Weep For Your Shepherds

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February 9, 1987

*It is time to weep and lament for the shepherds who are tending the Lord's sheep.* Weep for the pastors, the evangelists, the prophets and teachers — because God is about to send fearful judgments upon those who have become evil, sensuous and blind. The godly shepherds are themselves weeping between the porch and the altar over the condition of the church, but the corrupted ones who are self-centered will be dealt with by the Lord Himself.

Hear the awesome prophecy of Jeremiah: "'Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!' declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: 'You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:1,2 NAS, italics ours).

Jeremiah's heart was broken because of the corruption he saw in those who were called to lead God's people. The blunt sin and self-centeredness among the ministers of his day so crushed him, he trembled like a man drunken with wine. He cried, "As for the prophets: My heart is broken within me — all my bones tremble — I have become like a drunken man…overcome with wine…for both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:9,11 NAS, italics ours).

Then the prophet added these frightful words — "...from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land" (Jeremiah 23:15 NAS).

A frightening curse had fallen upon the land; there was adultery on every side; God's people had set themselves on a wicked course and they were spiritually dry and depressed. But their own shepherds had no pity on them. Their shepherds were blind to the judgment of almighty God that loomed just ahead. While enemy armies were approaching their very gates, the blind shepherds were preaching a soothing message of peace and prosperity. They convinced the people that the good times would never end.

Jeremiah knew why these self-centered shepherds, priests and prophets were not preaching against sin or warning the people. He knew why they were providing only superficial healing for God's people. It was because they themselves were bound by the same sins — they, too, were living a lie.

Listen to Jeremiah's indictment against them: "Among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers — so that no one has turned back from his wickedness…All of them have become to Me like Sodom…like Gomorrah" (Jeremiah 23:14 NAS).

The storm of the Lord had already gone forth, and God had warned His people through holy prophets that His anger would not be turned aside and that judgment was inevitable. But Jeremiah could hardly believe what they were preaching. These shepherds stood before a people who were walking in stubbornness, indulging in fornication and adultery, living under a curse, and soon to fall under devastating judgment — and they lied to God's people, preaching a message of false security. "They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord has said, "You will have peace" — and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity..."
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Published on World Challenge (https://worldchallenge.org)

will not come upon you" (Jeremiah 23:17 NAS).

If they had been men of prayer, holy and separated unto God — having sought Him with all their hearts — they would
have heard the distant thunder, they would have discerned that judgment was already determined, they would have
been aroused and consumed with a desire to awaken God's people. God said, "I did not send these prophets, but
they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have
announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way — and from the evil of
their deeds" (Jeremiah 23:21,22 NAS).

Jeremiah thundered — "Don't listen to them…they are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own
imagination — not from the mouth of the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:16 NAS). He added, "They borrow their messages from
one another." Also, "The prophets are as wind, and the Word is not in them" (Jeremiah 5:13 NAS).

These backslidden shepherds were so wrapped up in their own dreams, they substituted the deception of their own
hearts for the fires and unction of the true Word. There are many such dreamers and schemers in our pulpits today
— men of the cloth who go about saying, "I have a dream," God said, "I have heard what the prophets have said
who prophesy falsely in My name saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!'…The prophet who has a dream may relate
his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?"
declares the Lord. "Is not My word like fire…and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" (Jeremiah 23:25-29 NAS).

Self-centered shepherds cause backsliding!

There was no question in Jeremiah's mind as to why God's people had fallen into such a backslidden state. The
Word of the Lord came to him saying, "My people have become lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray.
They have made them turn aside..." (Jeremiah 50:6 NAS, italics ours).

God's people were in a stupor, lost, wandering about with no direction. They did not even know how far they had
strayed from the old paths. They had "...forgotten their resting place" (Jeremiah 50:6 NAS). Jeremiah said, "All who
came upon them have devoured them..." (Jeremiah 50:7 NAS). This refers to the demonic powers of Satan. What a
picture of present-day conditions in God's house. Multitudes of sheep are backsliding — they are lost and don't even
know it. The powers of hell assail them, plundering their lives, messing up their children, bringing confusion and
discord to their home and marriage. The old-fashioned altar calls where people wept with repentance are not even
acquainted with the old paths.

