



Born to Win

Winners After All?

by Ronald L. Dart

In this country, we have a political class that are in it for themselves. If they weren't, they'd have a higher rate of attrition. They'd be falling like flies—like autumn leaves, as a matter of fact—at different elections because they had stood up for what was right, instead of just for what the people wanted. They would *go down* with their cause rather than give it up. But they don't do that. Instead, they chase after polls and focus groups to find out what the people want. And they always manage to land on their feet, even if in dishonor. This is what Mark Helprin says in a recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial [*Statesmanship and Its Betrayal*]. And so we're left—those of us out here in the great hinterland—with nothing but term limits to get rid of them; because they'll sit in there, and use spin, and tell us what we want to hear, and avoid questions until they can get themselves elected again by people who weren't really paying any attention. And they'll be there forever.

“But maybe”, we think, “if they can't make a career out of this, if they're only going to be up there for two terms, or maybe three, maybe somewhere along the line they will try to do the right thing.” I don't know. We put term limits in for presidents a long time ago. And it seems like they still don't get around to doing the right thing very often. “Power corrupts”, said Lord Acton, and power has already corrupted our political system to such an extent that some people are talking about a second American Revolution. And *these* people scare me worse than the politicians. You can stop talking about gun control. That's the least of our worries, because the problem with our political system is a problem of the spirit, and will be resolved in the spirit or it will not be resolved *at all*: We'll just trade one kind of master for another.

The politicians follow the polls. Theoretically, that's a good idea. In other words, they represent the people, they ought to find out what the people want, and they ought to try to give us what we want... theoretically. But it kind of reminds me of the story of a man who came running breathless up to an information booth, and he said, “Have you seen a large group of people around here?” “Well, yeah, I have”, the clerk tells him. “Which way did they go? I am their leader, and I'm supposed to be in front of them!” Well, you know, there are times in a nation's history when we don't just want people who are in front of us. We want somebody out there who can say, “Look, folks, this is the way we need to go. And this is the way I'm going to lead. Come along. Let's do this. We can do this together.” Someone to inspire, someone to encourage, someone to tell us *what's right*...and go down in flames if he has to, standing up for what's really right.

But the politicians will not do that. They'll go to focus groups and polls, and they'll try to keep their finger on the pulse of the people, and they'll decide whether or not to criticize the president depending upon whether you the people of the United States think he is “doing a good job”. But the politicians *and* the pollsters are not asking us *all* the questions. They're asking questions about things they want to hear about. They get the answers that they want. The questions are even phrased to get the answers, in some cases, they want. And the whole thing is a cycle of deception, as people read the polls, and they say, “Well, I guess that's what the majority believes. So there's no point in fighting that.” And they go along, because they think this politician or that politician has a majority. I guess...I guess the First Amendment doesn't allow us in this country to outlaw polls, but it would probably be one of the best things that ever happened to this country if nobody could ever get on the telephone or letters, writing

out to people, or people on the street stopping you and saying, “I’m taking a poll”, and then ask you this series of questions. We’d be a whole lot better off if the only poll in this country was the one where we went in to our congressional district voting spot and cast our vote for whatever issue, policy, or politician was there for us to vote for or vote against.

I’m not a prophet, but I can read the prophets. And I’m worried about what I read. I read the newspapers, I read the Bible, I read the prophets. It’s tempting to say, you know, when you read those prophets, that, “Well, that’s all over. It’s in the past. That happened *generations ago*, and it doesn’t have *any* application for us in the 20th century.” What’s chilling is, though, that if you actually take the trouble to go read the prophecies, the prophets seem to be talking—and they *say* they’re talking—about the *last days of man on the earth*. And Jerusalem, and the House of Israel, and the House of Judah are still here, in the last days, somewhere. And *terrible* things are about to happen to them. Not only are terrible things about to happen to them, they’re happening to them for *a reason*—a reason that, in theory at least, they should be able to do something about. You know, if you take Israel of old—the Bible Israel—and you lay a dressmaker’s pattern over her and cut it out...if you then lay that pattern over the United States, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, you will find a fit that is just too close to ignore. And at the very least, you ought to remember that those who cannot learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them.

I’m going to paraphrase a very old prophecy for you, and you can decide for yourself whether or not you should start worrying.

The prophecy in question is the fifth chapter of Jeremiah. And remember, this is a paraphrase. What I’ve done is I’ve laid the pattern in here, and I’ve cut it out, and I’ve just laid it down over the United States and all the English-speaking peoples, and I’m just looking for a fit. You tell me if we’ve got one. Jeremiah, God is speaking to him:

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

¹ Go up and down the streets of [Washington, D.C],
look around and consider,
search through her squares.
If you can find but one person
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
I will [pardon] this city.

