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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
July 25, 2021  
9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Ephesians 2:13-22, Mark 6:30-34

Hymns: 226:1-3,5; 353; 408; 50:1-2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 23:1-6

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD. <sup>2</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: “You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,” says the LORD. <sup>3</sup>“But 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 increase. <sup>4</sup>I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says the LORD.

<sup>5</sup>“Behold, *the* days are coming,” says the LORD,  
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;  
A King shall reign and prosper,  
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

<sup>6</sup>In His days Judah will be saved,  
And Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this *is* His name by which He will be called:  
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO: Job requirements**

When people apply for job positions, they are usually expected to present a list of qualifications they possess to demonstrate that they will be able to do all that the job requires. They may be asked to present transcripts or diplomas or certificates proving that they have received some training that will help them perform the tasks the position entails. Sometimes people will be given an opportunity to explain that their life experience, their other work situations have adequately prepared them to successfully do the work in the offered position.

But what if they misrepresented the facts? What if they convinced everyone that they could do the job, but in fact they weren't qualified, or worse yet, they didn't have any interest in faithfully fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to them? The new hire would create havoc, and could do much damage, maybe even harm those around them. Undoubtedly the employer would be greatly displeased, and consequences would follow, probably including being fired.

Again, in this week's meditation we are touching on things concerning the presentation of the gospel, and the Lord's concerns regarding the position of Messenger of the Gospel. There are certain qualifications and responsibilities, job requirements that the Lord considers most important if individuals are going to serve in a position of trust for the Lord. These requirements are important to the Lord because His people are important to the Lord. So it is that the requirements the Lord has established are not simply a matter of whim, but these qualifications have been established out of the Lord's love and concern for souls. Chief among them is that --

**THEME: Prophets Are Required to Tell the Truth.**

First, let's take a moment to remember exactly what a prophet is. A true and faithful prophet is simply a faithful and trustworthy messenger for God. A faithful messenger carefully presents exactly what the Lord has said, nothing more, nothing less.

In our colloquial language we often equate a prophet with a someone who foretells the future. This impression comes from the many messages that were entrusted to the prophets of old that did speak of things off in the future. Sometimes these things were about judgments that were to come upon a nation. At other times they were precious messages concerning the Christ who was to come into the world centuries later. However, a great many of the messages the prophets were given by God had to do with the things that were going on around them in daily life in the world.

The prophets were to speak of the need to repent, and at other times they were also entrusted with wonderful messages of blessing and forgiveness that God wanted conveyed to the audiences, be that a king, or another individual, or the entire nation. The message was the Lord's, not the prophet's. The prophet was the mouthpiece. That is why they often introduced the message with words like "*Thus says the LORD!*" That speaks to the theme of our meditation this morning. Since the prophets were not to speak whatever they imagined might be well received, but what God directed them to say to people, we can understand the requirement that prophets have to tell the truth. They are required **to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth**, just like when people are sworn to tell the truth in court, except this is way more important, way more consequential than court. For that reason the Lord makes it abundantly clear that --

### **I. False Prophets Will Be Held Accountable.**

*"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. <sup>2</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: 'You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,' says the LORD."* (v.1-2)

What were these false prophets doing that destroyed and scattered the flock? They were actively contradicting the words of the true prophets. Even as Jeremiah was warning the people of the judgment that would befall the nation if they did not repent, the false prophets were declaring that God was not really upset by the sins of the people, and that the Lord had declared to these prophets

that He would bring peace to the nation, and that the people had peace with God. Many of the people followed the words of the **false** prophets because they were far more pleasant messages and made allowance for them to continue in sin, and live as they pleased, pursuing the carnal pleasures and false idolatrous religions that were flourishing in the land of Judah.

In that way the false prophets drove the people away from the true worship of God. They scattered the flock, and didn't attend to what the people needed, the very truth of God's Word. While Jeremiah was abused and imprisoned for speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth that God had entrusted to him, the false prophets appeared to be free and clear of any consequences for the lies they perpetuated. But then appearances can be deceiving!

Note what the Lord said, “ *‘Woe to the shepherds (those spiritual shepherds) who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! ... Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the LORD.*” (v. 1 & 2) The lying prophets would be held accountable for the harm they caused with their false messages. It is no small thing to be under “**woe**” from the Lord. The Lord is careful in all He says and promises, and He is faithful to fulfill all that He declares. That is true of His promises of grace and forgiveness, and that is true of His words of judgment as well. God promised to attend to the false prophets for the evil they had done, the evil of encouraging people to remain in their sin. They would be held accountable for the many, many people who died because of their false preaching. They would be held accountable for the multitudes who were lost eternally because of their lying, and their rejection of the clear Word of God.

