

Who are You Listening To

by Anton Bosch

This sermon emphasizes the prevalence of false prophets and preachers who speak their own words instead of God's, leading people astray with deceptive messages. It highlights the need for discernment in listening to preachers and the importance of true shepherds who feed the flock with God's word. The message warns against loving flattery and lies over the truth, urging listeners to align themselves with genuine shepherds who fear the Lord.

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Scripture: Jeremiah 23:9, Jeremiah 23:16, Jeremiah 23:21, Jeremiah 23:29, Jeremiah 5:30, Jeremiah 23:3

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Description

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Transcript

Welcome to Sun Valley Community Church again this Sunday morning. Welcome especially to members of Sun Valley Community Church who are obviously still under lockdown and we can't meet together in the chapel here. And welcome to our friends in other parts of the world, other parts of the United States who are joining us this morning.

Let's open the meeting in prayer. Father, we come to you in the name of the Lord Jesus and we confess again our absolute dependence upon you. Lord, without you we can do nothing.

Without you we are nothing. And Lord, we need you to help us today. I need you to help me to deliver this message.

We need you to help those who listen to hear your word and to understand what it is that the Spirit is saying. I pray Lord that this may not just be another message, another series of thoughts from some crazy preacher, but Lord that these may be your words that would touch our hearts and that would transform lives. In Jesus' name I pray.

So I pray Lord that you would help me, that you would put your anointing upon your word and your anointing upon the hearers and your anointing upon the minds of those who listen. I know Lord that there are many distractions as people are watching at home and there are all sorts of things going on around them. Lord, we pray that you would just help us to concentrate and to focus on your word this morning that we might be able to hear what it is that you are saying to your church.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So I'm going to begin straight, go straight into the text and I'm going to read from Jeremiah chapter 23.

Jeremiah chapter 23 and I'm going to just read selected verses, I really need to read the whole chapter but it will take too long and I trust that you will be able to read the whole chapter for yourself and get the context and not just this chapter but in fact the whole of the book of Jeremiah. As you know, Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Jeremiah is broken over the state of Israel and Israel represents the church.

The church does not replace Israel but the problems that beset Israel are the same problems that beset the church today. So I believe that Jeremiah's message, in fact the message of all the prophets in the Old Testament, are just as relevant to the church today as they were to Israel those days. And my text is the first verse of Jeremiah chapter 23, well the first verse I'm going to read rather, of Jeremiah chapter 23 and verse 9. And I'm going to read verses 9 and 11 and please follow as I skip through selected verses in the chapter.

So Jeremiah chapter 23 and verse 9. My heart within me is broken because of the prophets. All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man and like a man whom wine has overcome because of the Lord and because of His holy words.

For the land is full of adulterers, for because of a curse the land mourns. The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up. Their course of life is evil and their might is not right.

Verse 11, for both the prophet and the priest are profane. Yes, in my house I have found their wickedness, says the Lord. And then verse 16, thus says the Lord of hosts, do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you.

They make you worthless. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise me, the Lord has said, you shall have peace.

And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, no evil shall come upon you. Verse 21 and 22, I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they have prophesied.

But if they had stood in my counsel and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. And then verses 28 and 29, the prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream. And he who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully.

What is the chaff to the wheat, says the Lord? Is not my word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? And as I said at the beginning, this really is what is on my heart, not just today but has been for some time now. And Jeremiah reflects, and I don't profess to be anything near Jeremiah, I don't profess to be anything like Jeremiah, but the very burden of the Lord that had gripped Jeremiah, grips my own heart today, and he says, my heart within me is broken because of the prophets.

And when I use the word prophets this morning, I am not speaking prophets in the sense of apostles and prophets or prophets in the sense of the Old Testament, but I'm going to use the word in the sense of preachers, those who speak the word of God, whether they call themselves pastors or teachers or prophets or whatever, those who handle the word of God, those who purport to speak on behalf of God.

