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A Religion that Betrays, Part 2

Jeremiah 7:1-12, “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!’ ” 3 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. 4 Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.’

5 “For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, 6 if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, 7 then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

8 “Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, 10 and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations’? 11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” says the LORD.

12 “But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.”

The week before Christ’s crucifixion; the Gospels record many activities on the part of Christ, one of which is His Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:1-17)! This was the first time in Christ’s three year ministry where He publically received the adulation of the crowds and accepted the people’s Messianic praises!

At other times when someone or a crowd wanted to honor Christ as the Messiah, Jesus was quick to say, “Tell no one!” (e.g., Matthew 8:4; 16:20; Mark 8:30; Luke 5:14; 8:56) Yet here in Matthew 21, for the first time when the crowds shouted out the Messianic ascription,

Matthew 21:9, “...Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”

Christ did not rebuke the crowd. Instead, He rebuked the religious leaders who were rebuking Him for accepting their praises!

Matthew 21 is a climatic time in Redemptive History when the promised Redeemer publically received the title of Messiah and so was enthroned in the hearts of the multitudes as their King! In this capacity, it is interesting to note Christ’s first, official act as King: He filled the Temple with His glory. This however didn’t happen in the way one typically thinks of it. After Christ was heralded as the Messiah, He got off of the colt (which proclaimed His Messianic Kingship), ascended the stairs which led to the temple mount, and entered into the outer court with the crowds following behind. There He turned His face to that which was most distressing to God; Antonia’s Fortress which was the headquarters of the wicked and evil presence of the Romans in Jerusalem! Certainly this would be Christ’s first act of business as the Messiah, kicking the Romans off the temple mount and eventually out of Jerusalem! Yet that wasn’t Christ’s first order of business! Instead, He turned His focus to a religious practice sanctioned by the High Priest himself- the money changers (Matthew 21:12-17)! He attacked the religious system of Judaism of all places in the capital city, Jerusalem, AND at its holiest place, the Temple!!

This wasn’t the first time God rebuked His people on the Temple Mount. A little more than 600

years prior to Christ's cleansing of the temple, God sent a prophet to the very same temple to give a scathing rebuke to the people of Israel and their leaders. This rebuke is recorded for us in Jeremiah 7 where Jeremiah gives his Temple Sermon (609 BC).

Josiah was a bright light in the darkness that was the final 100 years of Judean history. And as godly and wonderful as he was, nevertheless his work for the reformation and purification of the worship of God in Judah touched very few hearts. On account of the dark and wicked regency of Manasseh, the nation had been placed under judgment. Manasseh was as the iceberg that struck the Titanic. After his regency, the judgment of God, the sinking of the nation of Judah, was just a matter of time! As a result, the final years of Judah were tainted by the wicked, irresponsible, and self-serving reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiachim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. In fact, Josiah's life and death was actually an act of judgment on the part of God! Notice the death of Josiah from the perspective of God.

2 Kings 23:26, "However, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him..."

Josiah was killed in battle as a consequence of his grandfather's sin! Josiah's death was an act of judgment on the part of God against the land and its people. When the Lord removes the righteous from a land, watch out; judgment is coming!

Isaiah 57:1, "The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; and devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil."

Clearly as an act of judgment, God will take a godly man from the earth. Yet was such the case in Josiah's life? Prior to Josiah's death, God told him this:

2 Chronicles 34:28, "Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, so your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring on this place and on its inhabitants." (cf. also Isaiah 57:1)

Accordingly, Josiah was as the birds in a forest that cease chirping when the predator is near. His death was a sign from the Lord the judgment was just around the corner! The death of Josiah was a seminal point in Redemptive History. When this man died, again the preserving grace of God which had maintained the nation through all the ups and downs of its history was withdrawn, and the nation was left to run headlong into the sin for which it so eagerly longed!

From the perspective of the people of God (fueled by the words of the false prophets), we see a rather peculiar thing because of the promises of God regarding the longevity of the Davidic monarchy and the Temple, God's people lived as though they had a "get out of jail free" card. The message of the prophets/priests/kings was simple: so long as the temple remained, God's people did not need to fear any natural disaster or external foe! This religious building guaranteed their protection! They were using the Temple as a "lucky charm" to avert evil! It

was believed that so long as the nation maintained the temple and its worship, they could serve whatever or whomever they liked! These are the “deceptive words” referenced by Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 17:4, “Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’”

The mantra of the false prophet, when things were bad was this: *“But this is the temple of the Lord; He won’t let it come to harm!”* When the foe threatened... when drought came upon the land... when disease and pestilence flourished... When a crazed prophet stood at the gate of the temple and pronounced a message of dire warning...the response of the false prophets, the priests, and the king was, “This is the temple of the Lord! *What could happen?*” Accordingly, Jeremiah exhorted the nation multiple times:

Jeremiah 17:8, “Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail.”

