

The Church Lost and Found

Jeremiah 6:16 “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk therein.’”

- Dramatic passage of the OT
- Climax of an appeal from the prophet Jeremiah beginning in the first chapter of his prophesy
- Represents departures and apostasies of man in all ages – from time immemorial
- Story of mankind
- History full of rebellion against God’s word and his way

I. The History of God’s Dealing with Man

- From Eden (**Genesis 3**) to Babel (**Genesis 11**)
 - i. First chapter of Gen – beginning of history with the creation
 - ii. Third chapter of Gen – man’s fall and expulsion from Eden
 - iii. Sixth chapter of Gen – universal apostasy
 - iv. Eleventh chapter of Gen – the makings of a second universal apostasy
- When man fell
 - i. Flaming sword placed in the garden
 1. Symbol of divine justice
 - ii. Also Cherubim
 1. Symbol of grace and mercy
 - iii. Meaning of symbol
 1. Even though man was banished from paradise and separated from God because of sin, it was not without remedy.
 2. Beginning of the scheme of human redemption
 3. Blood flowed from altars of Abel till the crimson flow of the blood of Christ from the cross of Calvary
- First apostasy (**Gen 6**)
 - i. Noah and his family only found righteous throughout the whole world
 - ii. Every imagination and thought was evil
 - iii. God found it necessary to purge the world of its wickedness and start the race anew.
- Second apostasy in formation (**Gen 11**)
 - i. Attempted to overthrow the government of God and his religion
 1. Wanted to establish their own government and religion
 - ii. Devised the tower – designed to reach heaven
 - iii. God frustrated their efforts by confusion of tongues
- The call of Abraham (**Gen 12**)
 - i. Not just an occasion
 1. Formed a medium or channel in which God could unfold the plan of redemption

- ii. Out of the loins of Abraham he formed a special race (apart from the rest of the world)
 - iii. The purpose of the nation of Israel
 - 1. God could culminate a scheme of redemption to bring man back to God
 - 2. When the purpose was fulfilled, Israel was terminated and ceased never to exist again.
- Jeremiah and Israel
 - i. Israel's history of apostasy, sin, rebellion and disobedience
 - 1. (Jeremiah 6:16) "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way."
 - 2. (Hos. 11:7) "And my people are bent on backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him."
 - 3. (Jeremiah 2:19) "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee; and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord God of hosts."
 - a. Israel's wickedness would correct them.
 - b. When the course of people becomes so wicked, it will result in a self-correction.
 - i. True in national affairs
 - ii. True in social world
 - ii. (Jeremiah 1)
 - 1. God called this young prophet to the stern prophetic task of correcting the deviations and departures of Israel.
 - a. (Jeremiah 1:5-10) "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."
 - b. Drastic task for a young man with such tender emotions
 - c. God selected a young man of tender heart to perform the sternest task assigned to any prophet in the OT
 - d. Jeremiah – weeping prophet

- i. Wept over the conditions prevailing in the nation of Israel
 - ii. Saw the finest system of national religion that the world knew totter to its fall
 - iii. Saw the altars of God collapse
 - iv. Saw the fires die out from beneath them
 - v. Gathered the live coals from the altar into his bosom to carry the fiery message of God to root out, pluck up, pull down, destroy, plant and build
 - iii. Dealing with error
 - 1. Six terms – root out, pluck up, pull down, destroy, plant and build
 - a. Four of which represent negative work
 - b. Root out and pluck up and plant – agricultural
 - c. Pull down and destroy and build – constructural
 - d. Construction company would not start building without excavation
 - e. Farmer would not plant without plowing
 - f. Deal with error – make ready for the growth of the truth
 - 2. Some want positive without negative
 - a. Four out of six of God’s commands where negative
 - b. Must get the field ready for sowing by removing the weeds.
 - c. (2 Timothy 4:2) “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”
 - i. “Reprove, rebuke, exhort”
 - 1. Two out of three people would claim to be negative
 - 2. They all work to a positive end
 - d. Both positive and negative are essential in the method of preaching
 - e. God told Jeremiah, “Be not afraid.”
 - i. A preacher who is afraid to preach has no place in God’s plan.
 - ii. If an apostle of Christ in the New Testament would not under all circumstances stand up for the Word of Christ – another Judas
- In the Right Way
 - i. Jeremiah 6:16 “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”
 - ii. Notice the words of the text
 - 1. Stand, see, ask, walk
 - 2. Stand – stop

