

## **The True Preachers and the False Ones**

Jeremiah 23:16-29

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, August 15, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Do not listen to any preacher who makes you vain. Do not listen to any preacher who preaches to you words that do not come from the mouth of the Lord. Do not listen to any preacher who preaches to you his own ideas. Do not listen to any preacher who spurns the Lord. It might seem odd to think that there are preachers who spurn the Lord. One might wonder why they still preach, but those preachers are out there. They do preach. Do not listen to any preacher who preaches peace to you. In the stubbornness of their hearts they do not tell you about the evil that is coming upon you. In other words, they do not tell you about wrath.

Now even the preachers who are from the Lord will preach sermons that do not mention wrath. Even the good preachers are not going to talk about wrath all of the time. I don't talk about wrath all of the time because after a while that would get old. It is not because wrath is a subject that should be avoided. It is simply because that if you talk about anything too much it gets old.

What is wrong is when the preacher never mentions wrath at all? When the preacher avoids talking about wrath, he is avoiding talking about something that is part of the nature of God. God is angry. He is angry at sin. God will damn. He will damn the sinners. The wages of sin is death. To avoid that subject is to put the people's souls in peril. If nothing is done about the wrath of God, to hell the people will go for their sins and there will be no redeeming them from hell once they are there. Hell is permanent.

There are plenty of preachers out there who never mention hell. They never explain death in terms of wrath. They never consider that the evil things that happen to us in this life are the result of our own disobedience.

The reason that they do not talk about God's wrath is because they do not want to talk about what makes God angry. Sin makes God angry. They don't want to talk about sin. The reason that they don't want to talk about sin is simple: they don't want to admit that they are sinners. They don't want to make the congregation admit that they are sinners. If they did that, someone in the congregation might not like them too much for it.

If the preacher doesn't talk about sin, he doesn't have to own up to anything. Think of it. If I never preached about sin, then none of you could use my sermons against me. But when I preach about sin I run the risk of doing the very thing that I am preaching against. And I am certain that someone is going to notice my hypocrisy. I just hope that the person who notices it has the decency to point it out to me and doesn't let me just keep on sinning.

If the preacher doesn't talk about sin, he doesn't risk offending anyone. It seems to me that most preachers succumb to this temptation especially in regard to sexual ethics. We seem to believe that it is wrong only if society thinks that it is wrong. We do not seem to believe that it is wrong if God says that it is wrong. We have subscribed to suburban ethics. We will let people live however they want and we won't say anything until it hurts someone else. If it hurts God, we are not as concerned about that. After all if God has no wrath, what is He actually going to do?

Now when wrath is absent from a preacher's sermons, there is something else that is absent from his sermons also: the cross of Jesus Christ. The whole point of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is

to atone for our sins. That is whole point. If there is no sin, or if there is sin, but God is not mad at it, then the atonement of Jesus Christ is irrelevant.

One would think that preachers who do not believe in God's wrath would give up altogether. Jesus talks about wrath a lot. Jesus preaches about sin and repentance. Jesus explains His death is an atonement for sin. With all of these realities one might think that preachers who do not believe in wrath would give up on preaching altogether. Would that life would be so easy. Life is not that easy.

They keep on preaching. They preach their own ideas. They preach their own notions. They preach what they think. They will find Bible passages and quote them out of context in order to justify what they think. It gives what they think a veneer of godliness if they can quote the Bible.

If the apostolic testimony means anything to being a Christian then we must take into account what Saint Paul tells the Corinthians, "I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." If the definition of apostolic preaching is to know nothing else than Jesus Christ and Him crucified then something crucial is missing when the cross of Jesus is never mentioned, when His atoning death is never mentioned, when the forgiveness of sins is never mentioned.

If the death of Christ atones for sin and there is hell to pay if we do not have that atonement then the preacher who never talks about wrath and the preacher who never mentions Jesus is preaching his people into damnation. It is like the doctor who never mentions cancer. His patients die from cancer and neither he nor they can figure out what is wrong because he will never mention it or acknowledge that it exists. It is like the government who does not enforce law on its people. There is chaos in the land and no one can figure out what is wrong because the government won't say that anything is wrong. Such preachers will be surprised when they and their people wind up in hell and will wonder to themselves why there are there. The preacher never mentioned this to us.

