



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **A Religion that Betrays, Part 3**

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Jeremiah 7-8:3

The heart and soul of Christianity is Christ; knowing Him, loving Him, walking with Him, serving Him, and honoring Him. This has been the same since the beginning. At creation, we read of God desirous of walking with Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:8). The core of God's covenant relationship with man repeated throughout the word is God "being our God and we His people" (Genesis 12, 15, 17). And the final state is described in these terms:

Revelation 21:3, "...the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them."

Not surprisingly therefore, the greatest command and that which is behind every law that God has given is loving God (Matthew 22:37-38). As such, throughout the word we read of God's people longing to love, know, and fellowship with Christ. Asaph's passion for the Lord is beautifully captured when he wrote these words:

Psalms 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth."

David loved the Lord and longed to fellowship with Him:

Psalms 42:1-2, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"<sup>1</sup>

The crowning glory of Job was the day he would fellowship with his Redeemer:

Job 19:26-27, "Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me."

The distinguishing characteristic of Enoch's life is that he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22). Such also was the case for Noah, Genesis 6:9! And then there is Paul:

Philippians 3:8a, 10, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

Truly, a love-relationship with Christ is the heart and soul of Christianity! Accordingly, the goal of all parenting is bringing Christ to the child and the child to Christ.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7: "[The Command...] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [The Calling as it Relates to Parenting...] And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons [In other words, your sons and daughters must be taught that the centrality of their religion is loving God!] and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

The husband/wife relationship finds its fulfilment in "proclaiming and enjoying the Christ/Church relationship" (Ephesians 5:32)! Pastoral care in the context of the church finds its

fulfillment, according to Ephesians 4:13, in raising up people who love and know the Lord! And what is the epitome of eternal life? Is it not a love-relationship with Christ (John 17:3)?

Yet when the Fall took place, this love-relationship was violated and destroyed! Satan effectively tempted the man and the woman such that the non-Christian's greatest passion is autonomy from the Lord. From the Fall on, fallen man frantically sought to get away from God (Romans 1:21-23)! And though God in His grace was unwilling to lose man and so sought after them in Christ, nevertheless the passion for Christless living still remains in the heart of the Redeemed! We don't want to submit to Christ; we like living in a world where what we do placates God and so places Him in our debt.

Thus, the history of redemption is a history of God's people at times rejecting Christ, and yet clinging to the laws and ceremonies which God gave to enhance our relationship with the Lord. So Christians living this way will still love

- Bible reading.
- Worship.
- Ceremonies.
- Ritual.
- Our symbols which we hang on our walls, wear as jewelry, and tattoo on our bodies.
- We love living in a world where these things make us good Christians and so blessed Christians!

In this way you must see that at times throughout Redemptive History, the religion of the people actually betrayed them! By clinging to the forms and circumstances of their religion; all of which were prescribed by God they actually rebelled against the Lord! Such was the problem facing Jeremiah's generation! They worshipped God with their lips, in other words they did many great and wonderful things but their hearts were far from God! And so in 609 B.C. Jeremiah was instructed by God to go the Temple Mount, stand at the main entrance, and preached the sermon before us. Thus far we have seen the background and the first four of Jeremiah's seven points.

The Message

- Religious devotion cannot nor will it ever assuage an angry God on account of our sin (Jeremiah 7:3-8).
- Righteous living- regardless of the quantity or quality- does not purchase the right to sin (Jeremiah 7:9-11).
- No holy place on earth can protect an individual or people from the wrath of God (Jeremiah 7:12-15).
- 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).
- Covenant Obedience is more Important than Religious Acts of Devotion (Jeremiah

7:21-26)...

Jeremiah 7:22-23, “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices [in other words, I didn’t redeem the nation from slavery so that they could become more religious!]. But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.’”

The Exodus (and for that matter, redemption) was/is not simply about delivering God’s people from an undesirable condition (slavery); it involved that, but it was much bigger! The Exodus ultimately was about God’s people being delivered unto a relationship of love, devotion, and commitment to God. When the nation of Israel was led to the base of Mount Sinai, we read of Moses:

Exodus 19:3-4, “And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.’””

Truly you haven’t understood the Exodus until you see that it was about God bringing His people back to Himself! This is why the message of Moses to the Pharaoh WASN’T simply, “Let my people go!”- as if it was all about their deliverance. RATHER it was, “Let my people go that they may serve me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). Accordingly, it was in the context of a love-relationship, a Covenant Relationship, that God exhorted His people at the base of Mount Sinai:

Exodus 19:5-6a, “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant [again, when it comes to a relationship with God, the Lord wants integrity!], then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...”

