
Do You Really Want to Hear What God Is Saying?

By David Wilkerson

September 7, 1992 A few weeks ago I asked those on our mailing list to write to us and tell us about their church. In other words, if yours is a good church, tell us about it - or, if your church is in a difficult time, tell us why. I requested that no one name their church or pastor, and that the information given be without gossip, rancor or bitterness. I simply wanted to take the spiritual pulse of America's churches.

Thousands of letters poured in from all over the United States and Canada. My wife, Gwen, and I read them for days. Hearing the heart-cry of so many Christians has been helpful and yet depressing - enlightening and yet shocking!

Thank God for all the glowing reports of both churches and pastors. A typical response (reflected in about one of every six or seven letters) read:

"All is well in our church. Our pastor is a true man of God who is not afraid to preach the Word. He is loving yet fearless. Our income is up and we are growing. The worship is uplifting. We can hardly wait for the next service!"

But the overwhelming majority of the letters we received were from people who are hurting spiritually. They wrote heart-rending letters about the deadness of their church. Almost without fail, they began: "We love our pastor, but... "

They went on to say: "Our church is boring. Many people sleep during the preaching! The pastor is afraid to offend anybody, and he seldom preaches anything negative...."

"We are dying spiritually, and we can't find a church that's any better. We long to see an outpouring of the Holy Spirit - to hear a convicting, stirring word from heaven! The pastor keeps preaching, 'Love, love, love' - but we are 'loving' each other right into spiritual coldness!"

Pastors also wrote to us: "We need encouragement! The workload is over-whelming. Our people say they want to hear the truth, that they want reproof and exposing of sin. But when the Spirit moves on me and I do reprove them, they walk out!"

One pastor said, "I've been kicked out of three churches in the past two years. The people told me they wanted me to preach without compromise. But when I did (and I did it in love) they refused to listen! It makes me wonder if there is anyone left who really wants to hear the truth."

Jeremiah Was Scathing in His Rebukes Against Certain Pastors! I believe God has a host of godly pastors today. But the prophet Jeremiah issued this rebuke to hirelings: "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:1). "For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord" (verse 11).

Jeremiah called these men "prophets of Sodom" - and he listed the kinds of wickedness he saw in them:

1. At the top of the list was adultery - pastors with eyes full of lust! They are sensual, carnal,

having roving eyes.

2. They walk in lies - the truth is not in them.
3. They strengthen evildoers in their evil ways. They won't expose the sin of their prominent members, because they'll risk cutting their tithe-income!
4. They speak visions that are not from God - but rather, fleshly visions designed to build their own egos and reputations.
5. They encourage compromisers, afraid to lose their affection and support.
6. They promote personal dreams, saying, "God said so," when God did not.
7. They use lightness (joking) in the pulpit - not wholesome humor, when it is fitting, but shallow joking!
8. They borrow messages from others - they have no word of their own from God.
9. And, worst of all, they have a self-serving message. Jeremiah said of them: "They make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you" (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

Beloved, you can hear this message today in pulpits all across America: "Don't be afraid - America is going to be blessed again! We're going to be prosperous, everything's going to be fine. We're all doing okay! America will always be special to God...."

But the sad truth is that many who preach this soft message have lost their anointing. God doesn't speak to them anymore - because they live in sin!

Scores of pastors, evangelists and teachers have no right to stand in the pulpit because they're unclean! They sneak into video stores, and then sit in their studies watching filth from the pit of hell. (I know this to be true because we receive pitiful letters from their wives!) Their eyes and minds are ever ablaze with nudity and fornication of all kinds. Most of these unholy hirelings need to be driven out of the ministry - they're damning multitudes of trusting sheep and sending countless young people to hell!

But Jeremiah also spoke of another kind of pastor: "His servants, the prophets!" These were men of prayer, full of the truth and the Holy Spirit. They were true shepherds - holy, unblamable, fearless servants who were "sent unto you... rising early" (Jeremiah 23:4).

The Bible says these men of God "hath stood in the counsel of the Lord" (verse 18). The word for "stand" means, in other words, having a give-and-take communion with the heavenly Father! Over and over in the Bible, you'll find this quality in every man of God. Elijah stood before wicked Ahab and said, "I've come to you, king, because I have stood before the Lord!"