And right now on Sunday morning, there are thousands and thousands, maybe even millions of preachers who are preaching the word of God. Many of them are preaching on YouTube like we are this morning. Many of them are on Facebook, and they're preaching their messages, and my heart is burdened because of them, because of what they are preaching and what they are doing and what they are saying.

And I pray that this morning God would open our hearts and minds, and my concern is really twofold this morning. My concern is for the preachers who are preaching a false message and who need to repent and who need to get back to the word of God. But my concern is also for those who are being deceived by those preachers, those who are listening and who are surfing on a Sunday particularly, who are surfing Facebook and surfing YouTube and all of these things and looking at the various preachers who are out there and listening to what they have to say.

My concern is for you, that you may be misled by those who profess to be men of God, but in fact are not men of God. And so my heart is broken within me because of the prophets. All my bones shake, I'm like a drunken man and like a man whom wine has overcome because of the Lord and because of his holy word.

You see, Jeremiah understood the intensity of the word of God. He understood the holiness of the God that he was serving. He understood the holiness of the word that he was handling.

And while Jeremiah was speaking by inspiration and speaking prophetically, we're handling the same word of God that has been written down for us today. And there needs to be a fear and a reverence as we come to the word of God. And Jeremiah says, because of his holy words, I am broken because of the way that the prophets are abusing the word of God.

Now let me also just say before we get into the rest of this message this morning, that I'm not speaking just against false teachers and those who are heretics and teaching another gospel and another Jesus. I am deeply concerned about the many who maybe have not fallen into the prosperity era or whatever other era, but who claim to be genuine men of God in conservative churches, whether they be evangelical or Pentecostal or charismatic, but who are not handling the word of God correctly, who are not preaching the word of God, who are preaching their own message. And so this message is not against the heretics.

Yes, it does go against the heretics, but this message is against those who purport to be the prophets of God who say that they are speaking the word of God, but they are not speaking the word of God. They are speaking their own word, as we'll see in a moment. And so in verse 10, he says, for the land is full of adulterers.

And when he speaks about the land here, I'm going to apply this in the context of the church. I'm not concerned with America or with Europe or with any other country. I'm concerned with the body of Christ, with the church.

And here, when he says the land is full of adulterers, because of the curse of the land mourns, the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course of life is evil, and their might is not right. Why does he single out adultery? Why doesn't he speak about fraud or theft or robbery or murder or lying

or any of the other many terrible sins that we know that the scripture speaks about? Why does he choose out adultery? Well I believe because he is choosing out something which is not necessarily, it probably was a physical thing that he was referring to, but that is also a spiritual thing. Adultery, in the context of the Old Testament, is when Israel forsook God and entered into an illicit relationship with something else, invariably Baal or one of the other gods of the land.

And so instead of being faithful to their husband, the Lord, they were now having a relationship with some false god. In some cases today that relationship may be with a national identity, sometimes that may be with a religious institution, where people are so more involved in the church than they are with the Lord Jesus Christ, that is adultery. When people are more involved with the word of God and they love God's word more than they love the Lord, that is adultery, because they're not being faithful to him and they've entered into a relationship which is illicit, which is not intended to be there.

When preachers love preaching more than they love the Lord, when preachers love themselves, when preachers love money, they are committing adultery, because they are loving the things that they ought not to love and they're forsaking their first love, the Lord Jesus Christ. The land is full of adulterers. And then I'm going to jump to the end of that verse, and their might is not right.

They have power. And folks, this is the problem, is that preachers today have tremendous power. Some of them wield power over congregations of thousands and thousands and thousands.

Many are incredibly influential in government, and others are very influential on the media, on the internet, and in various other places in the marketplace. They have power, they have authority, they have might. But God says their might is not right, because it doesn't come from him.

It comes from their own devices. And then if we go to verse 11, for both prophet and priest are profane. Profane means worldly.

They are not holy, they are not set aside. And of course the purpose of the prophet and the purpose of the prophet is that they were to be holy, set aside, dedicated to God and to the things of God and to serving him. But modern prophets and preachers and priests, or whatever you want to call them, are worldly.