In other words, the Temple could not deliver them! It was not a lucky charm which would protect the city and so the nation from destruction! To believe otherwise was to “...trust in deceptive words...”! That brings us to Jeremiah’s formal message, a rebuke that our generation needs to hear and appropriate!

The first message is that religious devotion cannot nor will it ever assuage an angry God on account of our sin.

Jeremiah 7:4, “Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’”

Again, in the religion of Christianity, God has not given us lucky charms to ward off evil. Christianity is not about placating an angry God, but loving, serving, and knowing a Being who has provided for our salvation through the death of His only begotten Son! Accordingly, maintaining the temple services or any and all religious acts of devotion was worthless as a defense against an enemy, much less the wrath of God on account of our sin! In fact, we see this theme throughout God’s word. Recall Samuel’s rebuke of Saul who thought Christianity was about lavish, religious shows.

1 Samuel 15:22, “And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams.’”

God is not after religious offerings! That may be what we are after and so in essence what false religion in the end is all about. But that is not Christianity! Notice David’s statement when he confessed his sin:

Psalms 51:16-17, “For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a

contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

Brothers and sisters, understand that God does not need nor does He require our religious devotion! In fact Isaiah called it “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6a)! And Paul called it “refuse” (Philippians 3:8)- σκύβαλον (*skubalon*)!

So what is God after when it comes to His redeemed people? God is after their integrity! After a thorough search of Jerusalem for a righteous individual, recall Jeremiah’s words:

Jeremiah 5:3a, “O Lord, do not Thine eyes look for truth [integrity]?”

In this context, that is the reason for why God disciplines His people; when integrity is lacking, God brings us to the wilderness (cf. Jeremiah 5:3b)! David said as much in his confession following his sin with Bathsheba:

Psalms 51:61, “Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being...”

Again, it is not religious sacrifice that God is after, nor any and all religious show! God is after integrity! In the words of Christ:

John 4:23, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth [with genuineness and integrity!]; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”

That is what God is after! And that is why Jeremiah rebuked the people:

Jeremiah 7:5-7, “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor [instead of sacrifice or religious show!], *if* you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin [In other words, if you are men and women of integrity who say what they mean and do what they say], then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.”

Religious devotion cannot nor will it ever assuage an angry God on account of our sin! Secondly, righteous living (regardless of the quantity or quality) does not purchase the right to sin.

Jeremiah 7:9-10, “Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal, and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’ - **that you may do all these abominations?**”

Jeremiah is attacking an inclination on the part of the sinner which perversely believes that right conduct purchases the right to a limited amount of bad living! In the realm of general living, this inclination is somewhat silly. A person decides they need to eat healthy, for all the

junk they were eating was poisoning their body. So they eat healthy for a week. And how do they reward themselves? By poisoning their body with more junk! Now as silly as this is, it is not damning. But in the realm of religion, the mentality is quite harmful!

Consider what some people call FFR, freedom from religion! Years ago a father and mother told me that because they attended worship consistently for six or more weeks that earned their family the right to do whatever they wanted on a given Sunday. What makes this inclination truly terrible is that it relegates those things God wants us to do out of love and devotion to a religious activity of placation! So if you spend time communing with Christ the sinner says, *“Sure, if that buys me a couple of hours of pleasure!”* Love the Lord your God!- we say, *“O.K. but then I get to indulge my love of self!”* Come to church; serve the body; place another’s needs before your own!- and we say, *“Done! Now God, it is my turn!”*

Isn’t that sad?!

God saved you because He loves you! It is His intention to walk with you and enjoy a love-relationship throughout all time. The things He calls you to — the demands — are there to enhance our fellowship. And we think doing enough God-things earns us the right to indulge the flesh? The mentality strikes a blow at the heart of the relationship God has with us!

Yet that is how Israel was living in Jeremiah’s day. All that they did was so that they could go out and engage in all sorts of abominations (Jeremiah 7:10)! Truly, righteous living does not earn us the right to sin!

Thirdly, no holy place on earth can protect an individual or people from the wrath of God.

Jeremiah 7:12, *“But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.”*

At one time in Redemptive History, Shiloh was one of the most holy places on the earth! It is where the Ark of the Covenant rested! Now in their twisted thinking, Hophni and Phineas (attendants of the Ark) concluded that they could do what they wanted; after all, they had the Ark! They helped themselves to the offerings which God’s people gave to the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). They laid with the female temple helpers who had devoted themselves to the service of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:22). And they did many, many other things. So God destroyed Shiloh (at the time of Jeremiah, the city was inhabited, but only barely, cf. Jeremiah 41:5) and gave the Ark over to the Philistines (1 Samuel. 4)!

Now, it was four hundred years after the events of 1 Samuel 4, history at the time of Jeremiah was about to repeat itself.

Jeremiah 7:13, *“‘And now, because you have done all these things,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer.’”*

This is reminiscent of God's call to Samuel (1 Samuel 3)! The difference is that in Jeremiah's day, there was no righteous man or woman to respond as Samuel did when he was but a lad! The nation was filled with little Hophnis and Phineases who in spite of repeated warnings gave themselves to their sinful lusts and pleasures!

