock*. The Lord is my Shepherd...He makes me lie down in green pastures... And we also know that He raises up undershepherds to watch over His flock –

1 Peter 5:1-4 ESV So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: (2) shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; (3) not domineering over

those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Now, there is another frequent theme in scripture in connection with this picture of shepherds and sheep – *false shepherds. Savage wolves.*

Ezekiel 34:1-3 ESV The word of the LORD came to me: (2) “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? (3) You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.

We also of course have it in the Good Shepherd chapter of John's Gospel which we already read this morning. Notice how many times Jesus contrasts Himself with false shepherds who are thieves and robbers.

So this subject is obviously very important to the Lord, and therefore it is a vital one for us. If you truly know Christ, if you are born again and therefore one of His sheep, *then you have the ability to discern. You have the ability to recognize His voice and you can recognize a false shepherd as well.* We see so many examples today of false sheep following false shepherds. How can, for instance, a man be a genuine shepherd called by Christ, when he is pocketing millions of dollars, flying around in a private helicopter or jet, living in a mansion and so on!? And how is it possible that he can attract thousands of adoring fans who call themselves Christians? We have the answer very plainly in scripture. They are not real sheep. If they were, they would not follow the counterfeit.

In chapters 18-20 of Jeremiah, we find the following, and we will plan next time to look in detail at chapters 23 where we find the Lord's fullest pronouncement of judgment upon all false shepherds.

### **He is the Potter, We are the Clay**

Jeremiah 18:1-10 ESV The word that came to Jeremiah from the

LORD: (2) "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." (3) So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. (4) And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.

(5) Then the word of the LORD came to me: (6) "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

(7) If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, (8) and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.

(9) And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, (10) and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.

This section was most likely in the Apostle Paul's mind when he wrote in Romans 9 –

Romans 9:20-21 ESV But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" (21) Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

### **Murderous Plotting Against Jeremiah & His Imprecatory Prayer**

Jeremiah 18:18-23 ESV Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words."

(19) Hear me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my adversaries. (20) Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. (21) Therefore deliver up their

children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. (22) May a cry be heard from their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. (23) Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

These attacks on Jeremiah were frequent. You have another one here:

Jeremiah 20:1-2 ESV Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. (2) Then Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the LORD.

Anyone who faithfully speaks God's Word is going to eventually encounter this kind of opposition. And this fact is something that no one ever mentioned

in seminary. Oh, we heard about what happened to Jeremiah and to Paul and to Peter, but no one ever brought this truth home to our day. The implication was that if you were a real pastor and you loved the people and you preached the gospel to them and if you did these things “correctly,” you would have success, your church would grow, the people would love you and people would be getting saved and baptized all the time.... But that is a lie and Scripture plainly and obviously exposes it as a lie. Study church history. Look at how the Reformers, for instance, were treated at the hands of “the church” and of “Christians.”

I want to put a question to you all – to us all – in this regard. It is this:

***Have you ever been hated for following Christ? Do you have enemies who hate you because you confess Christ and live for Him? Has being a Christian ever really cost you anything?***

These are questions that help us test ourselves to see if we really belong to Christ or not.

### **The Illustration of the Broken Flask**

Jeremiah 19:1-2 ESV Thus says the LORD, “Go, buy a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, (2) and go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you.

Jeremiah 19:10 ESV “Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you,

This was still another warning, in visual form along with Jeremiah's preaching, that God's judgment was about to fall on Judah. We see here the incredible longsuffering and patience of the Lord. Warning after warning after warning.

But what was the response of the people? They beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks.

I think that these wicked people *knew that Jeremiah was a true prophet and that He really was speaking God's Word*. I know they argued against what he was preaching and insisted that God would never let Judah and Jerusalem be destroyed. And yet we find frequent instances that demonstrate they did in

fact know Jeremiah was speaking God's Word.

I think that they had it in their minds that what a prophet spoke would come true, so the trick was to make him speak what they wanted to hear. If he wouldn't, they would work to silence him, even if that meant locking him up or killing him. Ahab did that to Micaiah, you recall and this is how it has been all down through the centuries.

This same wicked spirit is present in most local churches if it is not seen and confronted and expelled. Think of all the schemes that are used to try to force a pastor or teacher to say what the wicked want to hear.

I can give you many examples, but here is one that some of you have heard before. After we had worked for a long time to plant a second church in Montana, we had a board meeting one Sunday evening. A deacon began to criticize my sermons and he said, "our job as a board is to make sure that the people hear what they want to hear."

You can't make this stuff up! He actually said that and worse, not a single one of the other board members

objected to what he said. It was left to me to say, "I am going to keep preaching and teaching Scripture exactly what I always have and no one is going to dictate to me what to say." It was not all that long before the Lord took us out of that church and sent us to a new ministry.