"Who... hath perceived... his word... who hath marked his word, and heard it" (Jeremiah 23:18). The prophets heard counsel from God - and they comprehended it and preached it! God says these kind of servants "cause my people to hear my words... (turning) them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doing" (23:22). They are not afraid to expose sin in the house of God, no matter who gets convicted!

The Spiritual Death and Compromise in the Church Today Cannot Be Blamed Entirely on Backslidden Shepherds! Jeremiah himself was everything a hungry congregation could ask for in a shepherd. He was shut in with God; he couldn't be bought at any price; he wept over the sins of God's people. He was ready to lay down his life for the church - and indeed he was cast into jail and into a deadly mud

pit for speaking the truth!

Time after time, Scripture says Jeremiah waited in the Lord's presence until "the word of the Lord came to him." (This phrase appears over fifty times in the book of Jeremiah!)

In those days, there was no shortage of a true word from God. Indeed, the Lord has always had his true prophets and pastors, even in times of compromise and declension. Time after time, you read: "And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah... to Jeremiah... to Ezekiel..." It came to Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

And God's word was always a clear warning - full of judgment against sin, yet full of hope for the repentant. It was a call to separation from ungodliness - and to a continual life of holiness!

Usually there were three kinds of responses to the word of truth. And you see these same three responses among Christians today:

1. Many People Simply Do Not Want To Hear What God is Saying!The Israelites had no intention of quitting their sinful ways. Instead, they wanted a soft, soothing word. The prophet Isaiah said of them:

"This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord; which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" (Isaiah 30:9-10).

At first, I had a difficult time accepting this passage. I thought, "Are there children of God today who would actually demand of their pastors a deceiving message?"

Yes, there are! You may not hear them say those words - but you can see their response when the pastor brings a strong prophetic word. They leave church, thinking, "I can't take this kind of preaching - it unnerves me! I prefer simple Bible teaching on how to cope with my problems."

Beloved, that is almost a paraphrase of what Isaiah said Israel wanted: "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isaiah 30:11). They so despised any word exposing sin that they demanded any such message be stopped!

The Lord warns those who do not want to hear the true Word of God: "Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; but have walked after the imagination of their own heart... therefore... I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink" (Jeremiah 9:13-15).

God warns: "You can choose to sit under that kind of preaching - smooth, comforting, soft and easy. But it's poison! You're drinking in death!"

2. Others Say Privately They Want To Hear What God Is Saying - But Their Pride Hinders Them From Hearing!King Zedekiah best illustrates this kind of person. He was a man of great power, influence and authority. His father, Josiah, was a godly man - so we know Zedekiah had a background in holiness and the things of God. Yet when this man inherited the throne, he had no time for the Lord - that is, until a crisis struck!

Jerusalem was besieged suddenly - surrounded by a ruthless Chaldean army, strong and powerful! Eventually there was a shortage of bread, and water ran low. Zedekiah called for the prophet Jeremiah, imploring him, "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us" (Jeremiah 37:3). Like so many who face rough times, Zedekiah appeared to want the truth. He sounded so sincere - calling the nation to prayer!

But Jeremiah prophesied destruction to the king. About that time, word hit the surrounding Chaldeans that Pharaoh was approaching from the west with a huge army. Panic struck the Chaldean camp - and they started to flee: "When the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard... they departed from Jerusalem" (verse 5).

Imagine the cheers atop Jerusalem's walls as the Israelites watched their enemy flee! You can hear all the leaders, judges and magistrates: "Our walls are not cast down - our city is not burning. So much for old Jeremiah's gloom and doom!"

I believe the wine flowed and food was plenteous that night as they threw open the gates, announcing a week of official celebration: "The crisis is over - let us celebrate!" True to human nature, everyone put the crisis out of their minds and went back to daily business. King Zedekiah must have been embarrassed by his call for prayer, thinking, "How could I have been so alarmed and intimidated by that prophet?"

Now, who do you think was the most mocked, ridiculed man in the city that night? The one who prophesied destruction! As Jeremiah watched from a lonely rooftop, he must have thought, "Lord, You told me to prophesy judgment - but look at what's happened! The Chaldeans are gone, the economic crisis is over. You told me to warn that our women and children would be slain and the city burned down. But there is no bloodshed, no shortage. Was it all in my mind?"

Suddenly, Scripture says, "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah" - again! He was told to go to King Zedekiah and prophesy that the Chaldeans would turn around - and they would come back and finish the job!