3. Ask – listen
 4. See – look
 5. Rail road crossing warning – Stop, Look, and Listen
 6. Walk – go
 - a. After seeing what is right, go on, do not hesitate to do right.
- iii. Many ways to be wrong – but only one way to be right
1. The text has two words – ways and way
 - a. “S” on the first word “Stand in the ways” There are many ways
 - b. Stand in the forks of the road and ask for the good “way” – no “S” on that word
 2. Finding the right way depends on seeking it
- II. God’s Way Versus Man’s Ways
- God teaches man his way
 - i. (Hosea 14:9) “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.”
 - God forbids man’s ways
 - i. (Jeremiah 10:23) “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”
 - God curses perversion.
 - i. (Galatians 1:6-8) “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”
 1. Another gospel, which is “not another” simply meant that the different thing was not the gospel at all
 2. Reason why it wasn’t the gospel at all – “but there be some that trouble you, and would PERVERT the gospel of Christ.”
 - a. Perverted gospel ceases to be the gospel
 - ii. Perversion – Improper mixture
 1. Bread – power to sustain and nourish the Physical man
 - a. Take out the flour and it’s just salt water and yeast
 - b. Add a tablespoon of arsenic in a loaf of bread and it will destroy its power for nature’s purpose
 2. Glass of water – power to quench the thirst, get rid of body toxins, allows the chemical reactions in the body that are necessary for turning nutrients into energy.
 - a. Add a handful of salt in it and it will destroy its power to quench the thirst
 3. Gospel – power to save the soul
 - a. Add a doctrines of error and it destroys the saving power

III. The Periods of Church History

- Five words which designate these periods
 - i. Perfection
 - ii. Departure
 - iii. Apostasy
 - iv. Reformation
 - v. Restoration
 1. Course of religious history from NT times to our times
- The Period of Perfection
 - i. God created man perfect – the way he wanted man to be
 1. No cloud over his path
 2. No pain
 3. No dread of evil
 4. No fear of death
 5. He could look at his Creator with love unpoisoned and confidence undimmed – like a child may look into the face of his mother.
 - ii. He was a free moral agent – in the image of God
 1. Broke through the restrictions of divine law
 - a. Separated from God
 - b. Not a machine but a man – able to make his own life choices
 - c. Powers of will and of intellect
 - iii. Span the generations and see man as perfect
 1. Not as now – see man as sin corrupted him
 - iv. **Ephesians 2:14** – God created a new man – the Church – the one new man, the new creation
 1. Just as God made man perfect “in the beginning” the church was made perfect “**in the beginning**”
 - a. Perfect Institution – not perfect members
 - v. Degeneration of Adam – Departure of the Church
 1. Departure began before the Apostles died
 - a. **(1 Timothy 4:1)** “**The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in latter times (the last days) men shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.**”
 - i. Last days – gospel dispensation – not the approaching end of time.
 1. **(Isaiah 2:2-4)** – “**in the last days**” the house of the Lord would be established when the New Covenant would be inaugurated in Jerusalem
 2. Jesus referred to this prophetic forecast in **(Luke 24)** – pointed to Pentecost as the fulfillment of it.
 3. Last days began on Pentecost

4. (Hebrews 1:1) “God, who at sundry times and divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these “**Last Days**” spoken unto us by his Son.”
 - ii. Last days that Paul told Timothy meant that all through the Holy Spirit dispensation – gospel age – man would depart and pervert the word of God.
 1. Departure comes when men give heed to the seducing spirits instead of the Word that the Holy Spirit has revealed to us
- The Period of Departure
 - i. Departure was gradual – not overnight
 - ii. First in organization
 1. Divine arrangement
 - a. Congregation with elders, deacons, and members
 - b. Plurality of elders – one congregation
 2. Man’s corruption
 - a. One elder – One congregation
 - b. One elder – several congregations
 - i. Developed the bishop
 1. Bishop over bishops – archbishop
 - c. Easy step up to the papal system
 - i. Pope – just an overgrown metropolitan bishop
 - iii. Next stage – doctrinal
 1. Baptism – first case of sprinkling - Novation
 - a. Novation – sick – sprinkled water over his bed – not just on a spot on his head
 - b. Novation – recovered – they insisted he be immersed
 - i. Said “If sprinkling is baptism when one is sick, then it is baptism when one is well, because the condition of one’s health has nothing to do with what the action baptism is.”
 - ii. Claimed that it would be mockery of the ordinance if he should be immersed
 - c. 10th century – sprinkling was made a sacrament – Novation occurred 252 A.D.
 2. Mechanical Instruments in worship
 - a. First instrument of music ever know to use in the worship of any body of people claiming to be Christians was introduced by Pope Vitalian I in 670 A.D.
 - i. Threatened the unity of the Roman Church – removed from worship