The idea, you see, is the same as Jeremiah's enemies worked by. *If you can get the preacher to make scripture say what you want it to say, then it will be true and nothing but good will come your way from the Lord.*

- Pronounce God's blessing upon a marriage at a wedding, even though the bride and groom do not believe in Christ at all or have any intention of following Him.
- Pronounce God's blessing and salvation upon a person who has died, even though they never followed Christ.
- Pronounce God's blessing on people who walk in sin without any repentance
- Only pronounce God's blessing and never mention God's curse on the wicked.

Jeremiah 8:11 ESV They have healed

the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.

This is a great evil for which, as chapter 23 shows, the false shepherds will give account and pay the price eternally cast away from the Lord. And sadly, they will take many with them.

Jeremiah 20:6 ESV And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. To Babylon you shall go, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.”

### **Jeremiah Cannot Keep Silent**

Jeremiah 20:7-18 ESV O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.

(8) For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (9) If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning

fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

(10) For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! “Denounce him! Let us denounce him!” say all my close friends, watching for my fall. “Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him.”

(11) But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.

(12) O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.

(13) Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.

(14) Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! (15) Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, “A son is born to you,” making him very glad. (16) Let that man be

like the cities that the LORD overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, (17) because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. (18) Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

This is an honest prayer. It shows us that we can be honest with the Lord, though Jeremiah's prayers (as ours should be) are always tempered with the underlying confession that whatever the Lord does is right.

What did Jeremiah mean when he said that the Lord had deceived him? He cannot mean that the Lord lied to him – the Lord is truth.

It is quite possible that Jeremiah prayed this prayer to the Lord after he had been beaten and put in stocks by Pashhur. It seems that Jeremiah was telling the Lord something like “Lord, when you called me to speak for you, this is not how I thought it would go.” Think for instance of this:

Jeremiah 1:7-10 ESV But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a

youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. (8) Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.” (9) Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. (10) See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

But things did not seem to have turned out as Jeremiah thought. Of course as we know, they had – everything was proceeding according to God's perfect sovereign plan. And this I think was what he meant when he said, “Lord, you have deceived me.”

And could it be that Jeremiah had thought too highly of his friends and family and countrymen? Remember this:

Jeremiah 12:5-6 ESV “If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? (6) For even

your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you.”

Nevertheless, God’s Word has been put within him and he cannot keep it in:

I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.

(8) For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (9) If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Have you ever tried to use your finger to stop the flow of water from a pipe – even a quite small pipe? You can’t do it. God’s Word in Jeremiah was like that. It is going to come out! And that Word was a word these wicked people hated – “Violence and destruction!” A pronouncement of coming judgment, invasion, slaughter, captivity, siege and cannibalism. A pronouncement of these people’s guilt and evil. It was a message

that was going to stir up even more hatred and mocking for Jeremiah. But he could not not speak!

We can also apply this to those who hear God’s Word. If you are born again, if you truly belong to Christ, *then you cannot not hear God’s Word. You cannot listen to a false Word by a false shepherd.* You might try, for some notion of “keeping the peace,” but the Holy Spirit in you will not let you continue in that. You will probably be branded as some kind of troublemaker (think of Elijah being called “you troubler of Israel” by Ahab)...but never mind, you will not be able to tolerate the perversion of God’s Word.

John 10:8 ESV All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

### **The Believer’s Confidence and Experience**

This last section of chapter 20 is quite interesting, and I think we can at least in part relate to it. Experientially, following Christ is going to have its “ups and downs.” Here, Jeremiah begins with an “up,” – one of those



times when we are encouraged by the Lord's Word and Spirit:

Jeremiah 20:11-18 ESV But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. (12) O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. (13) Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.

Many people who claim to be Christians know nothing of this. Of praising the Lord "*for He has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.*" The typical scenario in fact is quite the opposite.

Think in more detail this week about the Lord as "a dread warrior." And that He is standing in this battle with His people. We have a fuller description of Him, for example, in 2 Thessalonians 2 and in Revelation. Those who mock Him now will have a radical attitude check one Day:

Revelation 6:15-17 ESV Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, (16) calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

This is an encouragement to Christ's people – though counterfeits will typically say these ideas are too harsh and that God's love would not permit Him to be so "harsh."

But then, the "down" times can strike. And this reminds us of how totally dependent we are upon the Lord for our strength and ability to persevere in serving Him-

(14) Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! (15) Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, "A son is born to you," making him very glad. (16) Let that man be

like the cities that the LORD overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, (17) because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. (18) Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

This is the experience of Christ's true people in this evil world. One day we will be out of here and we will see the new creation where all this warfare has ceased and the wicked are no more.