Their mindset is worldly, their thinking is worldly, their affections are worldly, their methods are worldly, their preaching is worldly. You listen to the preaching, and it's not the word of God that they're preaching, it's not the God of the word that they're preaching. But they are preaching their own ideas, they are preaching about worldly concepts and stories and pictures, but not the word of God.

They are profane, they are worldly, they are carnal, they are fleshly, they are compromised, they are not set aside to the things of God. Yes, in my house I have found their wickedness, says the Lord. Yes, we expect the world to be profane, we expect the world to be carnal and worldly and corrupt, but when that comes into the house of God, when preachers steal money, when preachers steal the honor of God, when preachers build their own empire instead of the body of Christ, they have become profane, and they brought that profanity into the church.

Next verse, verse 12, therefore their way shall be to them like slippery ways. In the darkness they shall be driven on and fall in them, for I will bring disaster on them. The year of their punishment, says the Lord.

We're going to come back to this idea in a few minutes. God knows, and God sees. And here's the scary thing, if I can see certain things going on in the lives of preachers, if I can see certain things happening in

the pulpit, how much more does God not know? I can do nothing about it except be broken hearted, just as Jeremiah was.

But God says, payday is coming, judgment is coming, and preachers act as though there is going to be no judgment. They live as though it is only the here and now, and their only concern is for themselves and their own empires and their own financial gain and their own followings. But the year of their punishment is coming, says the Lord.

And then in verse 14, and I'm just skipping over verses simply because we don't have the time to go through this verse by verse, I would love to do so, but we don't have the time to do that in one session. And so verse 14, also I've seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem, the prophets of the church. They commit adultery.

Same issue. Now if you remember a little bit earlier, he said in verse 10, the land is full of adulterers. In other words, the people are adulterers.

But you see, here's the problem. The adultery begins with the preachers. The preachers have fallen in love with themselves, with their image, with their following, with the number of views they get on their YouTube, on the number of friends they have on Facebook, on their public image, and all of these kinds of things.

Brethren, when pastors tell me that they're too busy to respond to my email because they're too important, they've committed adultery because they are in love with themselves and their own power. I've seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem. They committed adultery and walked in lies.

Now I know you probably say, well, you know, these preachers preach the truth. They're not lying. But the fact is that even if they are preaching the truth, that they are preaching what they do not know about, what is not their own personal experience, and what God has not given them to speak, they are speaking lies.

Even though the message may come from the Word of God, if their motive is not the right motive, and obviously it's very difficult to judge one's motive, they're walking in lies. And here's the problem. They strengthen the hands of evildoers so that no one turns back from his wickedness.

You see, preachers are so concerned about their numbers, they're so concerned about filling the pews, they're so concerned about the statistics that measure their success and their ability, that they will not ever speak against what is wrong. They will only speak what will be attractive, they will only speak positive stuff, they will only speak the message that people want to hear. Yes, they'll speak against abortion, they'll speak against adultery, they will speak against homosexuality, but they will only speak about that concerning those outside of the church.

They will never point the finger to those within their own churches that are involved in these things, because they know the moment they do that, people will walk out. Preachers will not preach the message that I'm preaching this morning, and I'm nothing, but I also have nothing to lose, because they're afraid of what they can lose. And unless you've come to the cross and lost everything, unless you've come to a place of brokenness, and unless the preacher that you're listening to has come to a place of brokenness and understanding that he is nothing, that he has nothing, that he is without God, it's all vanity, it's all a waste of time.

Unless he's come to that, unless he's come to a point of understanding, woe is me, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips, I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips. Unless the preacher has come to that place, he's walking in lies. And he will not strengthen, he will strengthen the hands of the evildoers, he will not go against the son in his own church.

He will not speak the truth, because he needs the people, he needs the money, he needs the support that comes from those things. And so they strengthen the hand of the evildoers. The wickedness that goes on in our land in political circles is being strengthened by preachers today, so that no one turns back from his wickedness.

Interesting that he uses those words, that no one turns back from his wickedness. In the New Testament we would use, and also in the Old Testament, we would use the word repentance. So that no one repents, it's just another way of saying that no one turns back from his wickedness.

And you know that there's a tremendous attack against this concept of repentance today. It comes from many angles. Preachers are saying, no, there is no such thing as repentance, it's only faith.

God help us. No one turns back from his wickedness, no one is repenting from their wickedness, because the preachers have prophesied falsely, and they have strengthened the hands of the evildoers. And so people are told, you can come as you are, and you can stay as you are, as long as you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a false gospel, that is not the truth. And if your preacher is condoning your sin, you need to find yourself another preacher. Because he is not a man of God.

And notice what he ends this verse with, he says, all of them are like Sodom to me. Sodom was the most abominable place as far as God was concerned, and you remember he destroyed it with fire. And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

And then if we go to verse 16, thus says the Lord of hosts, do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of God.

Don't listen to the words of the prophets. Don't listen to the slick preachers. Don't listen to every Tom, Dick and Harry who presents himself as a preacher in his own living room today.

Preachers sitting in their cars, they're not even part of anything. They don't submit to anyone, and yet they can sit in their car and just ramble on and make all kinds of statements and build a following. I'm horrified at the people who are being followed and being esteemed as being somewhat, when in fact they are not sent by God.

Because, he says, they speak a vision of their own heart. You see, there are those prophets who speak because they've been called and anointed by God. There are those prophets who speak because they are empowered by hell itself, by the devil.

But there is a vast majority of preachers today who may not be demon-possessed, but they're not anointed by God either. And so they're speaking a vision of their own heart. They're speaking out of their own ideas and their own thoughts and their own concepts.

They speak a vision of their own heart, and not from the mouth of the Lord. Brother and sister, you need to ask this question. Is God speaking through this preacher? Is this the word of God, or is this his own ideas? And yes, we measure those things against the word of God, but we also need a spirit of discernment that can tell us that deep down there's an awareness, there's a sense that this is not of God.

We need to pay attention to those things. They speak a vision of their own heart, not of the mouth of the Lord. Verse 17, they continually say to those who despise me, the Lord has said, you will have peace.

And everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, no evil will come upon you. Ezekiel has very much the same burden as Jeremiah has, and you'll find many of the messages, ideas that Jeremiah has are repeated by Ezekiel, just in different words. And Ezekiel speaks about those who say, peace, peace, when there is no peace.

Preachers who are saying to people in the pews, everything is fine, everything is good with God. Did you sign a decision card way back when? Did you pray the sinner's prayer? Yes, then it's fine, you're at peace, don't worry about these things, when in fact those people are living in sin, and unrepented sin, and are continuing in their evil and their wickedness. And preachers are just saying to them, peace, it's fine, it's no problem.

Lord has said you shall have peace. In fact, they don't only just say it's fine, they say God says you're okay, when you're not okay. And I know folk in our assembly are probably exasperated by the fact that I preach as directly as I do, and that I name sin.

And I know that there are many who wish that I would move on, but I cannot move on until the issues have been resolved, until repentance has become real, until there's been a turning away from sin. And as long as we continue in sin, we can never bring a message of peace. I long to be able to preach a great, wonderful, encouraging message and say God is with us, don't worry, everything's going to be great, God is anointing us, God is going to fill this church, God is sending thousands to be saved, I would love to be able to preach that message, but it's not the truth.

And it's not the truth, because there are those who are not right with God. And so they continually say to those who despise me, you say, well how do we despise God? When we count his word as nothing. When we count his word as nothing.

When we hear God speak, when God speaks through his word, when God speaks through the preaching of his word, and we regard it as nothing, we are despising him. And the Lord says you shall have peace to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart. They say no evil shall come upon you.