Jeremiah 7:14, "Therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh."

If God was willing to give Shiloh over to His enemies on account of His people's rebellion, don't think that the fate of the temple or the holy city will be any different! J. A. Thompson put it this way:

That Yahweh had once *established a dwelling place for his name* in what was some sort of a sanctuary... did not in any way guarantee the inviolability of the town or the sanctuary when there was *wickedness (rā'â)* among his people. The people of Jeremiah's day thus had before them a powerful proof that God could dispense with the Jerusalem temple in the same way he dispensed with the Shiloh temple. (Thompson, 1980, p. 282)

From this we conclude that there is no holy place on earth that can protect you from the wrath of an angry God! In fact, any and all holy places in Redemptive History were pictures of THE one and only holy place which does protect us from the wrath of God on account of our sin: the cross of Christ! There is no mortal man, prophet, priest, or king- regardless of his devotion, love, and service to the Lord- that can prevent the judgment of God on account of sin (Jeremiah 7:16-20).

Jeremiah 7:16, "As for you [God here is speaking to Jeremiah], do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you."

This really is amazing! At this time in Redemptive History, there were the Spiritual Green Berets who genuinely loved the Lord (they obviously didn't live in Jerusalem)! Such men as Jeremiah, Baruch, Gedaliah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk all lived at this time and endeavored to honor Christ. Yet their presence in Israel could not forestall the coming judgment that was due the nation on account of its sin! So God told Jeremiah, "*Don't even bother praying and appealing to me for a respite for My people! The day of accounting is at hand!*" (cf. also Jeremiah 11:14; 14:11)

Family of God, hear this! In our flesh we entertain the notion that because we are not immediately punished for our sin, it must not be that bad! And because it is not that bad, we need only to (1) do this religious activity, (2) offer that religious prayer, or better yet, (3) have a man or woman of God intercede on our behalf, and everything will be O.K.! God addressed this inclination in Romans 2.

Romans 2:4-6, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and

patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? [Because the Jews of Christ's day were not immediately punished for their sin, they assumed that what they were doing wasn't so bad; evidently God didn't care or possibly approved of it! So Paul warned his generation with these words...] But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."

What a shocker! Silence on the part of God is not complicity nor is it an endorsement! ALL SIN WILL BE ACCOUNTED FOR ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT! THE SMALLEST ACT OR THOUGHT WILL NOT BE MISSED!

Now we'd like it if a friend, a holy man or woman could pray on our behalf and lessen our sin. The only problem is that they have their own sin to deal with; so they are not in a place where they can remove or lessen ours! Accordingly, we must see that no mere mortal man can prevent the judgment of God on account of sin! And so, Jeremiah was instructed by God NOT to pray for any abetting of judgment!

Jeremiah 7:20, "Therefore thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched.'

This coming judgment was unavoidable and unstoppable! But herein is the most glorious news! For while no mere mortal man can assuage God's anger, the living and reigning God-Man, Jesus Christ, can and did!

Romans 3:25, "Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith."

The word *propitiation* refers to a "wrath removing sacrifice!" In other words because Christ had no sin (unlike the most devout and holy man or woman), He was able to die in the place of the sinner and take upon Himself the just wrath of God on account of our sin! Accordingly, while there is no mortal man who can stand in the gap and serve as a "wrath removing agent," there is a man who did; Jesus Christ! Because He is God, He is without sin. And because He is a man, He was born under stipulations of the covenant which God established with this world in Adam!

Now get this, it is so pathetic. For thousands of years throughout Redemptive History, God gave religious types and fore-shadowings that Christ's work on our behalf might be understood:

- The Temple was intended to be a picture of Christ's body.
- The Sacrificial System pictured Christ's sacrificial work.

The Case Laws all reflected the compassionate and gracious heart of the Lord for His people; justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The priestly office proclaimed our need for a righteous priest who truly could take away our sin. The prophetic office spoke of the Word of Life of which one taste would satisfy us for a lifetime. The office of the King was given that we might anticipate

and long for the “righteous Branch” who would subdue us to Himself, rule and defend us, and protect us from all His and our enemies!

Yet we in our flight from God/sin came to prefer the types over Christ, and so have and continue to confuse the shadows with their substance; thinking that a rite involving water can deliver us from the wrath of God. Or that Bible reading, prayer, or religious service somehow makes us acceptable in God’s eyes. This is what Jeremiah’s generation did!

Colossians 2:16-17, “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Family of God, if you don’t leave with anything else from Jeremiah’s Temple sermon long for the substance of our religion; not its shadow! Renew your commitment and devotion to Jesus. Know that all religious acts or devotion are a vehicle that God gives that we might love and enjoy Christ, not replace Him!

Bibliography

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 10, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.