THE PROBLEM AND POWER OF PAIN
WEEK 5 • DAILY BRIEFING 4 • BAD ORCHESTRA, GREAT COMPOSER

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Ecclesiastes 8:11

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

This week follows Sunday's sermon, "Restrain or Pain." You can watch or listen to the sermon at 1mso.church or on the One Missoula app.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, some of the deepest hurts in my life came from people who claimed to represent You. Heal what needs healing, and keep me from blaming You for what they did. Help me disconnect what they did from who You are. Even if I've been hurt by a church, I know that You love Your church and sent Your Son to die for it, so I pray that You would supernaturally give me Your love for Your people. Thank You that You are the Good Shepherd and that You have not given up on Your church. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

TODAY'S TEACHING

On Sunday we said that a church that's more "compassionate" than God harms the sinner, the saints, and the seeker. Today we are going further, because church hurt usually comes from one of three places. Some churches neglect the people who are wandering or broken. Some leaders rule harshly and pile burdens on people that God never gave them. And many churches, like the ones we talked about on Sunday, look the other way while sin runs wild in their midst. Whichever it is, today's point is the same: being hurt by a church does not mean God isn't real, and it doesn't mean you should give up on His people. He didn't die for His church just so that you can throw it away.

That third kind of hurt is the one we talk about least, but it might be the most common in America. When a church won't confront lust, greed, rage, or deception among its own members and leaders, the people sitting next to that sin get hurt by it. A youth pastor's lust goes unchecked until a student is harmed. A leader's rage gets excused for years because he is talented and the crowds keep coming. The people who got hurt in those stories were not hurt by God's standards. They were hurt because the people who made up that church refused to uphold them.

How does church hurt damage people's faith? Imagine sitting through a middle school orchestra butchering Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Nobody walks out of that concert thinking Beethoven was a bad composer or that he never existed. The problem was the players, not the music. A church that plays God's music badly in any of the three areas we listed does not prove that God is a bad composer or that He isn't there. Stop letting the negligent, the harsh, or the sin-tolerators drive doubt into your faith.

Today's first passage comes from Ezekiel, a prophet who lived as a refugee in Babylon nearly 600 years before Jesus. Israel's leaders, whom God calls "shepherds," had failed the people so badly that the nation was conquered and scattered. In chapter 34, God speaks directly to those religious and political leaders. The second passage is Jesus talking about the Pharisees, the most respected religious leaders of His day, during the last week before His crucifixion.

The third passage comes from Revelation. Around AD 95, the risen Jesus sent messages to seven real churches in what is now western Turkey. One of them met in a city called Thyatira. Jesus praised that church

for its “love and faith and service and patient endurance” (Revelation 2:19), and then He named one serious problem.

READ & MEDITATE

Ezekiel 34:4, 11

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. … [11]For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

Matthew 23:4

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

Revelation 2:20

But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

As you read, notice the different ways leaders hurt the people under them, and notice what God does about it.

REFLECT

Answer these honestly. This is between you and God, and nobody else needs to see what you write.

Ezekiel 34:4 is a long list of failures.

1. Look at the list in Ezekiel 34:4. Which failures come from neglect, and which come from harshness?

Most of the verse is about neglect. The shepherds ignored the weak, the sick, and the lost. The last line is about the opposite problem: “with force and harshness you have ruled them.” There’s a ditch on both sides of the road, and God holds leaders responsible for both.

Jesus’ complaint against the church in Thyatira is about something it allowed.

2. Fill in the blank from Revelation 2:20: “But I have this against you, that you _____ that woman Jezebel.”

According to this verse, who was getting hurt because the church put up with her?

Jezebel was probably a nickname borrowed from a wicked queen in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16:31), not her real name. Jesus says she was “seducing my servants.” The church’s tolerance did not protect anyone. It left the people in its own ranks exposed to someone leading them into sin. Tolerating sin is never neutral, because somebody always pays for it.

You don’t choose whether a church hurts you, but you do choose whether you keep carrying it.

3. If you have been hurt by a church, did it come from neglect, from harshness, or from sin that was tolerated?

Verse 11 of Ezekiel 34 is God’s answer to the failed shepherds.

4. Fill in the blank from Ezekiel 34:11: “Behold, I, I myself will _____ for my sheep and will seek them out.”

What does it tell you about God that He responds to failed shepherds by coming Himself?

God kept that promise in Jesus, who said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Jesus also knows church hurt from the inside. It was the religious leaders of His own people who handed Him over to be crucified.

Jesus saved His harshest words for religious leaders who hurt people.

5. According to Matthew 23:4, what did these leaders do, and what did they refuse to do?

God is not on the side of the people who hurt you in His name. If what happened to you was abuse, it should be reported to the civil authorities God put in place to punish evil (Romans 13:4). Forgiveness and justice are not mutually exclusive. You can forgive the people who hurt you while also protecting others from future abuse.

God has not given up on His church, even when it fails. Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

6. What would it look like for you to live out God’s love for His church, even if your feelings haven’t caught up yet, or to help your church become a place that heals instead of hurts?

PRAYER

Bring what you just wrote to God. Write your prayer or pray out loud.

MEMORY VERSE

Write or recite Ecclesiastes 8:11 from memory.