Does it fit? Almost. I have a feeling that if you really worked hard in Washington, D.C. you might find one person, maybe two. Who knows, maybe we’ll find a dozen? And maybe that’s the reason why the city is still there. But still, when you read the prophet...Just go ahead: look, search, look through Congress, go through the House of Representatives, wander through the White House. Find one person who deals honestly and *really* seeks the truth. Well, I don’t live in Washington, D.C. All I see is what comes on television out of Washington, D.C., and the people who are gathering up the people who come to speak on television...well, they haven’t found that person yet. God continues speaking:

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

² Although they say, “As surely as the LORD lives”,
still they are swearing falsely.

Oh, yeah. They’ll go into court. They’ll raise their right hand. They’ll swear solemnly to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and then they’ll *lie in their teeth*. And the thing that’s blowing my mind—the thing that I cannot grasp—is the fact that people now (well, other people in Washington, D.C.) will get on television and say, “Oh, well, nobody ever gets prosecuted for lying in a

civil case.” Really? Do you mean it’s okay to go in on a civil case, swear to tell the truth, lie in my teeth, and nothing bad is ever going to happen to me? Well, if I’m a *lawyer*, I might get away with it. But I’m not a lawyer, and I figure if I did that, they’d throw me in jail. And chances are, if you did it, we’d meet in there.

No, no, we’ve got this strange situation in this country to where not only the lawyers and all the people the talking heads on television coming out of Washington, D.C., seem to think it’s not that big a deal if we lie and obstruct justice. We’ve got the people in the country out there right now saying, “You know, even if the president *has* lied and obstructed justice, well, we shouldn’t impeach him for that—little, old thing like that.” And you have politicians who come on the air and say, “Well, no, the president isn’t above the law. But he’s not *under it*, either.” Oh, *give me a break*. Of course he’s under the law. Everybody in this country is under the law, aren’t we? Aren’t we all responsible to keep the law? And the implication is the president shouldn’t be held to any different standard from any other citizen in this country and *I beg to differ*. I think the president should lead. The president should be held to a *higher* standard than the man in the street of this country, because *he* is the chief law enforcement officer of this country. Don’t give me that stuff that, “Well, he’s not above the law; but he’s not under the law, either.” Yes, yes he is. And he is *more* obligated to keep the law, even, than the average citizen in the street is. Oh, yeah, the pattern fits. They swear, and then they go into court and put up their hand and they swear falsely, says God, of this people. “O LORD”, says Jeremiah...

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

³ [...] do not your eyes look for truth?
You struck them, but they felt no pain;
you crushed them, but they refused correction.
They made their faces harder than stone
and refused to repent.

Oh, yeah. You can have a lot of bad things happen and nobody seems to think God has anything to do with it. God can chastise, God can punish, and all they do is just harden themselves. Jeremiah thought, in verse 4,

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

⁴ [...] These are only the poor;
they are foolish,
for they do not know the way of the LORD,
the requirements of their God.

“These people I’ve taken this message to, they’re just hardening their hearts. They’re poor people. They’re dumb. They’re foolish. They don’t know the way of God. They don’t know the requirements of their God. I know what I’ll do.”

Jeremiah 5

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⁵ “So I will go to the leaders
and speak to them;
surely they know the way of the LORD,
the requirements of their God.”
But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke
and torn off the bonds.

What yoke? *God's* yoke. What bonds? *God's* bonds—in other words, those ties that God gives us to morality, to truth, to honesty, to the Ten Commandments. “No, no, no. We don’t want to be bound by that stuff anymore.” And they throw it off.

Verse 6 is chilling. It was said originally concerning Jerusalem. The problem is: the pattern fits.

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

⁶ Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them,
a wolf from the desert will ravage them,
a leopard will lie in wait near their towns
to tear to pieces any who venture out,
for their rebellion is great
and their backslidings many.

Now, don’t make the foolish mistake of thinking he’s talking about a cat when he says “a lion from the forest”, or that he’s talking about a dog-like animal when he talks about “a wolf from the desert”. When the Bible uses “lions” and “wolves” and “leopards”, it’s talking about nations with those characteristics, the prophets are. No, no. A wolf from the desert? Saddam Hussein is a wolf from the desert. And he’s got teeth. He’s a fool. He’s a man we ought to be able to swat down with a flyswatter. But *we don’t have* the courage. We’re even losing the capability; and we’re losing, I think, what may be more important: our position, our standing in the world that gives us...well, if not the *right*, at least the *authority* to do it. And the nations who might carp and complain about it should not lift a finger, but I don’t know anymore. I don’t know where we are. I don’t know about our relationships with other nations, because we are led by people who are trying to figure out where *we* are going, and get out in front of us. And *we*...well, we don’t have *a clue* where we’re going. God asks,

Jeremiah 5

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⁷ Why should I forgive you?
Your children have forsaken me
and sworn by gods that are not gods.
I supplied all their needs,
yet they committed adultery
and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. [*They lined themselves up by ranks in the
whorehouses.*]
⁸ They are well-fed, lusty stallions,
each neighing for another man’s wife.

