

Jeremiah 7:1-11  
The Politically Incorrect Jeremiah  
WRCoB 5.30.21

The church in America is on the skids.

For the first time since Gallup surveyed this topic  
Less than half the country belongs to a church.

However, what is truly alarming is the rate  
At which the church is losing members.

For instance, according to our own 2019 Brethren stats

The Church of the Brethren membership  
Has fallen to 98,680  
A loss of 5,766 in one year.

Since 2015, Brethren has lost almost 14,000 members.

To magnify this dilemma even more  
Look at the Southern Baptists.

In just one year, from 2019 to 2020  
The SBC lost 435,632 members.

Since 2006, the Southern Baptists have lost  
More than 2.3 million members.

So what's going on?

Well, I don't pretend to know.

So I look to others who might have more insight.

I look to my favorite Southern Baptist, Russell Moore.

Actually, his days with the Southern Baptists are no longer.

He recently resigned from a prominent leadership position  
And now works for Christianity Today.

Moore wrote a blog this past April that offers some insight.

In a nutshell, Moore believes the mass exodus  
Is due to the hypocrisy within the ranks of the church.

Moore believes this escalating church flight  
Is coming mostly from the younger generations.

Breaking it down into generations  
Moore finds that

*Generation X is less affiliated than the Baby Boomers and Millennials less than the Gen-X and Generation Z is looking to be even less affiliated than them all.*

Moore states that *only 8% of Millennials identify as evangelical compared to 26% of senior adults.*

A quick look around this sanctuary  
Confirms these statistics.

Moore doesn't think the exodus is simply because  
People are fleeing an antiquated biblical worldview.

Meaning, it isn't just the liberals leaving the church.

Moore says, *we now see evangelicals walking away from [church] NOT because they do not believe what the church teaches, but because they believe the **church itself** does not believe what the church teaches.*

It is not a drift towards agnosticism.

But a drift due to *disillusionment and cynicism*.

~~

Jeremiah faced a similar situation in Judah.

Jeremiah was a prophet who ministered from 627—586 BC.

He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah.

He witnessed the sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians  
And watched its residents turned into refugees.

The passage today comes during the period  
When King Josiah, a God-fearing king  
Was killed in battle against the Egyptians.

The Egyptians forced the people to select Jehoiakim  
The second son of Josiah to be the next king of Judah.

Jehoiakim was a puppet to the pharaoh.

He allowed the people to worship Baal  
And even allowed the practice of human sacrifice.

These were evil times.

But the people of Judah felt emboldened!

As long as they had their Temple  
As long as they came to worship

As long as they performed their religious duties  
Things would be all right.

~~

But Jeremiah told them something different.

Just because they attended worship  
Just because they fulfilled their churchly duties  
Didn't mean a thing to God.

And though Jeremiah was a reluctant prophet  
God urged him to speak out against  
The people of Judah.

Jeremiah was to stand at the entrance of the church.

And as the worshipers entered the sanctuary  
Jeremiah was to preach these words.

*Don't come through these doors to worship God  
When the rest of your life  
Is a despicable display of ungodly living!*

*Change the way you live!  
Treat people fairly!  
Care for the immigrant  
Underserved children  
And exploited widows!*

*And cease from going after other gods!*

*Don't think that the church is going to save you  
Just because you say*

*This is the temple of the Lord  
This is the temple of the Lord  
This is the Temple of the Lord!*

*Change your ways!*

~~

What a scathing sermon!

How would it be

If I was to stand outside our doors as you enter  
And preach to you like that?!

It probably wouldn't go over so well!

But it was a message they needed to hear.

And maybe we do too!

~~

We often look at the early prophets of the Bible  
With the belief that they were fortune tellers.

They read the palm of the nation's hand and told its future.

But they were not so much foretellers as forth-tellers  
Who told it like they saw it.

You didn't need to know a nation's future

To know when it was heading in the wrong direction.

The writing was on the wall.

The people during Jeremiah's time thought that  
 As long as they went through the motions of religion  
 They had fulfilled their Godly-duties.

As long as they went to church  
 They could live the rest of the week  
 As they wanted!

~~

What's a word that best describes this?

***HYPOCRISY***—*the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform.*

A person might fool their fellow church-goers  
 But as it says in verse 11 of our text today

**GOD IS WATCHING!**

~~

So what's going on with the church today?

It's similar to what was happening during Jeremiah's time.

They were mixing their politics with their religion  
 They were secularizing the sacred

They were chasing after the gods of sex and materialism.

According to Moore's blog

*Many have pointed to compelling data . . . showing that the politicization of American religion is a key driver of people away from religious affiliation. . . . many have come to believe that the religion itself is a vehicle for the politics and the cultural grievances . . . .*

If Christianity becomes political

People can go elsewhere to get their politics

And not have to put up with the hypocrisy.

Along with politics in church, Moore also claims

*Almost every survey of disgruntled people has also emphasized the scandals within the church—most notably the sexual abuse cover-ups and predatory behavior.*

Moore says

*We are losing a generation—not because they are secularists, but because they believe we are.*

The younger generation wants authenticity.

They leave the church because of its hypocrisy.

From a Barna survey finding conducted in 2015

*A significant number of young adults have deeper complaints about church. More than one-third say their negative perceptions are a result of moral failures in church leadership (35%). And substantial majorities of Millennials who don't go to church say they see Christians as*

*judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%) and insensitive to others (70%).*

~~

So what do we do?

We do what Jeremiah called the people to do.

Repent!!

The NRSV describes it as “amending our ways.”

The NLT this way

### **Jeremiah 7:5-11 NLT**

**<sup>5</sup> I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; <sup>6</sup> only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshiping idols.**

If we say we are the body of Christ

If we say, God is love and those who love are of God

If we say

We are to love God with heart, soul, and strength  
And love our neighbor as our self

If we say we are in the Holy Spirit

And the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace  
Patience, kindness, goodness  
Faithfulness, gentleness  
And self -control



If we say but we do not do  
What does that make us?  
Hypocrites!!

We are to be people who follow Christ crucified.  
Who died for our sins  
Who showed us a different way of living.

We are to be a community of people  
Who takes Jesus' words seriously.

We are to be authentic and transparent.

If there is sin in the church  
We are to call it out and not cover it up  
Repent, repair, and reconcile as we are able.

We are not to try and fit Christianity  
Into our politics and our culture  
But the other way around.

We are to proclaim Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

~~

We close our service today with the Bread and Cup.

On their own, the bread and cup are nothing  
But bread and juice.

To become a sacrament of ordinance  
They need a story behind it  
They need a blessing upon it  
And they need people to believe them.

And so we gather today

Aware of the story of God's great love and sacrifice  
Made real in the life, death and resurrection  
Of Jesus of Nazareth.

This is we know and believe.

Jesus blesses us through the bread and the wine  
Calling them his body broken  
And his blood spilt for all humankind.

And as he blesses us, he calls us to take up our crosses  
And follow him.

And in this, the bread and wine become everything.

We take the bread and cup as spiritual nourishment  
And partake them together as an affirmation of faith  
Binding us together as Christ's own

All for the glory of God!