The self-centered shepherds are blamed by God for the apostasy among Christians. "Their shepherds have led
them astray...they have made them turn aside...." It is absolutely impossible to sidestep this blistering accusation
because it is God Himself speaking.

Isaiah saw a horrible sight among God's people — demonic powers marauding the flock, wreaking havoc. There
were no walls, no concerned shepherds, no one to say, "Enough!" Satan was having his own way. "All you beasts
of the field, all you beasts in the forest, come to eat" (Isaiah 56:9 NAS). The prophet was simply describing a
terrible situation among God's people. Throughout Scripture, the beasts refer to satanic powers. The devourer was
unchallenged — going about seeking to destroy. Why? Because the shepherds had become blind! The watchmen
were dreaming and chasing after their own greedy plans. Isaiah said, "His watchmen are blind, all of them know
nothing. All of them are dumb dogs unable to bark, dreamers lying down, who love to slumber; and the dogs are
greedy, they are not satisfied. And they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have turned to their own
way, each one to his unjust gain, to the last one" (Isaiah 56:10,11 NAS).

Isaiah was grieved because the Lord's people were being plundered and taken prisoner by the power of the
enemy. "...this is a people plundered and despoiled. All of them are trapped in caves or are hidden away in prisons;
they become a prey with none to deliver them, and a spoil, with none to say, 'Give them back!'" (Isaiah 42:22
NAS).

Where were the shepherds? Where were the servants of God when all this plundering was taking place? They
were of no help whatsoever — stumbling about blind, deaf, insensitive. "Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as
My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace with Me or so blind as the servant of the
Lord?" (Isaiah 42:19 NAS)
Jeremiah added, "These false dreamers...reckless boasters...do not furnish this people the slightest benefit..." (Jeremiah 23:32 NAS).

Ezekiel confirmed the awful truth that greedy, self-serving shepherds were the cause of the confusion and helplessness among God's people. He said, "...they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field...My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill...there was no one to search or seek for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 'As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock..." (Ezekiel 34:5-8 NAS).

So it is today! There is a lack of true and holy shepherds to lead God's people into holiness. The cry of the hungry is, "Where can I find a godly shepherd to feed my soul?" Those who do have a godly shepherd ought to be very thankful.

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. What a stinging message he delivered to God's servants — "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock" (Ezekiel 34:2,3 NAS).

Zechariah said the very same thing. Not only were the shepherds blind, occupied with their own dreams — they weren't even there when needed. He declared, "...the people wander like sheep, they are afflicted, because there is no shepherd" (Zechariah 10:2 NAS).

This same prophet deplored the way the shepherds were making merchandise of God's people — becoming fat and prosperous by fleecing the sheep. "Thus says the Lord my God, Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slay them and go unpunished, and each of those who sell them says, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich!' And their own shepherds have no pity on them" (Zechariah 11:4,5 NAS).

A day of judgment is coming upon the false shepherds!

The prophets have predicted a day of sudden judgment upon the shepherds and ministries which have deceived God's people. There comes a time when God can no longer put up with the greed, the self-centeredness, the preaching of false peace, the arrogance of ministries which encourage the stubborn, carnal Christians in their stiff-necked ways. God breaks forth suddenly and He stirs up a great storm. "...a great storm is being stirred up..." said Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 25:32 NAS).

According to the prophets, quick and fierce judgments will fall upon ministries and upon their works — and a wailing and a crying will be heard when it all starts crumbling. "Wail, you shepherds, and cry; and wallow in ashes, you leaders of the flock; for the days of your slaughter and your dispersions have come, and you shall fall like a choice vessel....Hear the sound of the cry of the shepherds, and the wailing of the leaders of the flock! For the Lord is destroying their pasture" (Jeremiah 25:34-36 NAS).

