

Poor Pastors; Prodigal People
Isaiah 56:9-57:13

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^A Acts 20:27-30
^B 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Jeremiah 6:13-17, 12:9-11, 23:1-2; Ezekiel 3:16-21, 33:2-7, 34:1-6
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^E Isaiah 1:10-17
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A. Introduction

1. Why Poor Pastors?

- a. not poor in terms of money or possessions
- b. the word pastor is just the old English word for shepherd
- c. these pastors are spiritual shepherds who do their duty poorly
- d. what is the duty of a pastor? of a spiritual shepherd?

2. Paul was returning to Jerusalem from his final missionary journey. He stopped at Miletus and called for a conference of the elders from the church of nearby Ephesus: elders who were shepherds, watching over God's flock in that city. Paul challenged these men with the following and other words as found in Acts 20:27-30 – 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

- a. well, as Paul warned, the wolves came, and they are still here today!
- b. so that the flock of God – His church – is suffers as a result

3. Isaiah had a similar message in the passage we just read

- a. the period being foretold by Isaiah is uncertain
 - (A) perhaps it was the reign of Manasseh following Isaiah's death
 - (B) perhaps it was the time of exile, as both Jeremiah and Ezekiel record, as well as the years that followed
 - (C) when the flock of God wandered away because of poor pastors
- b. yet this passage is as relevant today as it was then
 - (A) wolves in sheep's clothing are ravaging God's flock

- (B) people, churches, denominations have fallen away from God
- (C) a high dignitary of one denomination recently responded to the criticism of his church's practice in a certain area by saying in effect, 'yes, the Bible does condemn what we are doing, but we do not think that the Bible applies any longer as to this practice.'
- (D) with that kind of double-talk, there can be no question but that the visible church in Canada is in need of Holy Spirit revival

4. should we be concerned for the fate of modernistic, liberal churches?

a. shouldn't we just be concerned for our own evangelical community?

b. In 1700 both England and France were dismally situated: culturally, politically, spiritually

- (A) Louis XIV by revoking the Edict of Nantes had effectively removed all rights of French Protestants, so to many were pressured into conversion to Catholicism or fled to neighbouring nations
- (B) In England, as a result of the 1662 Act of Uniformity, more than 2,000 Puritan ministers were expelled from the Established Church for refusing practices in the Book of Common Prayer
- (C) the ruling classes in each country lived in luxury, the population in hardship: enterprising people left for the new world
- (D) Louis XV was born in 1710, lived a godless life until dying in 1774; and 15 years later came the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, the collapse of much of French society
- (E) but England was spared that turmoil. Was it politics? no. Was it because of its navy? no. Three brothers, all born around 1700, trained and led a group of itinerant preachers who spread the message of Jesus Christ throughout England: these were Samuel Jr., Charles and John Wesley – revival came to England

c. the hope of this country is not in politics, nor in trade, nor in finance

d. the hope of this country is that the visible church of Jesus Christ return to the preaching of the Scriptures, the message of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

e. such a revival can only come by the work of the Holy Spirit

f. that is the why and the what of which we should be concerned

g. Paul was concerned; Isaiah was concerned

B. Poor Pastors – False Shepherds 56:9-12

1. Their Failure to Warn of Danger (verses 9-10)

- a. Isaiah draws a frightening picture of the danger to God's people: 'All you beasts of the field, come near and devour; yes, and all you beasts of the forest. Israel's watchmen are blind, knowing nothing; they are like dumb dogs, unable to bark; dreamers lying down, loving to slumber.'^{2}
- b. 'it's quite safe,' says Isaiah to the enemies of God's people, 'you can come in and spoil them; eat them up whole.'
- c. why? because the watchmen – and that is a term that is used in the Bible to describe the prophets or shepherds that God had sent to warn and to teach His people – they are not doing their job
 - (A) these watchmen – shepherds, pastors – are spiritually blind just as many are in the church today – they cannot see the danger
 - (B) they know nothing – they have left the place of spiritual truth, God's word to follow man's ideas; to be politically correct, but doctrinally false
 - (C) they are like sleepy watchdogs who cannot even lift their heads to bark when the danger comes
 - (D) they follow their own dreams; they have lost the vision of God

2. Their Self-Indulgence (verses 11-12)

- a. you will find in your handout references to where these false pastors are described in Jeremiah and Ezekiel^{3}, watchdogs changed into wolves: 'They are greedy dogs, never getting their fill; shepherds without understanding, turned to their own way, completely to unjust gain.'
 - (A) qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:3, 8 that are to be met before a person becomes an overseer or deacon: they are to be 'free from the love of money' or 'not ... fond of sordid gain'.
 - (B) these shepherds fail on all accounts as do some shepherds in the church today who relish their power, prestige and position
 - (C) those same standards are that they be 'temperate' and 'not ... addicted to much wine' – but listen how these false shepherds talk: 'come,' they say, 'let me buy wine, and let us drink our fill of strong drink; that's for today, and tomorrow will be even better!'
- b. what a painful environment for those who love the Lord, then or now!