I mean, it’s getting to the place in this country where you think people will sleep with anybody or anything. There doesn’t seem to be any boundaries on it anymore. There’s no question of right or wrong. There’s no moral value in faithfulness to one’s wife. And so I ask you: Does the pattern fit? Or doesn’t it? If you watch television in this country, you would basically come to the conclusion that there’s *hardly any* moral value left *anywhere*. And God says,

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

⁹ “Should I not punish them for this?”
declares the LORD.
“Should I not avenge myself
on such a nation as this?”

Notice, we don't even have to *be* the nation in question. All we've got to do is just be *like it*. And God says, "I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to do something about that." And then he says,

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

- 10 Go through her vineyards and ravage them,
but do not destroy them completely.
Strip off her branches,
for these people do not belong to the LORD.

And don't make the mistake of thinking he's talking about agriculture when he says "strip off her branches" and "go through her vineyards". He's just, basically, using poetic language to talk about *taking us down*.

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

- 11 "The [English-speaking people and the Jews]
have been utterly unfaithful to me",
declares the LORD.
- 12 They have lied about the LORD;
they said, "He will do nothing!
No harm will come to us;
we will never see sword or famine.
- 13 The prophets are but wind
and the word is not in them;
so let what they say be done to them."

They're going to have to pay for it, he says. And the really strange thing about it is: at this point he brings in not merely the *leaders* of the country, but the *preachers*.

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

- 14 Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says:

"Because the people have spoken these words,
I will make my words in your mouth a fire
and these people the wood it consumes."

I think we should all consider ourselves lucky that we don't have a Jeremiah walking our streets; because God says his words will be like a fire, and the people the wood.

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

- 15 "O house of Israel", declares the LORD, [...]

And he might as well have said, "O United States, O Great Britain, O Australia, O Canada..."

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

- [...] I am bringing a distant nation against you—
an ancient and enduring nation,

- a people whose language you do not know,
whose speech you do not understand.
- 16 Their quivers are like an open grave;
all of them are mighty warriors.
- 17 They will devour your harvests and food,
devour your sons and daughters;
they will devour your flocks and herds,
devour your vines and fig trees.
With the sword they will destroy
the fortified cities in which you trust.

Now, do we think that God has died? Do we think that God has no longer any interest in what people do on this earth—that we can live our lives whatever way we choose, that we can ignore principles of right and wrong, that we can ignore those standards that have held man up down through all generations? Do we think we can do that and get away with it? Here God says, “I’m not going to sit quiet. I’m actually going to do something about it.” There is hope, though. He says, in verse 18,

Jeremiah 5

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- 18 “Yet even in those days”, declares the LORD, “I will not destroy you completely.
- 19 And when the people ask, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?’ you will tell them, ‘As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.’”

So I guess, if we’re going to line up and ask, “Why would God do this to us?”, the answer is here: “Because you have forsaken me.”

Jeremiah 5

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- 20 “Announce this to the [people]
and proclaim it [to them]:
- 21 Hear this, you foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes but do not see,
who have ears but do not hear:
- 22 Should you not fear me?” declares the LORD.
“Should you not tremble in my presence?
I made the sand a boundary for the sea,
an everlasting barrier it cannot cross.
The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail;
they may roar, but they cannot cross it.”

“I’m the one that did all that. Do you *think* you should not fear me?”

Jeremiah 5

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- 23 But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts;
they have turned aside and gone away.
- 24 They do not say to themselves,
“Let us fear the LORD our God,

who gives autumn and spring rains in season,
who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.”

No, you don't say that. And you know why? Because us preachers and teachers, from the pulpits and over the airwaves, have not been telling you you ought to be afraid of God. Oh, I don't mean “afraid of” God. I mean *fear* God. For indeed, the humble and repentant has *absolutely nothing* to fear from God. But stubborn, and rebellious, immoral, and corrupt Man has *much* to fear from God. And those of us who are preachers ought to be saying something about that every once in a while, *at least*.

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

- 26 Among my people are wicked men
who lie in wait like men who snare birds
and like those who set traps to catch men.
- 27 Like cages full of birds,
their houses are full of deceit;
they have become rich and powerful
- 28 and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit;
they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it,
they do not defend the rights of the poor.

Oh no, no. They have gone into the law, and into politics, and into government for *power* and for *wealth*.

Jeremiah 5

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- 29 “Should I not punish them for this?”
declares the LORD.
“Should I not avenge myself
on such a nation as this?”
- 30 A horrible and shocking thing
has happened in the land:
- 31 The prophets [*That's the preachers.*] prophesy lies,
the priests [...]

You have to understand that, in Old Testament times, the priests were the civil leaders.

Jeremiah 5

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- 31 The prophets prophesy lies [(the preachers do)],
the priests rule by their own authority,
and my people love it this way.
But what will you do in the end?

There's no point in pointing our fingers at the preachers and at the politicians, because that's what we want. They've gone to the polls, haven't they? Haven't they *asked* us what we want, and haven't we *told* them what we want and what we approve of? So there's no point in blaming *them*. We have met the enemy, and he is us. If what Jeremiah is saying has to do with the latter days, and about our peoples, we ought to tremble with fear.

I believe we have failed at two levels among our people: We have failed in the churches, and we have failed in the education of our children. And we've reaped a political class that, with *few exceptions*, is without honor and without character. And the reason why there are so few exceptions is because we keep voting them out of office. We don't want to *hear* what they've got to say; and we'll allow the political consultants to lie about them, and run negative ads on them, and blow them right out of the water; when, in fact, *these* are the people who are telling us *the truth*. But we don't want that.

But the failure started a long time ago, in the churches and in the seminaries. And we who are supposed to be the spiritual leaders...what about us? What about us—the class the Bible would call “the prophets” or “the priests”? Well, when nearly a third of all pastors of churches have had *at least one* affair (that we know of), when a shocking number of priests have either had affairs or abused children, when prominent evangelists are caught hanging out with hookers, *why* should anyone listen to us? And why should we be shocked at the behavior of pastors and priests when seminaries are no longer sure the Bible is the word of God, or whether God even *exists* as a personal being. The truth is that the churches, and their leaders, have failed just like the politicians. In fact, we may have led the way—us in the churches—because *we* were the ones who let down the bars. The churches don't talk very much about the Law of God. People are willing to talk about morality, but they don't seem to have a clue that without God there *is* no authoritative morality. There's no God to teach us about the sanctity of life, so why should we *care* if we're killing off the next generation before they're born? Or killing off the elderly and the infirm before they have the decency to die?

Would you believe that Jeremiah told us about this, as well as the other? Yeah, it's in the 23rd chapter. Let me paraphrase *this one* for you. Actually, I'm not going to do much paraphrasing; I'm going to take it as it is.

Jeremiah 23

AKJV

⁹ My heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness.

And why? Because of the prophets...

Jeremiah 23

AKJV

¹⁰ For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourns; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right.

Everything is *all fouled up* in this land. And why? Well, we're *full* of adulterers, “And my heart is broken because of the prophets.”

Jeremiah 23

AKJV

¹¹ For both prophet and priest [*that's preacher and leader*] are profane; yes, in my house have I found their wickedness, said the LORD.

Call it what you want. Call it in church, call it in the houses of Congress and the offices of congressmen, or in the White House or in the Oval Office.

Jeremiah 23

KJV

¹¹ [...] yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD.

¹² Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD.

Later in verse 33:

Jeremiah 23

NKJV

³³ “So when these people or the prophet or the priest ask you [*talking to Jeremiah*], saying, ‘What is the oracle of the LORD?’ you shall then say to them, ‘What oracle?’ I will even forsake you”, says the LORD.

So, if I were a prophet...I’m not, but if I were, and you came to me today asking me, “What’s the message from the Lord today, preacher?” I could only reply, “What message? Thus saith the Lord, ‘I will even *forsake* you.’” Why would I say that? Well, because of the following verse:

Jeremiah 23

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³⁴ If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims, “This is the oracle of the LORD”, I will punish that man and his household.

³⁵ This is what each of you keeps on saying to his friend or relative: “What is the LORD’s answer?” or “What has the LORD spoken?”

³⁶ But you must not mention “the oracle of the LORD” again, [...]

There comes a point in time where you need to *shut up* and stop calling this the word from God; because God’s *not saying* what you’re saying. He said, “Don’t say that...”

Jeremiah 23

NIV '84

³⁶ [...] because every man’s own word becomes his oracle and so you distort the words of the living God, the LORD Almighty, our God.

And, yes, that’s the way it is. We take *our own* ideas and turn them into what we *call* “the word of God”. But before you become too angry at the political leaders and the preachers, remember the passage I read to you earlier from Jeremiah 5:

Jeremiah 5

NIV '84

³¹ The prophets prophesy lies,
the priests rule by their own authority,
and my people love it this way.
But what will you do in the end?

I’m sorry, folks, we’ve done this to ourselves; and we have *no one else* to blame. Is there any hope? Oh, yes, there’s always hope. The reason God sends a prophet is to give us a chance to change the outcome. We may not be able to change it for the nation, but maybe we can change it for ourselves and our families.

God help us. Maybe, in the end, we can be winners after all.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart.

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