

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel

Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

False Shepherds, Thieves, and
Robbers (Part 2)

March 21, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 23:1- 15

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 34

I hope that you are all very familiar by now with what is often called the Good Shepherd chapter – John 10. This is where the Lord Jesus announced:

John 10:14 ESV I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

When Jesus declared that He is the Good Shepherd, He was clearly announcing to the Jews, who should have been very familiar with Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34, that He was the promised true Shepherd of His Father's flock. Namely, that He was the

Messiah. Furthermore, He was declaring (and you see it if you read John 10) that He had come to gather His true flock, all of whom would recognize and hear His voice and follow Him. That is what has been going on now for 2000 years. All who have been chosen by the Father have been given to the Son (see John 17) and every one of them without fail will hear Christ's call and follow Him. THAT is the only reason you are a Christian, if indeed you have been born again.

Now, in every era of church history and even before in Old Testament days, there have always been false shepherds. Lots of them. Far more of them than true shepherds who know and serve the Lord. It is true in our day as well. The large majority of so-called shepherds, ministers, preachers, elders in local churches are false shepherds. It has always been the case and we are foolish if we think it surely must be different in our day. It isn't. A large part of the New Testament epistles were written for this very reason:

Galatians 3:1 ESV O foolish Galatians!

Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

Many people who claim to be Christians don't want to hear this. They are careless and lazy. They don't want to think that they are in a war against an enemy who never sleeps. They want to assume that surely the majority of pastors and theologians and church members are really Christians. That is not the case. *It never has been the case.*

This subject of false shepherds then warrants our careful consideration. We need to know what they look like, what their tactics are, what motivates them, and where we can expect to find them.

So when we study chapters like Jeremiah 23, we must not err by assuming that this was Jeremiah's experience, that it is fine to read as history, but that we are in a far different situation than he was. No:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV **All** Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (17) that the man of God may be complete, equipped for

every good work.

ALL of the Bible you see. This then is how we must approach Jeremiah 23 –

Jeremiah 23:1-8 ESV “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD.

(2) Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.

(3) Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. (4) I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

(5) “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness

in the land. (6) In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

(7) "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' (8) but 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."

Woe to them!

Jeremiah 23:1-8 ESV "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD.

(2) Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.

Now, here is what the Lord thinks of these wolves. Through Jeremiah, He pronounces his woe upon them. His curse and judgment. Condemnation. Jesus pronounced the same upon the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders- *Woe to you, scribes Pharisees, hypocrites!* Woe awaits these kind. Hell is ready for them.

The Lord calls them shepherds but they were not His shepherds. They would have included the false prophets and the priests whose job it was to speak God's truth and lead the people in true worship, but they did not. Instead, by preaching lies which they attached the Lord's name to, and by neglecting the true worship of God, notice what they did:

Destroyed and Scattered

Now, what initially comes to our minds is the destruction and scattering which was about to occur through the invading Babylonians. And certainly these false shepherds were responsible for this. But notice the descriptive terms used here for the people:

- The sheep of my pasture
- My people

- My flock

And then He goes on to speak about how one day – listen to it again:

(3) Then I will gather **the remnant of my flock** out of **all the countries** where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. (4) **I will set shepherds over them who will care for them**, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, **neither shall any be missing**, declares the LORD.

(5) “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.** (6) In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

(7) “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ (8) but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of

the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.”

This language cannot be referring to the return under Nehemiah and Ezra – at least not primarily. That return was just a picture of the real ingathering of the remnant, of the sheep of His pasture, of His flock. It is clearly a return that would be effected when this *righteous branch, a descendant of David, who would reign as King and ALL His subjects would be saved.* This is the New Covenant in Christ.

So let’s think some more about this. This is something that has continued to happen and it is happening at full speed ahead in our day. False shepherds who destroy and scatter. Who is it that they destroy and scatter? *The remnant. God’s elect. His true flock.* Let me show you:

John 10:11-16 ESV I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (12) He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and

scatters them. (13) He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (14) I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, (15) just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (16) **And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

Jesus was the one who began this work, and is continuing it, of doing exactly what Jeremiah announced – the calling of the true sheep from all over the world and all of them, Jew and Gentile would be *one flock*.

So think about this very carefully. Who is it primarily that false shepherds destroy and scatter? Well, you could say that the counterfeits in Jeremiah's day did lead in the destruction of the nation and the scattering of the Jews who survived. But it is Christ's true flock, His true people who are destroyed and scattered by this kind. The evil people of Jeremiah's day liked the false shepherds. They liked their message. They didn't scatter. No, it was the genuine flock that scattered.

And so it has been through the centuries

and so it is now. The wicked who pretend to be Christ's sheep love the false gospel they hear and they are not persecuted and destroyed. This scattering of the flock is largely the message of the Book of Acts.

Now, don't be naïve about this. What this means is that as we continue in these last days and approach the time when Christ comes again, the true flock of God, the real sheep, are going to be scattered. Not only because of persecution, but because they are looking for "green pasture." That is to say, they are looking for true Bread and true Drink. And they are scattered in their efforts to find it because false shepherds are on the increase.

Right now we are able to reach Christ's people, literally around the world, and speak the Lord's Word to them – and they hear it and know it! They recognize the Good Shepherd's voice. BUT, we should be praying and thinking about what we are to do, how we are to reach Christ's flock, if the day comes when our primary medium for all this – online broadcasting and publishing – is taken away from us. Make no mistake, most all the social media giants do not want Christ's Word being preached through their forums.