8. Go back until we are right back to the New Testament

IV. The Marks of Identification

- How can we identify anything; how is it possible to identify a restored church?
 - i. Identify an automobile that is lost
 1. Make, model and number
 - ii. Make, model and number of church on record
 1. Not identifiable by human authority – documents, disciplines, and creeds
 2. Identifiable by the NT
- First identifying mark – Origination
 - i. Seed – Plant seed anywhere and it produces after its kind
 1. Unbroken chain of church succession
 - a. Not necessary in order to have NT church
 2. Take the seed to any dark land of the earth today, where the church has never been known, teach it and preach it – it will produce now exactly what it produced then – the same NT church
 3. Church is in the seed that produces it
- Second identifying mark – organization
 - i. Congregation
 1. Not a denominational organization
 2. It is a congregation of Christians assembled for the purpose of worship and service to God
 3. Simplicity of its organization
 - a. Elders, Deacons, Members
 - i. Elders – oversee and provide the teaching of the truth
 - ii. Deacons – assist in the work of service
 - iii. Members – assemble together and thus to work out their salvation
 - iv. Preachers – proclaim the gospel
 4. The word congregation comprehends the organizational identity of the NT church
- Third identifying mark – doctrine
 - i. Gospel
 1. Same principle apply now as it did then
 2. No other means or method
 3. (Mark 16:15-16) “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
 4. (Acts 2:38) “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

- a. It is said in **verse 41** – “They that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”
 - b. **Verse 47** – “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
 - 5. This is the process
 - a. No other way to be added to the church – plain and simple
 - b. Baptized, saved, added – it is one process
- Fourth identifying mark – worship
 - i. Pattern
 - 1. **(1 Cor. 11:2)** “Keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you”
 - ii. Can be no additions – when is a thing an addition and when is it not an addition?
 - 1. One may say, “Show me the scripture for seats in the meetinghouse, or lights in the meetinghouse, or for songbooks, and I will show you one for organs in the church.”
 - 2. That is not parallel, but we would like to see him look for the organ, so we will give him the scripture for the seats
 - a. **(James 2:3)** when a man comes into the assembly he is told “sit thou here”
 - b. That is a seat – one could not sit without a seat
 - c. Not only a seat – man was ushered to it and was told to sit on it.
 - 3. Lights
 - a. **(Acts 20:8)** – Paul continued his discourse until midnight and the record says, “there were many lights.”
 - 4. Quibbles can be answered, but they are not parallels
 - a. Thing becomes an addition only when another element is added
 - i. Lord’s Supper
 - 1. Elements specified – bread – fruit of the vine
 - 2. Plates on which to distribute the bread are not addition, because no element is added
 - 3. Spread pizza sauce, cheese and pepperoni – that would be an addition
 - 4. There would be another element
 - ii. Songbooks
 - 1. Does not introduce an additional element of music
 - 2. Using the songbook – performing only the act of singing

- 3. Instrumental music – another element of music – addition – that is the sauce, cheese and pepperoni
 - b. There is a pattern for worship as there is a pattern for doctrine and we cannot transcend it
- Fifth identifying mark – terminology – names
 - i. Christian
 - 1. (Acts 11:26) “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”
 - a. If the disciples were called Christians then, why should they not be called Christians now?
 - 2. Any name that the NT mentions
 - a. But can’t be called by any that it does not mention
- Sixth identifying mark – Creed
 - i. Bible
 - 1. Human creed is a formulated interpretation of what the Bible says
 - 2. We can only have the divine creed – no other
 - 3. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.”
- Six identifying marks
 - i. Origination
 - ii. Organization
 - iii. Doctrine
 - iv. Worship
 - v. Name
 - vi. Creed
 - 1. If we are right in origination – right in organization – right in doctrine – right in worship – right in name – right in creed – we cannot be the wrong church
 - 2. If we are wrong in origination – wrong in organization – wrong in doctrine – wrong in worship – wrong in name – wrong in creed – we cannot be the right church
 - vii. Make, model and number of the NT church
 - 1. That simple – a matter of identification