Folks, if there is a problem, it is foolhardy not to address it. It is foolhardy in the face of God's wrath to ignore it.

If you find a preacher who never preaches wrath and never preaches the cross of Jesus Christ, flee!

There is wrath, people. There is suffering, death and hell to pay. Repent and believe the good news!

The tempest of the Lord will come. Wrath will go forth. The tempest of the Lord will dance upon the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn away until He has accomplished it. The wrath of the Lord will not turn away until He has raised the purposes of His heart. Only in later times will we fully understand.

There is wrath in suffering. The earth is cursed because of sin. The world is subjected to decay because of sin. That means that cancer is wrath. Destructive meteorological phenomena are wrath regardless of what the false preachers may say. Drought is wrath. Floods are wrath. Childlessness is wrath. Hurricanes are wrath. Earthquakes are wrath.

Some wrath is obvious. The destruction caused by the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is obvious wrath. God is punishing us for our greed and negligence. That is apparent. Some wrath is not so obvious, Hurricane Katrina or the Haitian Earthquake. Sometimes we figure out later on why God punished us the way that He did. Sometimes we will have to wait until the resurrection before it becomes plain.

Preachers need to be careful not to presume that they know the specific sins which caused this or that disaster. Anybody may be struck at any time by any kind of disaster by simply not fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. It doesn't take some specific thing. Sometimes the specific thing is obvious. Sometimes it isn't. What God will not tolerate is a denial of His wrath and a denial of His power.

Yet there are preachers who will deny both. They will say that God is not in the earthquake. They mean by definition God had nothing to do with the earthquake. God was not in the hurricane. God was not in the cancer. What they are implying without saying it is that God does not condemn us to death because of our sins. God does not damn.

It is false. God did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. God did not send them, yet they ran. They do not tell My people to turn from their evil ways. They do not tell my people to turn from the wickedness of their actions. They do not tell my people to repent.

If a preacher never exhorts you to repent, he is false preacher. Avoid him. He will lead you into damnation. He will lead you to believe that there is nothing that you are doing that is wrong. He will never ask that you confess anything. He will never ask that you admit anything. He will not be honest with you. He is not telling you the whole picture and by withholding God's wrath, he is leading you into it.

A preacher that exhorts you to repent is just like a man on the side of the road warning you about the oncoming bus that is approaching you from behind which you cannot see or hear. Would you rather he remain silent and let the bus hit you? Or would you rather he point out your stupidity for walking in the middle of the road. Your pride will be hurt. You will be embarrassed, but you will be alive.

Which you rather be? Never wrong and in hell or humbled and saved?

And folks you cannot hide from God. He is everywhere.

Am I only a God close by and not a God far away? Don't I fill heaven and earth? When a person goes into a hiding place, don't I see him? It doesn't matter if no one else sees you. The Lord sees you. It doesn't matter if you commit the sin only after you have driven to the next town, the Lord lives in that town also. It doesn't matter if you commit the sin only on certain days. The Lord lives on those days also.

How long will these preachers quote the Bible? I have a passage! I have a passage! I love the Scripture! I acknowledge that the Scripture is the only rule and norm for faith and life! How long will they quote the Scripture in order to justify a lie? How long will they preach the deceitfulness of their own hearts?

They think to make My people forget My Name. They think to make my people forget about their sins. They think to make My people forget about My Son and everything that He has done for them. They think to make My people forget about the resurrection. They think to get My people to forget about their Baptism and the Holy Supper.

They quote the Scripture to their neighbor, but they have forgotten My Name just as their fathers forgot My Name to worship a god of their own invention, a god without Jesus, a Jesus without a cross.

If a preacher has the Scripture, let him quote it. If a preacher has My word, let him preach it, but let him preach it truly. What has chaff to do with the grain? Isn't My Word like fire? Isn't My Word like a hammer? It shatters the rock.

The reason that the Lord tells you that His word is like fire and like a hammer is so that you recognize it when you hear it.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.