- C. The Righteous Remnant Spared 57:1-2
1. God has a word of comfort for those who remain true: *'The righteous perishes, and there is no man laying it upon his heart; and men of mercy are taken away, with none perceiving that from the presence of evil the righteous is taken away. He enters into peace; they rest upon their beds, whoever has walked straight before him.'*
 - a. godly men are taken from this world in death – and the implication is that this is much before their expected time – but no one pays any attention – the people are so spiritually insensitive that they do not even ask, *'Why do bad things happen to good people?'*
 2. but God does this that His people be spared from even worse things
 - a. from the wrath that is to come
 - b. God takes home His own people in peace – Shalom – a word for the ultimate in health, spiritual health – and they will know His rest
 - c. a similar statement is made in Revelation 14:13 before the execution of the final wrath of God: *'And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them."'* – God will spare his righteous remnant
 - d. but when the wolves, the false take over from the true shepherds, the damage is done; the visible church, in the OT, Israel; in this day, the church that claims to be Christian; the true church suffers
 - e. church history tells us how this cycle has repeated before: poor pastors; prodigal people – falling away from the truth, from God
- D. Prodigal People 57:3-13a
1. Their Immoral Character (verses 3-4)
 - a. *'But come here, you sons of a sorceress, Offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute. Against whom do you jest? Against whom do you open wide your mouth And stick out your tongue? Are you not children of rebellion, Offspring of deceit'* (NAS)
 - b. using terms like son, child, or offspring of a person in relation to either a quality or a stereotype individual, is Scripture's way of describing that person's character

- c. Israel, as a nation, has taken on the character of the idolatrous people around them: sorcery emphasising that they follow the anti-God, the Devil; adultery, that they are a false wife to Yahweh, the true God
- d. How do these regard the truth? mocking; making faces and fun of
- e. So are God's people mocked and belittled today; 'fundamental' is used in derision; 'evangelical' with a grin; 'Bible believer' as belittling; 'Born again' as a joke – and this coming as often as not from leaders in churches claiming to be Christian

2. Their Pagan Passions (verses 5-8)

- a. these verse, which I will not read again, combine a picture
 - (A) the just announced adulterous character of the so-called people of God in their relationship to Yahweh, their Redeemer & Saviour
 - (B) with the pagan, immoral worship practices that they had adopted from the surrounding religions and nations
- b. to describe how far they had fallen from God's purposes for them
- c. when the people of the world, unbelievers, can no longer distinguish the church of Jesus Christ – the Christian – from any other person, from any other religion – then that church has ceased to be the salt of the earth and the light to the world – it needs radical revival

3. Their Misplaced Trust (verses 9-11)

- a. God now refers to a past event: the attempts by Ahaz to seek alliance with the king of Assyria: 'You went to the king with oil; you multiplied your perfumes; you sent your ambassadors even afar; you deeply abased yourself, even to hell. The length of your journey tired you out, but you did not say, "there's no hope!" You found new strength, and so you did not faint. Of whom were you anxious and fearful that made you to be false? ... and did not remember me, nor lay it to heart? Is it not that I held my peace for so long that you do not fear me?'
- b. the seeking of help from anyone but God by the people of God is an affront to almighty God – these people had gone in time past to great lengths to woo the help of Assyria – and with each step towards the world their reverence and fear for the Rock-Solid God diminished

- c. God's patience with His people did not result in their repentance
- d. how often God's people seem to adopt worldly wisdom and worldly methods to run the church of God, to organize its programs
- e. but the church is, or it should be, engaged in a spiritual warfare, and only spiritual weapons will work: **'For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.'** (2 Corinthians 10:3-4) – and it is notable that these verses are speaking of strongholds – fortresses – existing within the church, not outside; in the minds of professing Christians, not in unbelieving enemies.

4. Their Coming Exposure (12-13a)

- a. God will not allow this situation to continue indefinitely
 - (A) we pray in the Name of Jesus and for His sake
 - (B) for the sake of God's great Name, the church which bears His Name will be purified until it again carries out His mission
 - (C) God will demonstrate the truth: **'I, I will make conspicuous your righteousness and your works for what they are: but it will not profit you.'** – Judah was going through all the form of sacrifice that Moses had established – righteous deeds – but God was having none of it – read Isaiah 1:10-17 – He was fed up with sacrifices
 - (D) so also, God will tolerate only so long the form without substance that takes the place of worship in much of the church today
- b. Israel pretended to worship God, but their trust was elsewhere, so God warns them **'When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry all of them up, And a breath will take them away. ...'** (NAS) – we need that the wind of the Holy Spirit sweep away all the things in the church – our church and our lives – which do not honour Him, that revival may come to the people of God

E. The Promise to the Righteous Remnant 57:13b

- 1. to those who remain faithful, this promise is given: **'... But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land And will possess My holy mountain.'** (NAS) – pray that God's visible church, His holy mountain, might be again possessed by those who indeed are His people, who take refuge in Him

F. Conclusion

1. the church's heating plant^{4}.

a. a group of five students were visiting London and thought that they would like to hear the famed C. H. Spurgeon preach. Arriving early at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, they were standing outside the door, when a portly man approached them offered to show them around, and asked if they would like to see the church's heating plant. Well that wasn't why they had come, but it being early, and not much else to do, they agreed. Going downstairs, opening a door, the guide whispered, 'This is our heating plant.' In surprise the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, asking a blessing on the coming service. Their guide, Charles Spurgeon, then introduced himself to them

b. this is the way to revival: 'If ... My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' (2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

2. I don't know who first said it, but it should be our prayer, too: 'Lord, send a revival, and let it begin with me! '

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AV Authorized (King James) Version
NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers

Some of my favourite commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870

EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan

Volume 6, Isaiah, by Geoffrey W. Grogan, Principal, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, Scotland;

EJY – The Book of Isaiah by Edward J. Young; © 1965; Wm. B. Eerdmans

K&D – Commentary on the Old Testament, by Keil & Delitzsch; Volume 7, Isaiah, by Franz Delitzsch

Kerux – The sermon and illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick to be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. in places I have used my own loose translation, in others those of EJY and K&D.
3. Jeremiah 6:13-17, 12:9-11, 23:1-2; Ezekiel 3:16-21, 33:2-7, 34:1-6
4. Adapted from Kerux illustrations #5250