I need to move on, but I just want to stop quickly at that second last line. They walk according to the dictates of their own heart. We're living in the time of the judges, and in the time of the judges it says that every man did what was right in his own eyes.

That's where we are today. Every man is doing what's right in his own eyes. When people tell me I don't need to listen to preachers because I know the word of God, I don't need to be in fellowship, I don't need to be in submission because I know stuff.

You're following the dictates of your own heart. And when he says no evil will come upon you, obviously the reverse is true. Let's go to verse 21 as we move on.

Verse 21, I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, and yet they prophesied. There are so many preachers today, high level, very visible, famous preachers in the world today that I am absolutely sure of that God has not sent them.

They sent themselves. They inherited the business because that's what it is from their father. They have built their own image and their own church, but they were not sent by God.

And unfortunately the majority of big churches and of mega churches and of influential preachers and those preachers who are so visible in America and in the West today, unfortunately the majority of them were not sent by God. God says I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. They went and preached, they went and did the work, they went and established churches, they went and established ministries, but God had not sent them.

Brother and sister, you better make sure that the preacher that you're submitting yourself to has been sent by God and has not put himself in the pulpit, has not built his own empire and his own church and his own ministry, but that he is indeed sent by God. He says I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. And right this morning on Sunday morning there will be thousands and thousands of preachers who will be preaching on the internet and on Facebook and they will be speaking and saying God has said, but in fact God has not said.

God has never spoken to them. I'm not even speaking about preachers who buy their sermons on the internet, and yes it's a big business. Preachers who present very slick and very nice powerful messages, but in fact they subscribe to various websites on the internet and they can download the message and they preach the message complete with illustrations and so on.

I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. Stand in the pulpit is an awesome responsibility and my wife will tell you how much I stress about every time I have to preach. I'm not new at this business, I've been doing it for, I don't know, 40 years, 50 years now.

And yet I'm stressed out every time I stand in this pulpit because I understand the responsibility of speaking only what God has spoken and not speaking my own thoughts and my own minds, of not running when God has not said to me to run. And yet there are many who are willing to do that today. Let's move to verse 22, but if they had stood in my counsel, in other words if they had heard from me and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from the evil way and from the evil of their doings.

So the result of those preachers who hear the word of God is that they turn people away from sin. Verse 23, am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, and not a God far off? This is obviously a rhetorical question. Where is God? Is he present in this chapel as we're recording this message and there's really just my wife and I in the camera? Is he here? Yes, he is.

And he's here to listen to what I'm preaching, to judge what I'm preaching. And he's present every time anyone purports to speak on his behalf. Am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, and not a God far off? But the problem was they were acting as though God was far off, that God doesn't see.

Verse 24, can anyone hide himself in secret places so that I not see him, says the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth, says the Lord? And so here's the problem, here's the bottom line of this whole issue, and when I listen and look at preachers, when I listen to what they say, when I look at the way they live,

when I look at the way they do their stuff, I can only come to one conclusion, and that is that they don't believe in God. They don't believe that God is omniscient, that he knows everything, that God is omnipresent, that he is everywhere, and that there is nothing that is hidden from his eyes. And yes, I'm stressed out because when I'm preaching, I know that people are listening, I know that people are watching on the internet, but I'm particularly stressed out because I know God is listening, and God is watching.

Can anyone hide himself in secret places so that I not see him, says the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth, says the Lord? Yes, indeed, he fills every nook and cranny of the universe, he is everywhere, and he is present whenever the word of God is open, particularly. Verse 25, I have heard what the prophets have said, who prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamt, I have dreamt, God is hearing, God is listening. And yes, we may only be able to listen to a few of those messages on YouTube this morning, but every one of those thousands, and I don't know, there may even be millions, I don't know, God listens to every one of those, and judgment is coming.

Verse 28, the prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream, and he who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully, what is chaffed to the wheat, says the Lord. If you have a word from God, then speak that word, and speak it faithfully. That is obviously the reverse of what everything that we've been looking at this morning.