We have come to this same flashpoint of divine judgment upon shepherds and ministries once again. It will not be the devil shutting down shallow, deceptive ministries — it will be God! God will shut off their supply of money; debts will mount up, trouble will beak out on all sides. From within and without there will be turmoil, persecution, terror and fear — all allowed by God to bring an end to those ministries and shepherds who cater to the flesh. God has had enough of carnival Christianity, show business gospel, and cheap, degrading money raising — all in the name of Jesus. God said, "You shall fall like a choice vessel..." This speaks of the expensive, costly, prized ministries — recognized as choice vessels — but headed for a fall.

Zechariah also prophesied of God's wrath against merchandising shepherds. God warned through him, "My anger is kindled against the shepherds..." (Zechariah 10:3 NAS).

God has made it very clear that He will eventually take away the pulpits from shepherds and ministries who feed themselves while deceiving the sheep. "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed
themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them” (Ezekiel 34:10 NAS).

God, by His holy prophets, declared a year of punishment upon the wicked shepherds. Jeremiah spoke of this appointed time of judgment — “For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness,’ declares the Lord. ‘Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them, they will be driven away into the gloom and fall down in it; for I shall bring calamity upon them. The year of their punishment,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:11,12 NAS, italics ours).

Get ready! Christians will soon be bombarded, more than ever before, with very desperate and sad appeals for money from ministries about to fall. What dreadful appeals — what guilt and pressure will be forthcoming from all sides. It is the death rattle of dying ministries falling under divine judgment.

The need for shepherds after God's own heart

There is a desperate need for holy, God-fearing shepherds — because the people of the Lord are bent on backsliding. Without anointed shepherds to awaken and arouse them, they will continually revert to the world and wickedness.

It may cut us deeply, but the truth is: God's people have leaned toward the world and its idolatry from the very beginning. The Israel of Christ is just as stiffnecked as the Israel of Moses. God called Israel out of Egypt to be His own possession. He wanted a separated people who would love and serve Him out of a yielded heart. He said, “…I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself…to be My possession among all the peoples…And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:4-6 NAS).

Moses knew the tendency of their hearts. He said to them, "You are a stubborn, stiffnecked people…from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day I knew you" (Deuteronomy 9:6,7,24 NAS).

Moses added, "For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still with you today, you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then, after my death?” (Deuteronomy 31:27 NAS). Also, "For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord…” (Deuteronomy 31:29 NAS).

The people had for their shepherd the humblest, most dedicated man on the earth at that time. He spoke as the oracle of God and he walked in His glory. But even then Moses had to warn them, cajole them, judge and provoke them to go on with God. Even under such holy, godly teaching — they held on to their secret lust and idolatry. And Moses knew something about the nature of God's people — He knew that once the fear of God was lost, once the thundering against their sins ceased — they would backslide wholesale and return to their old stubborn ways. And it happened just as Moses prophesied.

Hear what God says about the nature of His children. "Why then is this people…slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return” (Jeremiah 8:5 KJV). "My people are bent to backsliding from me...” (Hosea 11:7 KJV). "I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said, 'I will not listen!' This has been your practice from your youth, that you have not obeyed My voice” (Jeremiah 22:21 NAS).

Is this perpetual backsliding only an Old Testament phenomenon? Hardly! At the end of the church age, you find Christ pronouncing judgment on the Laodicean chuch — backslidden, blind and corrupt — without knowing it. A boastful, stubborn people who pride themselves in having so much — but who in reality make the Lord nauseous.

Paul warned the New Testament church that merchandisers would come in among them, teachers whose god would be their belly — who would teach and preach for ungodly gain.

Idolatrous shepherds for idol-loving sheep

Those who refuse to forsake their idols and will not put aside their stumbling blocks will be led into deception by polluted ministers who will give them what they want.
Some elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord. God told the prophet, "These men have set up idols in their hearts and have put right before their eyes the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?" (Ezekiel 14:3 NAS).

