



Jeremiah 23:21-28

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"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. ²² But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. ²³ 'Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' ²⁶ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, ²⁷ who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, Who warns us, "Beware of false prophets," Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As you may have noticed, the small grain harvest in our area is now in full swing. Drive along almost any rural highway, and you'll see the custom harvesting outfits working in the wheat fields. The huge combines move down the field, gracefully sweeping in the wide swaths of wheat. The grain itself is gathered into hoppers and off-loaded onto trucks to be transported to the elevator. What's left over—the straw and chaff—is scattered behind as the combine moves along. A man who was interested in the commodities market once found himself with several thousand dollars to invest, so he went out to one of those fields where the harvest was in progress. There he was met by two men. One of them offered to sell him the entire harvest of grain for his money, so-and-so many bushels of pure wheat, delivered at the elevator. The other man said that, for the same price, he would sell him the chaff that was spewing out the back of the combines. With a satisfied smile, the customer agreed to purchase the chaff, and plunked down his cash...

I made that story up, of course. Nobody would be foolish enough to do that. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of agriculture knows that wheat is a valuable commodity. Compared to the wheat, the chaff is practically worthless. No one is ever going to make a blunder like that with their hard-earned investment dollars! Unfortunately, a lot of people are making exactly that kind of blunder when it comes to their eternal souls. False teachers are leading them around by the nose, preaching their own ideas instead of God's Word, and getting them to invest their devotion—and their dollars—in something that's as worthless as chaff. We need to have the ability to tell spiritual wheat from spiritual chaff, so that we don't get taken for a ride by the religious hucksters of our age. That's what our text for today is about. The difference between the false prophets and the true prophets of this age or any other is rather a simple one: it lies in what they have to offer. Our theme for today is...

"WHEAT SELLERS VS. CHAFF SELLERS: From Which Will You Buy?"

- I. The false prophets offer only the worthless chaff of their own dreams.
- II. The true prophets offer the precious wheat of God's Word.

Jeremiah wasn't the kind of guy you'd pick as a good example of a prophet. He was rather timid by nature. At the time of his calling he was young, inexperienced, and not a very good speaker. But he did have one thing going for him—God's Word. It was by God's command that he prophesied, and it was God's Word that was the content of his prophesy.

For many years, the people of Judah had been sliding further and further downhill into sin and unbelief. Jeremiah's job was one he wouldn't have chosen for himself: he had to warn them of their sin and call them to repentance. It wasn't a pleasant job. In the course of his preaching he was attacked, beaten, thrown into prison and threatened with death. All because he was preaching something that the people didn't want to hear—God's pure Word.

What the people DID want to hear was anything other than the truth about their sinfulness. And there were plenty of so-called "prophets" around who were willing to give them what they wanted. These false prophets preached everything BUT God's Word: they preached about their own ideas, they preached about the greatness of the nation, they even preached about dreams that they had. Well, the people loved these false prophets; they followed them like lambs. But to God, they were an abomination. The Lord said, ***"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds."***

These were the false prophets—the chaff sellers. God didn't send them, but they pretended that He did. If they had been true prophets, the Lord said, they would have preached His Word and tried to turn the people from their wickedness. Instead, they spoke nonsense. They avoided the topic of sin. They offered the people worthless chaff instead of the wheat of God's Word that they needed so badly. And the people ate it up. They bought it!

Will you buy it? I ask you that because there are plenty of chaff sellers around in our day. If you want a pastor who'll say nothing but pleasing words and avoid the topic of sin at all costs, there are millions you can choose from. If you want to hear a sermon that makes you feel good and tells you what a decent person you are, you don't have to go very far to find that. But there are very few pastors who preach nothing but God's Word...and those who do are not very popular! One Sunday a parishioner in such a church came up to his pastor after the service. He was feeling uncomfortable about the sermon, because the pastor had warned against certain sins that he was guilty of. "Look here, Pastor," he said, "do you have to call these things sins? Couldn't you refer to them as 'weaknesses,' or, 'natural human frailties'?" The pastor took a bottle from a nearby cabinet; the label on it said "POISON" in big red letters. "How would it be," asked the pastor, "if I erased the word 'POISON' here and substituted the word 'PEPPERMINT'?"

You see where the danger lies. Scripture says that ***"the wages of sin is death."*** (Romans 6:23) To sidestep the topic of sin, or put another label on it, or pretend that it's not very important...these are all mistakes that could be eternally fatal to your soul. Gossiping about your neighbor is a sin. Lustful thoughts and deeds are sins. Despising the Word by not coming to worship and not supporting the Gospel is a sin. Getting drunk is a sin. All these things are sins, always have been sins, and from this pulpit always will be called sins. Not because your pastor thinks so, but because God's Word says so.

