

The Rev. Jeremiah Right

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For the past couple of weeks television news, talk shows, and the internet have been abuzz with reports, discussions, and blogs about Barack Obama's pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Most of us have seen the video clips of this Chicago prophet declaiming his views of America at full volume. His sermons are, in a word, radical. Mr. Obama has the freedom to attend the Rev. Wright's church. Every American cherishes the right of the free exercise of religion. It's one of the things that makes America great. If you find yourself in The Windy City on a Sunday, however, may I recommend Holy Trinity Church pastored by the Rev. David Helm? If Chicago is your location and biblical preaching your desire, then David Helm is your man.

I've never met the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, but I do know the Rev. Jeremiah Right. Yes, their names sound the same, but let me assure you they're two different men. I've often attended the Rev. Right's church, and I hope you will visit sometime. In spite of his initial hesitancy to enter the ministry, citing his youth and lack of skills for public speaking (Jer. 1:6), Pastor Right received an outstanding education at Almond Branch-Boiling Pot Theological Seminary (Jer. 1:11-19) and has been proclaiming the word of the Lord ever since.

I must caution you though, the Rev. Right doesn't suit everyone. You see, Pastor Right can be kind of strange. What do I mean by *strange*? Well, to begin with, he won't join the local ministerial association. In fact, he has preached against it (Jer. 14:13-22). He displays other eccentricities as well. For instance, he once went all the way to Babylon just to bury his belt (Jer. 13:1-11)! On another occasion, this is no joke, he made a yoke for oxen but wore it himself during the sermon (Jer. 27:1-22). So let me warn you, if you visit Pastor Right's church, expect the unexpected.

Some people in the church don't like the Rev. Right's preaching. He's not like many of the clergymen with whom you may be familiar. He

doesn't tell jokes, nor does he hesitate to preach against sin. Not just any old sin, mind you, but the sin of church-going people (Jer. 7:1-29). Some in the congregation have reacted rather strongly to his sermons. After one message, they took Pastor Right and threw him into a pit full of mud (Jer. 38:1-6). Others object to him because he often cries in the pulpit (Jer. 8:18-9:1), an action they see as a definite sign of weakness. Many people feel they need to be affirmed, but that's just not the Rev. Right's style. The elders and deacons are afraid that if he doesn't change his approach soon, it will be detrimental to the church's growth.

Folks are concerned that all of his preaching about sin and judgment has left him mentally unbalanced and without a healthy sense of self-esteem. No one will say this, of course. They carefully couch their feelings in terms of prayer requests. "Pray for Pastor Right. He must be tired and under a lot of stress." Others think he needs a vacation. "I hear Egypt's nice this time of year." When I stop to think about it, I'm amazed that the church has kept him this long. But if they try to run him off now, I don't think he'll go (Jer. 17:16).

"Why do I keep going back to his church, and why do I want you to visit?" Those are good questions. All I can say is there's just something about his sermons. They're not popular or witty, but in their own way they are powerful. The Rev. Right often seems angry when he preaches. He tells us that God is angry too, angry with our sin. But if we repent, Pastor Right says everything will be okay (Jer. 3:12-15). I like a nice, comfortable religion as much as the next fellow, but maybe living for myself all week and showing up for church on Sunday, just to be on the safe side, isn't the way to live the Christian life (Jer. 7:1-15). Perhaps I should repent more often. Maybe the Rev. Right is right after all.

I guess the main reason I keep going back to his church is a theme that occurs again and again in his sermons. I could explain it to you, but I'd like you to hear it from Pastor Right himself. Here's a transcript from one of his messages:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

A new covenant? A new heart? A child of God? Sins forgiven? Yes!
The Rev. Jeremiah Right just may be the most radical preacher of all.