Whatever happens, the Lord is going to bring every single one of His people back to the Land, which ultimately is the new heavens and earth.

The Land is Full of Them

Jeremiah 23:9-15 ESV Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and because of his holy words. (10) For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right. (11) “Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their evil, declares the LORD.

(12) Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall, for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the LORD.

(13) In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavory thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. (14) But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies;

they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.”

(15) Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: “Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.”

Here we see the greatest threat to a nation and people. It isn't what most people think – corrupt civil authorities. That is a great evil and the Lord will hold such evildoers accountable. But notice here that the source of the widespread wickedness among Jeremiah's countrymen was *the prophet and priest*. Because they were ungodly the nation was ungodly.

And consider this (verses 13-14) –

As evil as Baal worship idolatry was, the Lord regarded the evil of the prophet and priest in Judah to be even worse. It is one thing to blatantly embrace an idol, but it is a greater wickedness to continue to use the Lord's name, to claim to speak for Him, to lead worship in His house, all

the while living as Sodom and Gomorrah.

The greatest evil in our nation today, therefore, is to be found in the visible church. It is to be found in the church leaders and church members who do this:

Isaiah 1:10-15 ESV Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! (11) “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (12) “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?

(13) Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (14) Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. (15) When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your

hands are full of blood.

This, you see, is why Jeremiah was so shocked and sick in heart –

Jeremiah 23:9-11 ESV Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and because of his holy words. (10) For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right. (11) “Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their evil, declares the LORD.

And look at this again:

Jeremiah 23:13-14 ESV In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavory thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. (14) But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.”

Do you remember young Martin Luther's trip to Rome? Here is R.C. Sproul's description of it (speaking from Rome) -

500 years ago an obscure Augustinian monk from the monastery in Erfurt Germany had a crisis experience on this very spot.Now in 1511, when Luther came here, like all the rest of the pilgrims, he had to ascend the staircase on his knees until he got to the top of the stairs. And in a wave of doubt, he stood up and said aloud, 'who knows if it is true?' Luther's visit to Rome was one of the most disappointing episodes of his entire life. He was overwhelmed by the obvious presence of corruption among the clergy here in the city, and all the attempts that he had made to find peace with God through his work in the monastery were dashed in the smithereens with the disillusionment that he experienced here.

This must have been the experience of Jeremiah. To see shocking corruption and the most wicked sins practiced by those who were supposed to be leading God's people in righteousness. God's

hot anger and wrath, you can be sure, burns against such people.

What was the message these false shepherds were preaching and practicing? Here it is -

Jeremiah 23:16-20 ESV Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, **filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds,** not from the mouth of the LORD.

(17) **They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'**"

(18) For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?

(19) Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. (20) The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will

understand it clearly.

We see here the heart of the false gospel that is everywhere today, just as in Jeremiah's day. Look at its elements carefully:

- It gives the people empty hope, false promises that are claimed to be the promises of the Lord,
- The source of this false gospel is the wicked inventions of the false shepherds. The only "vision" they have is what they create in themselves.
- And their message appeals to the masses – *it shall be well with you*. The people they preached to, just like themselves, were wicked, sinful, unrepentant. And yet when the message they heard from prophet and priest was *it shall be well with you. No disaster will come upon you*. Elsewhere Jeremiah describes their message as "peace, peace, when there is no peace." Or "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord."

You don't see any scattering of the Lord's flock in this, but there was a scattering. This wicked message scattered *the true people of the Lord*.

Through persecution, as Jeremiah experienced, and because of this:

John 10:4-5 ESV When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (5) A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Application – The Same Today

Christ's chosen, His elect, His true sheep, are being scattered today. They are being scattered by false shepherds who preach the very same message the prophet and priest preached in the time of Jeremiah. *They tell wicked people it shall be well with them, disaster will not come upon them, no matter how they are living the Lord loves them and forgives them and they are on their way to heaven.*

This is the voice of the stranger. The sheep do not hear the Good Shepherd in it. This kind of message is a false gospel preached by thieves and robbers who creep into the fold but who are not sent by the Lord.

I wrote a blog article last week which will be published this week in which I applied Jesus' words here in Mark to our day:

Mark 12:38-40 ESV And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces (39) and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, (40) who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

These are the typical traits of the false shepherd. Be wise to them and beware.

The ministry here that the Lord has called us to is largely ministry *to the scattered flock of Christ*. The false shepherds have persecuted them. They are scattered because they do not recognize the voice of a stranger. *And when they hear the Good Shepherd's words, they light up.*

False shepherds create confusion and fog in our minds. They look like shepherds, they act like shepherds on the exterior, they hold a Bible and claim to be preaching what it says. *But they*

create, we might say, a cognitive dissonance in Christ's true sheep, because while they look like a shepherd, their voice and words are not the voice and words of the Good Shepherd.

I regularly hear from people who genuinely know Christ, but who have been confused for years. They read their Bible and it says things like this:

1 John 2:9-11 ESV Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. (10) Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. (11) But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Or –

1 John 2:15 ESV Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

And yet, what do they hear at church –

They hear the pastor telling wicked people it shall be well with them, that disaster will not come upon them, no matter how they are living the Lord loves them and forgives them and they are on their way to heaven.

And so the flock is scattered, just as it was in the days of Jeremiah.

Christ however is faithful. He is indeed the Good Shepherd and He promises to find and preserve His flock.

Matthew 18:12-14 ESV What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? (13) And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. (14) So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

And be sure of it – He is going to deal with every single one of these false shepherds. Woe to them!