From this we see that God’s intention when it comes to salvation is the whole man/woman. He did not redeem us so that we simply would perform religious acts of devotion! Accordingly to the deceived Saul who thought God might be impressed with his religious devotion even though it meant disobeying God, Samuel said this:

1 Samuel 15:22, “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.”

That is exactly what David affirmed in his confession after he fell into 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.”

When the sinner is “broken in spirit” seeing their depravity and spiritual bankruptcy, it is then that they fulfill one of the ends of salvation and so cling to God! In fact it is only in this context that religious acts of devotion mean anything. Notice how David’s Psalm of confession ends:

Psalms 51:19, “Then Thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then young bulls will be offered on Thine altar.”

It is NOT that these are worthless. RATHER, it is that these do not constitute the essence of salvation! God didn’t redeem us so that we might engage in religious activities! Thus Christ said to His generation that had exchanged God for sacrifice and religious activity;

Matthew 9:13, “But go and learn what *this* means, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

God’s people at the time of Jeremiah missed all this. They did not like God and so they neglected and at times rejected Him. But they maintained the religious show as if that meant anything! Accordingly, Jeremiah’s message to his generation was this: **Covenant Obedience** is more Important than **Religious Acts of Devotion!**

Notice the sixth section and so the sixth message, knowledge, information, or theological acumen not only cannot save a sinner; it in fact instigates the sinning proclivity of man leaving him as twice the child of wrath (Jeremiah 7:27-34).

Jeremiah 7:27-28, 30-31, “And you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you. And you shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.’ [Do you understand? The more Jeremiah preached to his generation, the more they rebelled against God and ran into sin. In fact, it got so bad that the people of God even engaged in child sacrifice—skipping down to v. 30...] ‘For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,’ declares the Lord, ‘they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.’”

From this we see another “awful” message that Jeremiah gives us here in this sermon: in and of itself knowledge does not save or sanctify; it only condemns! Again, the more Jeremiah preached to the nation, the more they rebelled. And the more the nation rebelled, the greater their condemnation became!

Jeremiah 7:32, “‘Therefore, behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when it will no

more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no *other* place.”

In 586 BC when the third and final exile occurred, the Valley of Hinnom would become a grave yard where Jews would bury their loved ones. Yet so many people would be killed at the time, the Valley of Hinnom would be so filled, dead bodies would be left exposed to be eaten by birds and wild animals! In this context we tend to think: “If only Israel had known this to be their future; they would have repented!” Yet again, that is the point: they did know that this would be their future! Yet it had no effect except to harden their hearts such that they indulged in sin all the more!

This is a strange psychology. The perversity of sin is such that to warn people of the consequences of their rebellion does NOT inhibit their sin; it excites it! Paul explains this about the non-believer:

Romans 1:32, “And, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

In fact, Paul went on to explain how it works:

Romans 7:7b-8a, “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind...”

It is as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 8, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (v. 1b)! How is this so? What explains this strange psychology? The answer is found in the depravity of man!

Romans 1:28, “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.”

To be “given over to a depraved mind” does NOT mean that the non-Christian is forced to sin. RATHER, it means that God’s grace is no longer there to inhibit them as it did before. From this we see that knowledge, information, or theological acumen not only cannot save a sinner; it in fact instigates the sinning proclivity of man leaving him as twice the child of wrath!

Notice the final section; that in the end, all idols will betray their worshipper, leaving the individual with the expectation of death. This is speaking of the end, when the Babylonian armies vanquished the people of God, destroyed the temple, and so conquered the nation of Judah:

Jeremiah 8:1-2, “‘At that time,’ declares the Lord, ‘they [the Babylonians] will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves.’”

[And as an act of humiliation to show that the Babylonian god is greater than the false gods that the people had been worshipping...] And they will spread [the bodies] out to the sun, the moon, and to all the host of heaven, which they have loved, and which they have served, and which they have gone after, and which they have sought, and which they have worshiped. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be as dung on the face of the ground.”

For an entire century, the nation of Judah had rejected God because they preferred the religious excitement that came with Baal, Dagon, Asherah, and the many other gods of the Canaanites. Throughout all this time, God warned His people that these false gods would not protect them essentially saying, *“Do you really want to entrust your souls to these false deities? In the end they will betray you!”* Yet God’s people not only did NOT listen to the Lord; BUT they got angry at the prophets and persecuted them! Accordingly, God disciplined the nation with its own sin (Proverbs 5:22; Hos. 2:6-7; Jeremiah 5:25)! Notice where all false-religion eventually brings a person:

Jeremiah 8:3, *“And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family, that remains in all the places to which I have driven them,”* declares the Lord of hosts.”

