

Jeremiah 7:16-29 Living Where Truth Has Perished Falls Church AM  
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A young man named John received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity.

John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to "clean up" the bird's choice of words.

Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. The parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got more angry and even more rude!

John, in desperation, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep was heard for over a minute. Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer.

The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior."

John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude. As he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behavior, the bird continued, "May I ask what the turkey did?"

We live in a place where people suppress the truth that we are all guilty before a holy God, and that Jesus is the only way to be saved from God's wrath. People all around us will not listen. **Our wonderful God gives us instructions for how to live in a place where truth has perished.**

### **1. Why was Jeremiah told not to pray for the people? (v.16-20)**

(v.16), "*As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.*"

Jeremiah had preached repentance the best way that Jeremiah knew how, but the people did not listen. The people were too busy with their little rituals of worship. Their hearts were far from God.

What should Jeremiah do next? Pray for them, right?

That is what is so surprising about verse 16. God says not to pray. How are we to understand this?

Let's compare to Moses. Moses came down from Mount Sinai, where Moses had been talking with God, and what did Moses find? Moses found that the people were not worshipping the true God at all – they had replaced God with a statue of a calf that they had made with their own hands. It was made of gold, so we call it the golden calf. What should Moses do next?

The Bible tells us what Moses did, in Exodus 32:30-32, “...*Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”*<sup>31</sup> *So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold.*<sup>32</sup> *But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.”*”

Jeremiah should pray for the people. Right?

But God told Jeremiah not to pray. We can even break out the verse into five statements that emphasize. 1. Do not pray for this people. 2. Do not lift up a cry for them. 3. Do not lift up a prayer for them. 4. Do not intercede with me for them. 5. I will not hear your prayer.

We need to put together 4 factors to understand.

1) the first factor is God knew things that Jeremiah did not know. Things such as a) that the people would not listen b) that the people would not repent and c) that God would send burning anger that could not be quenched.

2) the second factor is we must pray according to God's will. Since God's intention was to send judgment upon the people, it would have been wrong for the prophet to pray for deliverance of the people. We cannot ask God to go AGAINST the purposes of God. Instead of praying “Thy will be done” it is like praying, LET JEREMIAH'S WILL BE DONE.

3) the third factor is when we pray for the glory of God, we accept God's verdict. There are two possible verdicts. a) mercy to sinners. b) judgment to sinners. It is wrong to pray for a different verdict than God's verdict.

4) the fourth factor is to remember that with God, there is mercy even beyond His anger and His angry judgments. We sometimes call this tough love. Remember that Jeremiah was called by God for two things - to build up, as well as to tear down. Right now, Jeremiah is tearing down. But one day, Jeremiah will be building up by preaching about a new covenant. God had promised an ultimate deliverance of His people, but sometimes the people must first pass through the

fires of God's anger. Sometimes, God's anger is sent in order to refine us! There are situations in which God's wrath is purifying God's people! Jeremiah was to be commanded not to pray for the temporary relief of the people, thereby going against God's longer-term plans for the renovation of the people.

What was so bad about people in Jerusalem? Beginning with verse 17, it seems that God took Jeremiah by the hand and walked him through the home lives of the people. Verse 17, "*Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?*" In other words, God was saying to Jeremiah, look at what the sinning people are doing now!

Verse 18, "*The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger.*"

The family was all working together, it seems. Much like we and our neighbors might do on a Labor Day – it is time for a bonfire! So, the young are sent to gather kindling sticks. The fathers are making fire! The women making food. Mommy is making dough to bake a cake in the image of the queen, in the form of a woman.

Seems like a quaint family picture of a Norman Rockwell scene. The families are spending quality time in a family activity together. Getting closer to each other as a family, but the whole family was moving farther away from God.

How so? They understood God to be their Father in heaven, and so they were trying to create a mistress for God. The queen of heaven!?

How is our God responding to such an offer? Verse 19, "*Is it I whom they provoke? declares the Lord. Is it not themselves, to their own shame?*"

The point is that the people are damaging themselves by false worship.

So, how will God treat the sinning people? Verse 20, "*Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.*"

The families were supposed to conduct true worship in God's temple, where burnt offerings were to be correctly offered by households. The burnt offering was the highest form of request for God to forgive their sins. This was not a family BBQ, but a worship service. The burnt offering was not to be eaten at all. That

offering was to be completely devoted to the Lord. Their false worship was provoking God to anger.

## **2. What should we do when the people won't repent? (v.21-26)**

But in verse 21, we find that this time the burnt offering meant nothing to God. Listen, *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh (meat).’”*

God is saying to the people, if you are going to treat Me so disrespectfully, and serve false gods, then you might as well save yourself the trouble. Save the meat for yourselves, and grill it and eat it.