And then verse 29, is not my word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Maybe one day I'll preach a whole message on this verse, maybe in fact I should, but what struck me as I looked at this verse, is he doesn't say, is not my word like something that builds up? No, he says my word is like something that breaks in pieces. He doesn't say my word is like something that puts things together, but it is like a fire, and the fire judges, and the fire destroys everything that is not real. The word of God is not just there to comfort us, yes it comforts us, it exhorts us, it builds us up, it does those things, but it is primarily a hammer that breaks the rock on the hard places in our lives.

And when we won't allow the word of God to break us, his message can never penetrate, the seed of his word can never get into our lives in order to produce fruit. And we say, well I don't want to be broken, but better we be broken by him, fall on him and be broken, than he fall on us, and we be ground to powder. My word is like a fire, and it is like a hammer that breaks in pieces.

Verse 30, therefore behold I am against the prophets. This is the sad reality, as I believe this morning, God is against the vast majority of preachers. Am I claiming to be the only one who is right? No I don't.

I pray that I am. I hope that I am. But I have no guarantee, and therefore I am preaching to myself this morning, and I am examining my own heart, and as I was preparing this message I was examining my own heart, and I will continue to examine my heart in the days to come, because I do not want to be one of those that God says I am against them.

Just think about the pride and the arrogance of many preachers. God says I resist the proud. God is against the proud.

God is against the prophets who are arrogant. The preachers who speak when they have not been commissioned by God to speak. And then they do another thing.

They steal my words, every one from his neighbor. And you know, here's the thing that I noticed today, is that it depends on what sort of circles people move in. But the message that is preached goes in sort of seasons, in fads, and at one point everyone will be preaching along these, and everyone's preaching that in the next season.

This is particularly prominent in cults and in abusive denominations and groups, where everybody has to preach the message of the apostle. But they're stealing my words from one another. Why do they steal the words? What's wrong with taking the ideas? Am I not taking the thoughts of Jeremiah this morning? Yes I am.

But in fact it is not Jeremiah's word, it's God's word. And when we're taking the word of God, we have every authority to preach that word. But when it's not God's word, and it's the thoughts and the ideas of men, remember, they speak from their own imaginations.

And when I take the imaginations and the ideas and the thoughts of someone else, and I run with that, and particularly when we present it as our own ideas, we're stealing my words. One from his neighbor, verse 31, Behold, I'm against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues to say, He says. He says.

God told me to tell you. I hope that every time, and I pray that every time I get into the pulpit, every time I open the word of God, whether it's in a pulpit or in an informal setting, that I'm speaking the word of God, that I'm speaking what God wants me to say. But it's too easy to say God told me, when God told me nothing.

And I cannot tell you this morning that God told me to preach this message. I very strongly feel that this is the message I need to preach. But can I be wrong? Yes, I can be wrong.

But when preachers say God told me to tell you, and particularly when God told me to tell you something which is contrary to the word of God, when God told me to tell you that it's okay for you to continue in your sin, that God told me you don't have to repent, that God told me that you don't need to change your lifestyle. We're using His name in vain. We're saying God told me, when in fact it's not God who told me.

The source is somewhere else. Verse 36, And the oracle, or the burden of the Lord, you shall mention no more. For every man's word will be his oracle.

For you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, your God. This is a complicated verse, but I just want to draw one central truth out of here. The idea of an oracle is that this is what God has said, and in fact the translators sometimes use the word burden.

This is what God has laid upon us to speak, speaking of prophets in the Old Testament. The oracle of the Lord, you shall mention no more. Don't say that God told you to speak.

Don't say this is the word of God. I remember attending a Reformed church for many years because there was no evangelical church in the town in which I was living, and hanging from the pulpit, in the front of the pulpit was a very fancily embroidered piece of satin, and it had the words, Thus saith the Lord. But the preacher wasn't even saved.

He was a drunkard. But every Sunday he would stand behind that thing and people would say, This is God speaking, Thus saith the Lord. The oracle of the Lord, you shall mention no more.