Wheat sellers vs. chaff sellers: from which will you buy? It's hard to face our sin. You may not want to do it—that's up to you. If you want to buy chaff, then buy chaff. Just don't kid yourself that you're getting a good bargain. Because in the place of God's Word, the false prophets offer only the worthless chaff of their own dreams.

According to our text, the false prophets may look very pious. They say they're speaking for God, and they even mention His name frequently. But then they proceed to preach and teach not God's Word, but their own dreams and ideas. The Lord says, in our text, ***"I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another."*** It was working, too. The people of Judah were getting farther and farther away from the true God, just as their ancestors had turned away from Jehovah to worship Baal. Is it working in America, in our day and age? Are false prophets still pawning off their own dreams instead of God's Word? There's no doubt about it! A man named Joseph Smith had a dream in which "the angel Moroni" directed him to establish the Mormon Church. They're now the fastest growing anti-Christian sect in America, with membership numbering in the millions. Several years ago TV evangelist Oral Roberts had a dream that God would kill him unless his viewers donated \$8 million to his church; it sounds ridiculous, but he got his eight million and more.

Much more common are those pastors who don't claim to have bizarre revelations from God, but who quietly substitute their own ideas for God's Word. They preach about current events, they preach about world peace, they preach about being nice and practicing brotherly love...in short, they preach just about everything under the sun except the main message of God's Word—SIN AND GRACE! It's all chaff. It's all a dream. They may not know the difference, and their people may no longer know the difference. But our Lord knows, and He says, ***"Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat?"***

WHAT IS THE CHAFF TO THE WHEAT? —That's the real question. The test of a prophet is not in how intelligent he is, or how eloquent he is; it's in what he has to offer. The true prophets offer the precious wheat of God's Word.

As I mentioned before, the true prophet doesn't avoid the topic of sin. He can't, because God's Word condemns sin in all its forms. Preaching the Law is no fun, but the true prophet doesn't have a choice in the matter. On the other hand, God's Word proclaims not only the reality of our sin, but also the solution for our sin—in Jesus Christ! ***"Let him who has my word speak my word faithfully."*** This is where preaching becomes not a burden, but a great joy. Because when people are conscience-stricken, sorrowing, and despairing over their sin, the true prophet has something to offer them. Not the worthless chaff of false comfort, not the sugar-pill that "everything will be OK if you just do your best," but the precious wheat of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yes, says the preacher, your sin is very real and very serious, but the Son of God died on the cross to take away your sin. On that cross He endured all the punishment that you deserved. There IS a way to satisfy the demands of a just God, and this is it: simply to trust in what Jesus Christ did for you those many years ago. This is what the

faithful Word says, in 1 John 2, ***“If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the payment for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”*** (1 John 2:1-2)

Again and again, I run into people who are obviously sincere Christians, but who tell me, “Pastor, I feel terrible. With the sins I’ve committed I just don’t know how I can be saved!” If you feel that way, or have ever felt that way, I will tell you again, there is no sin you have committed, or ever will commit, that Jesus has not atoned for with His blood. Bring all your sins to the Lord Jesus; He will never turn you away. As soon as you ask forgiveness, you are forgiven, with no strings attached. The Bible says, ***“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”*** (Romans 5:20) Jesus Himself invites you, ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*** (Matthew 11:28)

There are wheat sellers and there are chaff sellers—from which will you buy? The Apostle John urges us to ***“test the spirits,”*** to find out which are the true prophets and which are the false. (cf. 1 John 4:1) How do you do that? Jesus answers, ***“You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”*** (Matthew 7:16) Grapes come on grapevines; you won’t find them anywhere else. Likewise, you’ll know God’s prophets because they speak His pure Word, with nothing added to it, and nothing taken away from it. When you find such a preacher, you may safely follow him. God doesn’t lie in His Word, and if the prophet preaches that Word, then you know he’s not lying. God grant us always such dedicated true prophets!

I began in the setting of a harvest field, comparing the valuable grain to the relatively worthless chaff. Surely, though, the comparison is even more striking than that. Perhaps it would be better to compare a bushel of diamonds to a bushel of dirt. The dreams and manmade ideas of the false prophets, clever as they may seem, are in reality as common and valueless as dirt. The truths of God’s Word, however, are each more precious and valuable than a pure diamond. Let’s remember that when we’re deciding where to invest our spiritual resources! AMEN.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.