

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*.

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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.

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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!

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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!

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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!

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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%).

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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

⁵ I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; ⁶ 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!