

# THE LAST SUNDAY OF END TIME – CHRIST THE KING

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## Have No Fear, Little Flock

### Jeremiah 23:1-6 (NIV84)

<sup>1</sup> “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the LORD. <sup>3</sup> “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. <sup>4</sup> I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD. <sup>5</sup> “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. (verse 1) What is going on here? Jeremiah was a priest who was called at a young age by God to be his prophet. He started his ministry in 626 BC and served as such for 40 years. Although he started his ministry under a good shepherd of the people - King Josiah of Judah who turned the people of Israel back to the Word of God - the next four kings – Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoichin, Zedekiah - were all bad. The Bible says of each of these four kings of Judah that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD. Jehoiakim took the Word of God from Jeremiah that was written on a scroll, had it read before him, then cut it piece and by piece, and threw every section of God’s Word into the fire. Zedekiah would listen to God’s Word that came through Jeremiah, but he wouldn’t do what it said. He even imprisoned Jeremiah as a traitor to the nation of Israel when Jeremiah preached the Word of God. I can’t even give you examples of Jehoahaz’s and Jehoichin’s evilness because they both lasted only 3 months as kings before being deported, never to rule again.

It wasn’t just the kings that were bad in Jeremiah’s day; it was also the priests and others claiming to be God’s prophets. They didn’t preach against or remove the idols of the false gods that the Israelites were serving. They blatantly contradicted Jeremiah and called him a liar to his face and in front of the people at worship. Jeremiah would preach that God was about to judge the people of Israel for their sins, but the priests and so called prophets would say that God would rescue them soon and never judge them.

In a religious environment such as this, what was a person to believe? If your priests, prophets, and king were directly contradicting God, who would you follow? No doubt many people followed the majority of their political and religious leaders into the falsehoods that they were telling. By doing so, these bad shepherds were destroying and scattering the sheep of God’s pasture.

Is our situation all that different from that of Jeremiah’s? Do we not see rulers who are evil, who even listen to God’s Word but never do what it says? Do we not see people who claim to be God’s prophets, God’s mouthpieces, God’s pastors, who teach a message that directly contradicts the revealed Word of God? Do we not see the “shepherds” – the leaders – do horrific things while covering it up with masks of righteousness? How many reported sex scandals within religious institutions did we hear about this year? How many more happened that we didn’t hear about?

What about you? Maybe you’ve listened to the experience of others that they were hurt by these bad shepherds, that what happened to them destroyed their faith in God. Maybe you have had bad shepherds who proclaimed their own message or twisted the Word of God and led you into false belief. Maybe you have watched others follow bad shepherds who throw on their peoples’ shoulders the burden of earning a standing with God by trying to perfectly complete endless to do lists. Did someone hiding under a mask of righteousness abuse you, took advantage of you? Maybe this destroyed you, destroyed your faith in God, that he would allow such a person to do these things to you. And now you feel unclean, unworthy, destroyed, lost, and wandering.

If so, hear from God today that what they did to you was wrong. You were sinned against. And God noticed. This is why he announces woe to the shepherds who have wronged you, abused you, violated you. Because he knows your heart and your thoughts and sees everything, he knows exactly what you have gone through and what you are going through.

What’s more is that God will not just stand there shaking his head and giving a disapproving look at these bad shepherds. No, he acts. He is a God of justice. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the LORD. (verse 2)

The bad shepherds will not get away with what they have done. God will punish this sin for how you have been wronged. If you want reassurance that he'll actually do this, then look at what he did in Jeremiah's day. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, the unfaithful priests, and the false prophets were punished. God removed them, just as he said he would. The bad shepherds who are or were destroying and scattering God's flock will be removed and punished, if they haven't already.

Not only will God remove and punish those bad shepherds, but the LORD himself has taken on the shepherd role. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number." (verse 3) Bad shepherds have done their damage, but we are not their flock. It is God's flock. His sheep belong to him. They know his voice. They know that he is the one in control. These bad shepherds do not rule. Christ is King.

In spite of what the bad shepherds have done to you and to others, God still gathers people together with his Word. He gives them the green, lush pastures of his perfection lived for you. This is all from the righteous Branch who was raised up, Jesus, the descendant of the good shepherd King David. He is rightly called: "The LORD Our Righteousness." (verse 6) He did what was just and right in the land for us and in our place. It's his righteousness, his right standing with God, his perfection, which is ours by faith in him. When you feel dirty and unworthy because you have been violated and sinned against, he cleanses you with his water of life. He has paid for not only your sins, but also for all the sins, all the wrongs, all the violations that have been done to you. He refreshes you by covering you with his perfection. Like we said last week, you are a saint because God has covered you with his perfection. You are cleansed. You are pure. You are made whole. You are God's sheep in his flock, his pasture.

Not only is the scattered flock - us and others - gathered together by God through the refreshing, life-giving waters of his Word, but he also increases his flock. God thwarts the goals of all the bad shepherds work to destroy and scatter God's flock. The flock of God, his believers, actually increases. One at a time he calls us by name to belong to him, to be a part of his flock, to be clothed with Jesus' righteousness. He did this in Jeremiah's day with the remnant he gathered. He returned them to Jerusalem and generation after generation more people were brought to faith in him and covered with the LORD's righteousness and made perfect members of his flock. We see it firsthand whenever we welcome a new member, whenever we see a baptism. You see it when you share what God has done for you, how he has made you clean and pure and whole, fixed what is broken, showing kindness to lead people whose faith has been destroyed instead to a faithful God who still loves them and is actively seeking them through you. And then there are so many other times where this is happening, and we don't even see it. God's flock, his Church, is growing and none will be missing because the Good Shepherd is in charge!

Our Good Shepherd King does even more for us as his flock. "I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. (verse 4) Not only does God punish and remove bad shepherds, he also gives us new shepherds. I hope that all of you here today would say that you know at least one good shepherd, one pastor, who wants to connect you to Jesus, who cares about what happens to your soul, who wants you to own what God has done for you to make you pure, whole, and complete, that the LORD is your righteousness. Even if I don't know your name today, know that this pastor wants you to know Jesus, to protect you, and serve you so that you continue on your journey to be in heaven one day. This is why your pastor has had a thorough background check. That's why we as a congregation made a safety plan where we run background checks on all those who serve over our little ones. We are committed to keeping God's sheep here safe.

But just because I haven't committed a crime or the "big, unspeakable" sins that makes the news, any sin is a big deal – a big deal to God and to the person who was sinned against. I have sinned against God's flock, against you when I have not always been kind, when I have not always put you first ahead of myself, that I have responded in anger. And there are the times I sinned against you without even knowing it. These are not okay. All sins still hurt. For my sins, my failings as a pastor, I ask for your forgiveness.

At the same time, I am reassured and know where my purity comes from. It's the same as yours. The LORD is my righteousness. Because he has paid for the ways that I have sinned against you, the ways I have failed as a pastor, I know that I stand as a good pastor before you, one clothed with the Good Shepherd's righteousness who has never harmed his flock. And God will continue to give you good pastors who are covered with the LORD's righteousness, who are committed to protecting you. This is why you and me, as God's flock, no longer live in fear or terror.

The LORD is our righteousness. He has gathered people together as his flock in Jeremiah's day and covered them with his purity. He gathered us together today so that we are covered with his purity. God's flock continues to grow. The LORD continues to remove and punish bad shepherds and replace them with good shepherds who are committed to protecting God's flock. So, have no fear, little flock. Our Good Shepherd King is in charge. Amen.