All this happened so long ago, what could it possibly have to do with us in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? Very much indeed! As our society embraces and celebrates sin, with more and more organizations, companies and even government entities having “pride” events to highlight and normalize that which is perverse and evil, it is important for the messengers of the Word of God to state clearly what the Lord says about these issues. Sin is dangerous. It is a killer of souls, and ultimately it will bring destruction for both soul and body in hell. The Lord lays it upon His faithful messengers to call for repentance. Repentance begins

with a turning away from sin, and then includes looking to God for mercy and forgiveness. Mainstream denominations have by and large soft peddled the message from God. They say it is not clear that God is against fornication, or abortion, or homosexual sins, or the rest of the perverse ideology of the world that has enraptured our society. They declare “ *‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace.*” (Jeremiah 6:14) They preach that whatever is done in love is pure and good, and whatever Bible verse says otherwise, well those passages are obscure and backward, and written by hateful, insecure men, and are probably not even the Word of God. Such lies hurt the flock of God. They scatter the sheep and drive them away from the Lord. They do a lot of harm. The harm is real, and we have seen the victims of that harm with people we know and love, people from our own families.

The Lord’s message to the false teachers today is the same as was spoken by Jeremiah at the Lord’s behest, *Woe to the shepherds* (those false spiritual shepherds of present-day America) *who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! ... Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the LORD.*” (v. 1 & 2) They will be held accountable for the lies they declare from the pulpit and their forums and through social media outlets. Their lies encourage our American society to continue down the path of sin. The result is that more and more people will be harmed and driven from the Lord. Ultimately, **woe** will befall the false prophets of our day. In the end they too will be held accountable for their false ways.

However, the Lord does not give up on the sheep of His flock. He cares about them and --

## **II. The Lord Shall Preserve His People.**

He declares in our text: “*But 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 increase. <sup>4</sup>I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,*” says the LORD. (v. 3,4) The Lord knows those who are His. The Lord has known from before the world began those whom He has elected according to His grace. These He shall also call to faith. He will gather them

into His Church. We see this going on powerfully and dramatically throughout the world today. In countries where persecution is most severe the Lord is actively calling people to faith and bringing them life and salvation through His Word of Grace.

Yes, the Lord will hold accountable the many false teachers that are misleading people, but He will also provide faithful messengers to guide His people in the truth of God's Word. From days of old the Lord promised to provide faithful shepherds, faithful pastors, that is what pastor means -- shepherd. It is such a wonder of grace that the Lord has called servants to work among His flock, to bring them the Word in its truth and purity. It is a wonder of grace that blesses His people with the guidance and direction needed to find one's way through this spiritual wilderness to the green pastures of heaven. So, the Lord provides the necessary gifts to His Church so that the message of the gospel goes forth, and through that message the Holy Spirit works in hearts calling and preserving in true faith those whom the Lord our God would call. The flock is fruitful and increasing, and still today *"the Lord add(s) to the Church daily those who are being saved."* (Acts 2:47)

What a marvelous message the Lord's faithful prophets have to share! And --

### **III. The Truth About Jesus Shall be Proclaimed!**

Jeremiah was blessed to be entrusted with this marvelous prophecy about Jesus: <sup>5</sup>*"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

<sup>6</sup>*In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* (v.5-6)

Those days that were coming when Jeremiah prophesied, those days have been fulfilled. Paul wrote to the Galatians: *"When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."* (Galatians 4:4) That promised descendent of David, that small shoot of the family tree of the

Davidic line was born in Bethlehem of Judea, born of the virgin Mary. He was the One who would sit upon the throne of David, ruling over a spiritual kingdom of which there would be no end. Jesus would bring salvation to His people! Yes, it began with the people of Judah, but it extended to the entirety of the spiritual Israel, all those whom God would call. By His grace Israel dwells in safety. We dwell in safety!

This is no false promise of peace as the lying prophets presented to the people Jeremiah's time, but a peace and safety that has a sure and certain foundation in Christ Jesus.

How can we be so confident of our salvation in Christ? Because of who Jesus is and what it is He has secured for us! He is "**the LORD our Righteousness!**" (v.6) That is how Jesus is to be known in all the earth, "**THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!**" Consider these words. Jesus is declared to be Lord, not in the sense of being the supreme ruler, but in the sense of being Jehovah, the covenant God who promised to bring life and salvation to a sinful world. Jesus is the Lord our Redeemer. We have life in His name. He secured that salvation for us in His holy life during which He fulfilled the law perfectly **for us**, and by His innocent sufferings and death in which He paid the full price of **our** sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world! (1 John 2:2)

The righteousness of God in Christ is now **OUR** righteousness. It is so by God's decree. It was God's plan to secure a righteousness which He would then credit to the world. The Lord declared that this righteousness of Christ is yours and mine. We come to know this truth, and benefit from this grace **when God's Word is taught in truth and purity by faithful messengers of God.** The Holy Spirit opened our hearts to believe and know that this Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. He is the Lord **OUR** Righteousness!

This is the name, the only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12) This is the message which God has delivered to us in His Word, which He has entrusted to us that we might share it with the world. It is vitally important that we be faithful and true witnesses of God's grace to a world entangled in so much sin. This world is full of sinners, just like us, sinners that desperately need the truth of the gospel. We are the ones who

are the messengers of God to urge others in the world to turn away from the sin that besets us and turn to Jesus who secured the righteousness which He credits to us by grace through faith in His name.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.