Jeremiah must have cried, "No, Lord - not again! Who will believe me now?" But he went to the king's courtyard and cried out: "Zedekiah! The Chaldeans are coming back - and they're going to burn down Jerusalem!"

Zedekiah must have shaken his head in disbelief - he'd heard it all before! So he simply turned Jeremiah off and went back to merrymaking with everyone else. But not much later, a scout rode up with the news: "The Chaldeans are back!" The siege continued - and this time the Chaldeans didn't leave!

Zedekiah summoned Jeremiah again - this time in secret - and asked him, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jeremiah 37:17). In other words: "I really want to know what the Lord is saying!"

Jeremiah answered, "Yes, there is a word. You are going to be captured by the king of Babylon!" But Zedekiah still didn't receive it. He only hardened himself - because it wasn't what he wanted to hear!

Eventually, conditions in the besieged city grew worse. Starving mothers boiled and ate their babies. There was nothing left - and the end was in sight. As the king walked along the wall in sackcloth, he looked at all the deprivation - and he called on Jeremiah one final time. He brought the prophet into

his chambers through a private entrance: "And the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me" (Jeremiah 38:14). In other words, "Give me the hard truth, with no smooth words. I really want to hear what God is saying this time!"

Beloved, there are many who say, "I want to hear the Word of God! I want it straight, uncompromising, pure." But you can rest assured: These will never receive what God says, because pride hinders them from hearing when the truth comes!

Jeremiah told the king to surrender to the Chaldeans - and that he, his family and the people would live. Even the city would be spared. But if he didn't surrender, it would all be destroyed - and he would die!

Zedekiah answered, "I can't do that - I'm afraid of the Jews that have already surrendered. They'll mock me, shame me - they'll tear me apart!" Sure enough, he rejected God's word to him. Even though everyone was dying and the city was collapsing, his pride was still intact!

Zedekiah ended up trying to escape in the middle of the night, but he was captured. His sons were killed before his eyes, his wives were ravaged, and his eyes were burned out in their sockets - all because of pride!

3. Many Cry And Clamor For A Pure Word - But It Is A Cover-Up For Long-Standing, Hidden Idolatry In Their Heart! When I read all the pitiful letters from Christians, saying, "We need a strong, pure word from the Lord's heart," I prayed: "Oh God, where are our modern-day Jeremiahs? Where are the pastors who will not be afraid to preach holiness?"

But I was shocked and surprised at the Lord's answer to me. He said, "David, many say they want to hear My word to them - and there is a holy remnant who sigh and cry over the wickedness in the land. They yearn for the truth and will obey Me. Yet multitudes will not listen when the truth is brought forth! They will reject any message that touches their pet sins or idols!"

How clearly this is illustrated in Jeremiah 42! Only a remnant was left, and Johanan was now the leader. They decided to run to Egypt - so they camped out at Bethlehem and called on Jeremiah to try to get a word from the Lord:

"We beseech thee... pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant... that the Lord thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.... The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee" (Jeremiah 42:1-6).

Have you ever heard a people who sounded more serious about hearing a true word from God? They said, "We want the truth badly! Whatever you tell us, we'll obey it - whether we like it or not!"

So Jeremiah shut himself in with God for ten days. He must have prayed, "God You heard how they cried out for a pure word. Give me a word from Your heart!"

But the Lord answered him, "They're lying! They don't want My word. They're full of idolatry! They just say they want the truth - but they've already made up their minds to do their own thing!"

Jeremiah came to them with God's word: "If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down... Be not afraid of the king of Babylon... for I am with you to save you from his hand....

"But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land... but we will go into the land of Egypt... then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye have feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt... and there ye shall die" (Jeremiah 42:10-16).

The leaders accused Jeremiah of speaking falsely - and, just as God had told Jeremiah, they decided to go their own way. They said, "We will go into... Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread" (Jeremiah 42:14).

They Rejected God's Word Because They Were Tired Of the Sound of the Trumpet - Weary of Spiritual Warfare! The leaders of the remnant said, "It's too big of a struggle here. We're tired of hearing all the trumpets and the thunder!" So they went their own stubborn way - and they died by the sword, as God had said, except for a tiny number.

