

Some people think that human beings are basically good people. Some people think that if you give the right family, the right education, the right upbringing and care, the problems with humans can be fixed. That is not true. The Bible demolishes that false theory. All human beings are bad, with bad hearts. Only when Jesus took our incurable hearts to the cross and put them to death, and gave us new hearts, did we become capable of good.

In the Bible, the word heart is more than just emotions, such as my heart went out to you. It means in my emotions I felt sad for you. In the Bible, the heart is more. It is here thought occurs, it is where desires reside, and it is where decisions are made. Here in chapter 17, Jeremiah teaches that our hearts is where our deep-seated, incorrigible wickedness is found, which requires God's judgment.

Just like everyone can read sin on the hearts of the people of a country, everyone can read the Word of God written on the hearts of the people of a church. This reflects the truth that **There are only two kinds of hearts: sadly stunted or abundantly flourishing.**

Our sin is engraved on our hearts, but God will write His law on our hearts.

1. Change of heart: from stone to flesh. (v.1-13)

Verse 1, their sins are inscribed on their hearts, like laws were written onto clay tablets, is stinging satire of them being heart-level breakers of the Ten Commandments, while they continue to claim God's law as their own. Verse 2, their children, who should have been well-versed in the ways of The LORD, such as Deuteronomy 6:7 says, "*You shall teach God's Word diligently to your children, 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...*" But here in our verse 2, their children only remember how their sin was everywhere, sin beside every tree, sin on every hill, sin on the mountain, and sin in the open country. The need for training children in the ways of God is portrayed acutely.

Verse 3, God would give their wealth as the price for their sins. Verse 4, God's anger will cause them to lose the land and serve their enemies in a foreign land. Speaking of the impending exile again here.

Verse 5, much like Psalm 1, there is a contrast now painted between the person with complete reliance on God for well-being, and the person who trusts in his own strength. Walking with God in the covenant has a paradox. Attempting to put your life on secure footing by selfishly relying on your own abilities results in curses. But trusting in God, which includes obeying God, is the way of life. Jesus said in Matthew 10:39, "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*"

Verse 6, the shrub has a stark and fruitless appearance, with stunted roots that do not penetrate down far enough to reach the water levels below the surface of the ground. Like that plant, with no green leaves, no fruit, and no growth, so also the sinning people will have no good come to their lives. They live, as it were, in parched places, the wilderness, the salt land.

Verse 7, how very different, though, is the man whose heart has true trust in the LORD. What is he like? Verse 8 answers that he is like a tree planted by water. The roots of the tree reach to the underground stream. When hot days come, the tree remains green, and the fruit keeps coming. So the people who are connected to the Word of God underneath them, do not fear, are not anxious, but continue to flourish no matter the difficult days in which they live. Every generation of people are each persons born with a heart of stone needing regeneration. John 3:3, Jesus said, “*unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*” Titus 3:5, God “*...saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...*”

Without God’s Spirit...without a change of heart, we are each the same hard-hearted fruitless and miserable people as the sinners of Judah were.

This is the context for the famous words of verse 9, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*”

Consider what Paul wrote about our hearts in Romans 3:10-12, “*...none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God...no one does good, not even one.*”

The Bible teaches that human beings are free agents, morally responsible for themselves to choose good and reject evil in any given situation. Tragically, as a result of our fall in Adam, our hearts were in bondage to sin. That means we did not love God and others as we should, but instead we loved ourselves in a selfish way, as we should not do. We were free agents, but we did not use our freedom to love God. We were enslaved to our selfishness. Only God can free us from enslavement to sin.

Wise King Solomon asked rhetorically in Proverbs 20:9, “*Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?’*”

The Apostle John agreed when he wrote in 1 John 1:8, “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*”

Paul, John, and King Solomon all agree with Jeremiah here, so that God’s Word has a unified stance that our hearts were bad.

Verse 10, God searches the heart! Literally heart-searching. Another way to say the same thing is that the Lord tests or examines our minds. Our deeds flow out of our hearts and minds. The heart is the basis of our character, and it includes our mind and will. God knows our thoughts. God knows our intentions.

Verse 11 contains another illustration. This time, the person is compared to a certain kind of bird that hatches the eggs of other birds. When the young realize the false mother, they leave that bird. Same is true for riches acquired unjustly. The riches disappear. Who are we describing? Verse 11 says the fool. The fool in the Bible is the person who does not appreciate morals. Wisdom will leave them like the young birds will leave the wrong mother.

All this talk illustrates what we see in verse 12, having God's glorious throne with them, is only as valid as the people's willingness to respond to God in covenant love.

Verse 13, all who forsake God, all who turn away from God, shall be put to shame, written in the earth. They have turned away from the fountain of living water. Jeremiah is pointing ahead to Christ, who is the living water. Jesus Himself said to the woman at the well in John 4:14, "whoever drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The heart-sins of idolatry and self-trusting defile everything, while true heart-obedience and fruitfulness in everything during times of crisis is only possible by trusting THE LORD.

2. The heart of a leader. Jeremiah was impacted by his own message. He faithfully shepherded the people and they persecuted him. (v.14-18)

Verses 14-18 is the fourth of what we call the confessions of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a leader who shows the people how to get right with God. Jeremiah knows that true healing is the Lord's doing.

In verse 14, Jeremiah here was pleading with the LORD, since the LORD is the only hope. Jeremiah was asking God to heal and to restore.

In verse 15, we have a really scary statement. The sinning people said to Jeremiah - who was prophesying their doom, destruction, and being carried away to a foreign prison - where are these actions that the LORD has been threatening to do to us? "*Let it come!*" What a taunting remark! Jeremiah prophesied doom, and they were saying, "Fine, Jeremiah, tell God to let it rip!" Sinners say the same thing in each generation. Consider 2 Peter 3:4, "*They will say, 'Where is the promise of [God's] coming? ...ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.'*" People are doubting Peter, and doubting Jeremiah and doubting God, saying, there won't be a judgment! That is a tough audience. Anyone who has done street evangelism has encountered people with this brazen view of God.

Jeremiah was looking for some vindication here from God. This mockery is what Jeremiah had to deal with.

Verse 16, Jeremiah said to God, *“I have not run away from being your shepherd...”* Despite the persecution of the people, Jeremiah did not abandon his prophetic job. