

Does the Church Speak for God Anymore?
Jeremiah 2: 4-13
September 2, 2007

Many of you know that I am a grateful, recovering alcoholic and I have gained hope and healing through the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Much of my spiritual and worship life revolves around AA and God's removing my obsession with alcohol through the tools that recovery program provides. One of its spiritual tools are meetings offered at my home club. Usually these meetings focus on one of the steps of the 12-step model or how we are dealing with some character defect in our lives. I get something out of every meeting, but recently there was a meeting in which one of the more effective leaders asked those that shared to describe exactly how we were working the steps in our lives. We were asked to give an accounting of our program: how often we were attending meeting...what step were we working at that particular time...how often we were calling persons on our call list to work through issues...how often we were meeting with our sponsors...how often we worked with newcomers to share our experience, strength and hope. It was a humbling and challenging meeting, for even though each person in that room had received the gift of sobriety for that day, we also knew were challenged to use God's blessing each day to surrender to God's peace in our lives and to carry serenity in our hearts in a world of much trouble. We knew we could only remain spiritually fit if we stayed sober, both physically and spiritually. We each knew that it would work if we worked it. We had to become a living witness, a living embodiment of the principles of the program.

I started last week a new series on the book of Jeremiah entitled, *Does the Church Speak for God Anymore?* Now the important word in that title is "church." As the old

hymn goes, “I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.” Today I want to examine the individual aspects of the church by making the question very personal: *Do you and I speak for God Anymore?* Does the way in which we live our lives project the fullness and presence of God? Are we truly spirit-filled?

Jeremiah’s text has two important images for us in examining this question. In verse five he says that in following worthless idols they became worthless themselves. And in verse thirteen he says that they have committed two sins: they have forgotten the spring of living water and instead dug their own wells, human wells that cannot hold water. Both of these images work together. The first people of God were called out of a polytheistic world in which people literally worshipped many gods by name. These were gods that people depended on to deliver their crops, to fill their nets with fish, to provide love in their lives, to keep them from harm. The god of Israel said, “forget them and put all your trust in me alone.” But they hedged their bets, just in case this god of Israel didn’t deliver. So Jeremiah holds the mirror up to the people and says, you have forgotten the one true God, the spring of living water, and dug wells instead. Now Israel was a very dry place. Natural springs of flowing water were rare. So in this desert climate wells would be dug through the hard rock to be a source of water. Like the woman at the well in the gospel of John people would travel distances to find water that was often contaminated as it lay in stagnant pools. They would also break and could not hold water very well. They did not fill like the living, flowing, natural water.

What are the idols which have a grip over us? What broken cisterns fail to fill our culture? How are our lives leaking water so that we run on spiritual emptiness? Our world is filled with them. To name a few – money and debt, possessions, TV, drugs,

food, sex, work, the search for good looks. I am sure you can think of others. There are people here today that I know struggle with and are addicted to every one of these. They defeat our hope and deflate us. We whine and become self-absorbed. They drive us from farther and farther from God. We pursue worthless things and become worthless.

Consider just a few of these recent statistics with respect to these broken cisterns from which we drink. Money and debt... According to MSN in a 2004 survey, 43% of Americans spend more than they earn each year; the average household has \$8K in credit card debt and \$18K in consumer debt (not including mortgage); most homeowners max out their mortgage at 29% of income; personal bankruptcies have doubled in the past decade; average savings rate in January was negative .7%! We are beginning to see the effects of this broken cistern in the sub-prime mortgage crisis. We truly do buy things that we don't need with money we don't have to impress people that we don't even like. And it poisons our spirits.

Food and obesity... according to CNN study, 1 in 3 Americans is obese (some say up to 60% of Americans are overweight) and 1 out of 50 are at least 100 pounds overweight. The percentage of children and adolescents who are obese has doubled in the last 20 years. Each year 300,000 deaths are attributed to effects of poor diet. \$117 billion in annual healthcare costs are attributed to unhealthy weight and sedentary lifestyle.

Sex and pornography... Internet pornography is \$57 billion industry worldwide – bigger than combined revenues of football, basketball and baseball. U. S. revenue is roughly double that of all major networks combined. There are 4.2 million pornographic websites (that's 12% of total sites). There are 68 million searches daily (that is 1/4 of all

requests). Americans download 1.5 billion pornographic files a month (more than 1 out of every 3 files downloaded). You may be surprised that this is not just an adult male activity. It is ruining our children's future ability to enjoy intimacy. Consider these facts. Eleven years old is the average age of the first exposure. The largest consumer group is the age group between 12 to 17 years old. Shockingly, 80% of 15 to 17 year olds have had multiple hard core pornography exposures. A few other statistics: 10% of adults admit to Internet sex addiction; 1 out of 5 men admit to viewing porn at work; 47% of professing Christians state that it is a problem at home.

Over against the worthlessness of these broken cisterns all around us are the living waters of spiritual disciplines. Studying sacred scriptures, prayer, living the contemplative life, forming accountability groups, doing random acts of service for our fellow humans. I heard a great definition of spiritual disciplines the other day in Disciple Bible Study training. Spiritual disciplines are those practices in which we forego short-term satisfaction for a longer term satisfaction. There are signs of hope in statistics here. Although studies show that only 15% of adults participate in Bible Study, 59% of the population do read sacred scriptures occasionally. 82% of adults pray and 89% of teenagers pray in a typical week. Let me ask you. What are your spiritual disciplines? Do you practice daily devotional and contemplation? Do you search the scriptures deeply for how they make a calling upon your life. Every day do you deny some satisfaction so that you can enjoy a longer-term reward?

The best news is that you are wonderfully made for an abundant life. The average human heart pumps more than 1,000 gallons a day, more than 55 million gallons in a lifetime. It never sleeps, beating 25 billion times in an average lifetime. The lungs

contain 1,000 miles of capillaries. DNA contains about 2,000 genes per chromosome--- 18 meters of DNA are folded into each cell nucleus. To write out the information in one cell would take 300 volumes, each volume 500 pages thick. The human body contains enough DNA that if it were stretched out, it would circle the sun 260 times. The body uses energy efficiently. If an average adult rides a bike for one hour at ten miles per hour, it uses the amount of energy contained in three ounces of carbohydrate. If a car were this efficient with gasoline, it would get 900 miles to the gallon. All of this marvelous complexity is designed into you by a God that loves you deeply and personally and wants you to drink living water, not settle for water contained in the cracked cisterns that cannot fill and cannot hold. Each of you is of sacred worth. And remember, "I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together." And the world is listening for the good word of strength and hope that you can bring them today.