God said, in essence, "I will answer idolatrous, corrupt living with idolatrous, corrupt messages. They are so set on their idols, so addicted, so bound to their hidden sin, so determined to follow me while indulging their flesh, I will give them teachers to scratch their itching ears. I will send among them shepherds who will use and abuse them — they will minister to the idolatry in their hearts — confirming them in it."

"Every man...who setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth a stumbling block of iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to...his idols...If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people....The punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him..." (Ezekiel 14:4-10 KJV).

We have the music of devils in God's house because the youth demanded it — the parents no longer cared — the pastors simply gave in and let the kids have what they wanted. A rich, over-fed church became addicted to luxury and now wallows in the idolatry of materialism — so God answers that idolatry with silver-tongued teachers who give them a theology to justify it.

Shepherds according to God's heart

While God is judging self-centered shepherds, He is at the same time raising up shepherds after His own heart. These same prophets who foretold the bringing down of greedy, corrupt shepherds and ministries also prophesied of the raising up of holy shepherds and godly pastors who will feed the flock in righteousness. God is going to have for Himself ministers who come forth out of Zion — God's holy hill. "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:14,15 KJV).

It begins with the people in the congregation — one here, two there — a hungry, awakened remnant whom He is calling out. God said, "And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:7 NAS).

When the people of God rid their lives and homes of all the idols, and when the Holy Spirit stirs them to holiness and purity — when their hearts become desperately hungry for truth and reality — God will give them a new heart. They will no longer be satisfied to sit under shepherds who are light and foolish. They will quickly discern which shepherds are true and false. They will be led into the sheepfold of a true shepherd who will feed their hungry souls. They will be reproved and love it — because it will produce in them a hatred for sin. Jeremiah prophesied, "'In those days and at that time,' declares the Lord, 'the sons of Israel will come, both they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the Lord their God they will seek. They will ask for the way to Zion, turning their faces in its direction; they will come that they may join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten'" (Jeremiah 50:4,5 NAS).

God said, "'I shall also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:4 NAS).

God has promised to raise up in the last days shepherds with the heart and characteristics of David. "Therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34:22,23 NAS).

This speaks of Christ, the one great Shepherd of all the chosen — but also of those shepherds whose hearts are like David's — repentant, God-fearing and jealous for His holiness.

What glorious promises God has given to us about being fed and shepherded in these last days. "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest...I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick..." (Ezekiel 34:15,16 NAS).
"Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arms He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (Isaiah 40:11 NAS).

"For the lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the waters of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17 NAS).

Conclusion

Let no disgruntled, rebellious preacher-hater or despiser draw comfort from this message. What I have presented is the message of the prophets, but with deep and genuine love and compassion for all hurting, troubled ministers. It is with love this strong word is delivered, having been first pierced by it in my own heart. God will not permit grumbling, dissatisfied Christians to touch His anointed — especially while such are in the refining fires.

God is so patient, so tender toward all His servants. The truth is, the shepherds who are truly anointed and touched by the glory and fire of God have come through much testing. Many were at one time misled, selfish, competitive, striving to be accepted or respected, driven by the hunger for success, caught up in earthly dreams. But God saw something in them that He loved — a repentant, hungry heart, a yearning for the deeper things of God. And those who were patient with them, those who prayed for them, loving them enough to wait until God had time to bring them back to Himself — they have, in turn, been so blessed because now they are being truly led by a shepherd who has come through the fires. They now have a man of God under whom they are growing in Christ; and they are now a part of the body that is wholly connected to the Head.

Weep for your shepherds! Weep in love, in sorrow, yet in hope! God has His true shepherds today, though few in number and mostly unknown, who will not compromise and who will care enough about the flock to expose their sins and call them to repentance. Pray for your pastor — he is being tested as never before. Pray for all the evangelists and all ministries. You need not follow shepherds who have lost their anointing — but don't touch them. This is a matter God is going to deal with personally.