It would be like God saying to us – I'm giving your Sunday tithes and offerings right back to you, I reject your attempt, and I suggest that you go get yourself a tasty burgers for the whole family. It is angry sarcasm. God is upset. Very upset. Why?

You will understand when I read verse 22, *“For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

What? God did not ask for the sacrifices they are bringing. The people were worshipping God on their own terms! They were making it up as they went along, instead of worshipping God in the way that God asked to be worshipped. Who ever said to bring burnt offerings? Yes, at other times, God Himself asked them to bring burnt offerings, but never the offerings by themselves. Yes, God asks us to bring tithes and offerings, but never just the money by itself. Along with the money, we are supposed to bring our own cheerful hearts. In a way we are actually offering our whole selves to God, even as we bring dollars to God in worship. What God wanted was not a tasty barbeque! God wanted their genuine spiritual devotion!

Listen to verse 23, *“But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’”*

**NOT BURNT OFFERINGS. INSTEAD, OBEDIENCE!**

**NOT BIG DOLLARS DONATED, BUT RATHER OBEDIENT HEARTS!**

When a man does something to offend his wife for the 100<sup>th</sup> time, what will that man do – in classic case of that man trying to make up with her? Bring her flowers! But what does she want instead? Stop doing that offensive thing.

God wanted their obedience AND their true worship. But since they would not give their obedience, God would not accept their bribery worship.

What if that wife threw the flowers into the garbage? She really wanted her husband to do the right things AND bring her flowers. But since he would not do the right things, the wife would not accept his flowers either.

It was not wrong for the people to bring burnt offerings to God. But since they were not pursuing holiness, so it was actions done in vain for them to bring these burnt offerings. The Lord our God said famously through another prophet named Hosea, *“I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”* But we must understand that is not an either/or. God actually wanted both. God wanted BOTH steadfast love and sacrifice. God wanted BOTH knowledge of Him AND burnt offerings. God wanted BOTH obedience, and genuine worship. God wants your spiritual devotion, and your dollars donations.

What the bad husbands never seem to understand is that flowers don't buy back the wife – why? Because the wife wanted BOTH to be treated well AND to receive the thoughtful extravagant gift of flowers. It is not an either/or situation. If you don't treat your wife well, you don't attempt to buy her heart back with flowers. It is insulting. She is not a vending machine from which you buy things for the price of a dollar, and she is not a puppy who forgives all with the next treat. And neither is God.

The example that God gave in verse 22 was the classic example of the people of God coming up out of Egypt. Once God saved His people, He did not give them instructions for bringing many sacrifices. No. What did God give them? Instructions for how to live in many correct ways. We call these The Ten Commandments! Obedience to the commands is at the heart of God's covenant bond with God's people. And in verse 23, God reviewed what that covenant bond required of God and what that covenant bond required of them. God must see Himself as their God. They must see themselves as God's people. Were the people seeing themselves as God's people? No. They were acting like the people of this female god instead, this queen of heaven from verse 18.

God reviewed the sins of the people in verses 24-26, *“But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. 25 From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. 26 Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.”*

Review of the sins.

24. Did not obey.
  25. God sent prophets.
  26. Did not listen. Grew stubborn. Worse than fathers. (not better than)
- That brings us to our last point.

### **3. How do we live here, after truth has perished all around us? (v.27-29)**

Verse 27 is interesting. Remember from verse 16, that God has told Jeremiah not to pray. But here in verse 27, Jeremiah can still preach to them. But what is doubly interesting is God's observation about the people's response to the faithful preaching. God says to Jeremiah – the people will not listen. Here are verses 27-28, *“So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 And you shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.’”*

#### Truth has perished!

No truth in their family gatherings, for their whole BBQ cookout and bonfire event was in the service of false gods!

No truth in public worship gatherings either. They were calling God their Savior, but not living for Him as Lord who can command them how to live.

The people listening to Jeremiah, were supposed to have a strong reaction to this statement that truth has perished.

If they did have a very convicting experience listening that sermon, what did Jeremiah instruct them to do? That set of strange instructions is in our last verse, verse 29, *““Cut off your hair and cast it away; raise a lamentation on the bare heights, for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.”*

Why cut off their hair? Because it was always an outward sign of inward repentance. The classic shaved head on the outside, showed the sorrow of repentance inside. If truth had died in Jerusalem, and were sad and horrified and convicted about it, cutting off their hair would be the right response.

If we had a picture of America, could we put as a caption – Truth has perished?