Don't say, Thus saith the Lord. For every man will be his oracle. Every man is right in his own eyes.

Every man has his own ideas and his own thoughts, his own ideas about doctrine, his own ideas about holiness, his own idea about the body of Christ. Everyone is just following their own ideas, and he says, Stop it. Don't say God told me.

Don't say this is a word from God. Don't say this is an oracle or a word from God, because you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God. Now I'm going to jump, and I'm coming to a conclusion, and I'm going to jump back to Jeremiah chapter 5. So we've been in Jeremiah 23, and I'm going to go back to Jeremiah chapter 5, because I don't want you to go away from here and say, Well, this is all about the preachers out there.

This is not about the preachers. It is, of course, about the preachers, but this is about you and I. It's about those of us who listen to the preachers as well. And Jeremiah chapter 5, well-known verses, verse 30, an astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land.

Remember I said we can use the word church in this concept. An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the church. The prophets prophesy falsely.

Same idea as in chapter 23. The priests rule by their own power. Pastors rule because they have power, institutionalized power, delegated power by the denomination.

Not because sheep willingly follow them because they recognize the voice of a true shepherd, but because these men have power. They rule by their own power. And here's the real problem.

My people love to have it so. My people love to have it so. Why do false prophets and false preachers proliferate? Why do their churches grow by the hundreds and by the thousands? Because the people love the false preaching.

They love the emptiness. They love hearing about the sin of the world, but not about their own sin. They want to hear a popular message, and that's the indictment.

False preachers will always be there. False prophets were there in the Old Testament. They were there right at the end of the book of Revelation to the letters to the seven churches.

There were false preachers in those various churches in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. And they're with us today. But the indictment is against those who submit themselves to them, who pay money to these preachers, who support them by their presence and by their accolades. Remember, through one of the churches in the book of Revelation, he says that I will cast her and her children into a sick bed.

He's not just going to judge the false prophet or prophetess in that concept, but he will judge her children also. And then let's go back to Jeremiah chapter 23, and I'm going to finish off with the beginning. So I've jumped around a little bit.

I've dealt with verses 9 to the end of Jeremiah 23. I've gone back to Jeremiah 5, and now I'm going to come back to the beginning of Jeremiah chapter 23. And there's a wonderful prophetic aspect there that speaks about the coming of the Lord Jesus and his coming.

And as we said last week, there is another aspect to that, that Jesus is coming again the second time. But he says, I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries, verse 3 of Jeremiah chapter 23. I will

gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their folds, and they will be fruitful and increase.

There is a remnant. He will return the remnant again, and he will bring them in from wherever they are, and he will bring them to himself. I will gather the remnant of my flock, sorry I haven't moved forward.

I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their folds, and they shall be fruitful and they will increase. And then verse 4, I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them. You see, the fact that there are so many false shepherds, false prophets, false priests, doesn't mean that there are not real ones.

They are there. And he says, I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them, and they will fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking, says the Lord. The Lord is building his church, and remember that was the promise Jesus gave.

He says, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. This morning the question is, who are you listening to? Who are you submitting yourself to? And are you loving the truth, or are you loving to hear the flattery and the lies that just make you feel good? May God grant that I may be a true shepherd, and that you may be true sheep in the body of Christ. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you, Lord, that you have a plan, and Lord, that even amongst Israel there was a remnant, and even today in the visible false church there is a remnant of those who love you and those who are saved and born again. And Lord, that you will draw them to yourself, and Lord, that you will set up shepherds over them who will feed them. But Lord, I thank you above all that the day is coming when the branch of righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come, and he will set up his kingdom and rule forever and ever.

When the work will be done, and Lord, we will sit at his feet, the true prophet, the true preacher, the true priest, and we will hear his word. We pray, Lord, that this may be real. We pray that you would minister to us now, Lord, that you would keep us, protect us, and Lord, that the day may come soon that we may be able to gather again physically in this chapel.

I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

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