This is a picture of many last-day Christians: tired of hearing prophetic trumpets announcing judgments to come, weary of spiritual warfare and life's struggles. They say, "Please, leave me alone! No more convicting meetings or sermons to upset me. I just want a nice, quiet, soothing place to worship."

Are you tired of hearing it all? Have you become so weary that you think, "I just want some peace - I can't exist in this kind of tension!" Or do you really want to hear the straight truth? Do you want a prophet of God to point a finger at your heart and say, "You are not diligent in seeking God - your heart is growing cold! And you won't be able to receive any word from him until you deal with your idolatry!"

I've had to face that question honestly too: Do I really want to hear what God is saying? My honest answer is: No, Lord - I really don't know if I want to hear all You have to say. I don't know if I want You to probe as deeply as You want to - because I don't know if I can handle it. I don't know if I want to hear any more about Your awful judgments falling on America. I've heard so much that only Your grace holds me above it!"

A young pastor asked me recently, "Why do we need to know what's ahead? Can't we just leave that in God's hands and go our way rejoicing?"

Beloved, the Lord warns us to prepare us! You see, he is coming for a prepared Bride - and knowing that fire is about to fall from heaven, He forewarns us in love: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11). We're not to panic when judgment hits - we're to be built up and ready!

A Prophetic Warning To New York City! Right now, I believe God is speaking a warning to New York City. And I wrestled with His severe word as I prepared this message. I prayed, "Lord, is this really going to happen?" Again and again, I heard the still, small voice: "Preach it - warn! Those who want the truth will receive it!"

Dear saint, this warning is not meant to scare anyone. It's meant only for you to take to the Lord and pray. This is what I believe the Lord showed me:

Thirty days of chastisement will fall on New York City such as the world has never seen. God is going to let down the walls! There will be unimaginable violence and looting - over a thousand fires will be burning at the same time, throughout the city and its boroughs. Times Square will be ablaze, and the flames that ascend into the heavens will be seen for miles. Firetrucks will not be able to handle it all!

Trains and buses will shut down for a few weeks. Billions of dollars will be lost. Broadway shows will stop completely for weeks at a time. It will cause businesses to flee the city in an unstoppable hemorrhage. The violence will be so ferocious, it will shock the whole world. Our streets will be lined with not just the national guard, but our country's militia. Los Angeles' fires were confined to a few sections of that city - but New York will be ablaze in all its boroughs!

Such things are expected in Third World countries, but not in a civilized nation like the United States. Yet in not too long a time afterward, New York City will go bankrupt - the world's "queen city" cast into the dirt! It truly will become a Third World city - a city of poverty!

When will all this come about, you ask? All I can say is, I believe I will be here when it happens! And when it happens, no matter where we are - in our apartment or on the job - we are not to panic or fear!

One Of The Most Moving Things About All That Jeremiah Prophesied Was This: He Was There When It All Happened - And He Was Safe! Jeremiah survived the horrors he warned were coming! "And he was there when Jerusalem was taken" (Jeremiah 38:28). He must have watched in silent horror from behind a prison wall as the Chaldean army poured into the city. For twenty-three years he had warned, but no one would listen - and now the blood was flowing!"

The king's house was in flames. All the leaders were dragged out of hiding. The sights and sounds were unbearable; how Jeremiah must have cried out for mercy! "Oh God, I saw it all - I prophesied it! But Lord, can't you spare?"

Yet, here is the good news:

Jeremiah was present to see the city broken up - but he was safe! And not only was he safe, but so was Ebed-Melech, the man who pulled him out of the deadly mud pit! When everything was coming down, Jeremiah sent a message to Ebed-Melech, who was hiding in fear: "[Thus] saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey [prize] unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 39:17-18).

Can you imagine Ebed-Melech's comfort as he heard this word? Yet we have the same message that was given to Ebed-Melech: Those who love God's Word and walk in faithfulness and obedience will be miraculously spared by the Lord in hard times! "I will deliver you! Don't be afraid - your life will be spared because you trust in Me!"

Right now, God is shaking California with earthquakes, from San Francisco to Los Angeles to San Diego. The entire nation is feeling the birth pangs of judgment!

But when you see these things, and you hear that New York City is in flames, you can fall on your knees and begin to rejoice - not because of the judgment, but because of God's promise: "Lord, I wanted to hear what You had to say - and You warned me! I have obeyed Your Word - and now I need

not be afraid!"

Hallelujah!