If we had a picture of our public worship service, could we put as a caption – Truth has perished?

If we had a picture of your family gathering, could we put as a caption – truth has perished?

Let's root out goddess worship. Mother nature? Mother earth? Witchcraft? Fascination with new age, Eastern religions, and ancient divinities. The supermodels and cheerleaders, the television and other ads that present the feminine body as an idol that our culture worships.

Other people worship the Virgin Mary. They even give her the title Queen of heaven! They miss Jeremiah's point. The point is that there is no queen of heaven!

Only the King of heaven. Giving too much attention to Mary is to deny the sufficiency of Christ Jesus as our savior. Mary was a godly woman who had an important role in Biblical history, but she is not a mediatrix. To pray to Mary is to treat her as a goddess. In fact, to pray to a human being is paganism, and then that is supposedly brought into the worship of God! It provokes God to anger.

Feminism is the worship of the power of the woman, proposing the superiority of the woman. The Biblical truth is that women are made in the image of God. Genesis 1:27, "*in the image of God He created [man]....male and female God created them...*" The truth is that women are created in the image of God, and are therefore dignified, and are called upon to obey God, to worship God, to love their families, and to serve the church family. This is truth.

But falsehood is the opposite, because our culture's feminism is to make God in the image of a woman. There is a constant push to exalt women above men, and even to exalt women above God, as if women do not need to obey God!

The price of our culture's lack of obedience to God is seen in divorces, the fights in the church over the Biblical role of women in the church, of failing to protect children from falsehoods, in eating disorders, and in violence against women, and in warping and sexualizing all male-female relationships.

If feminism is a religion, then child sacrifice is the ritual that atones. We call it abortion, but the Biblical words are child sacrifice. Someone else has to die to keep me happy?

No, instead families must obey God, and worship God.

**Conclusion: Three tips for living where truth has perished.**

**1) Remember that Christ is the truth who perished for us, but then rose again.**

John 1:17, "*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*"

John 5:24, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*"

In John 14:6, Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...*"

John 16:13, "*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...*"

**2) Remember that Christ prays for us and calls us to pray for sinners.**

We have a huge difference between the lifetime of Jeremiah, and the lifetime of ourselves, that we must always keep in mind, even as we study a book like Jeremiah together. And that difference is – we have a great High Priest who was dead and is alive, and HE is praying for us without ceasing. Hebrews 7:24-25,

*“[Christ] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

Christ prays for us. Christ came for us, into this world. Christ died for us upon the cross. Christ rose again for us from the grave. Christ lives. Because He lives, he is able to save us to the uttermost, which is to save us completely.

We do not pray for God to save people, EVEN THOUGH THOSE PEOPLE NEVER REPENTED! No. But we can always pray for people to repent. No sinner is beyond us praying for him or her.

God’s instructions for us as Paul wrote to young pastor named Timothy, in 1 Timothy 2:1, *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,...”* verse 3, *“This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all,...”*

We are called to pray for all sinners.

**3) Christ calls us to family worship.** To see a revival in America, we start with worship in our homes. We must begin every day in prayer to the one true and living God, and by getting His truth through daily Bible reading.

If you do not worship Christ at home, then you are acting like a pagan.

What does your family worship? Either it is worship of God, or it is worship of television, or a sports car, or a sports team, or your favorite food, or a certain music, or anger or violence or lies.

Letter written by pastors in the 1600s, included in the front of printed copies of the Westminster Confession of Faith, “As we cannot but with grief of soul lament those multitudes of errors, blasphemies, and all kinds of profaneness, which have in this last age, like a mighty deluge, overflowed this nation; so, among several other sins which have helped to open the flood-gates of all these impieties, we cannot but esteem the disuse of family instruction one of the greatest.”

The end of that letter, If, therefore, there be any spark in you of love to God, be not content that any of yours should be ignorant of Him whom you so much admire, or any haters of Him whom you so much love. If there be any compassion to the souls of them who are under your care, if any regard of your being found faithful in the day of Christ, if any respect to future generations, labour to sow these seeds of knowledge, which may grow up in after-times.”

Let me remind you of the helps we offer. We have devotionals that you can use. The New Horizons magazine has a prayer list in it, that you could use daily for your family to pray for our missionaries and our new churches. Our bulletins have a prayer list that you could pray daily for needs in our church family. You could read through the book of Jeremiah, or the book of John, and other books that we are studying as a church. You can get a hymnbook, and sing together around your supper table. At least start at suppertime when you feed your body, to feed your mind the truth by reading the Bible and praying. Christ calls us to family worship.

That is how we live as Christians in a place where truth has perished.