This is the brutal end of all rebellion! Sin has a pleasure (Hebrews 11:25) only because God in His grace withholds the consequences of sin when it is committed. Yet when God’s grace is no longer operative and the sinner is given over to their sin, they get a full dose of it! And the result is the longing for death! That is why on the Last Day when the judgment of God is fully met out on account of sin, the non-believer will NOT repent, BUT instead long for death.

Revelation 6:15-16, *“And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.’”*

That in essence would be the disposition of many of God’s people when the Babylonians destroyed their nation, put them in bonds, and marched them into exile! They would not repent or turn back to God (although they could); rather, they simply would long for death!

This was Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon which he preached just four years before the Babylonians first came to Judah and took from the land the first exiles! If we were to condense this chapter and so Jeremiah’s message into a couple of walk away points, we’d assert at least the following:

- There is a way *which seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death! (Proverbs 14:12)
- The pleasure of sin at best is passing; in the end it brings with it bitterness and death!
- Any and all religion void of Christ is absolutely and completely worthless!
- Our passion as Christians ought therefore to be Christ- knowing Him, loving Him, serving

Him, and so honoring Him! There is no higher calling that could be placed on our lives than this!

Yet that is not what God's people at the time of Jeremiah walked away with. Notice the response of the people and an important lesson for all servants of Christ. In the middle of Jeremiah's sermon, God warned the prophet:

Jeremiah 7:27, "And you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you."

I wonder if Jeremiah understood what God meant here anymore than we did the first time we read this verse! Do any of you know the people's initial response to this sermon? It is shocking!

Jeremiah 26:7-9, "And the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. And when Jeremiah finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded *him* to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, 'You must die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord saying, "This house will be like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant"?' And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the Lord."

As you read further in the chapter you will see that Jeremiah would have been executed at this time (cf. v. 11) if it wasn't for a couple righteous men! J. A. Thompson describes it this way:

Small wonder that when Jeremiah commanded the people to amend their ways, and declared that the temple would become like Shiloh (7:12–14) and the nation would be cast out, there was a violent reaction from the priests, the prophets, and the people, who would have done Jeremiah to death there and then (26:7–9). The state officials set up a trial and took evidence from the priests and prophets and from Jeremiah (26:10–15). Jeremiah was acquitted of any capital charge (26:16–18), but the incident nearly cost the prophet his life. Some of the state officials, notably Ahikam ben Shaphan (26:24), one of the leaders in Josiah's reform and perhaps a son of the Secretary of State in Josiah's day (2 K. 22:12), were able to rescue him. Another prophet, Uriah, met his death at the hands of Jehoiakim about the same time (26:20–23). (Thompson, 1980, pp. 99-100)

So sadly, rather than repenting and turning from their sin, the nation's knee jerk reaction was to kill the messenger! Truly their fate was sealed. Their Religion would Betray them! But this raises an important question (looking from the perspective of Jeremiah):

- Was the message of the sufficiency of Christ only for the nation at this time? Was it not also intended for the messenger as well? Was Jeremiah simply to preach it, but not live it?
- Is it Dave's and my calling as shepherds simply to speak of the loveliness of Christ, but not ourselves to be impassioned for Him?
- As parents is it our calling to tell our children that all they need is Christ, but ourselves



NOT to live in a world where this is so?

- Is it our calling as Christians to be in love with a sovereign God, but ourselves NOT submit when He deigns a bitter providence?

We will look further at the experiences Jeremiah would encounter as a result of God's call of service. But for now, let us realize that it is God's will for ALL of us to learn the sufficiency of Christ in life. God wants us to pant for the Lord just as Asaph, Paul, David, Job, and many, many more in Scripture. Their experiences are NOT recorded for us that we might affirm by faith that such a passion is good. No! What we read of their life indicates the end/telos of our growth in grace as well!

In other words, "Physician, heal thyself!" Preacher, heed thy message! Congregation, embody the will of the Lord and so settle for nothing less in your religion than fellowshiping and walking with Christ all the days of your life!

## **Bibliography**

Thompson, J. A. (1980). *A Book of Jeremiah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

## **End Note**

<sup>1</sup> As such, he really only ever had but one desire, "One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple" (Ps. 27:4)

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## **About the Preacher**

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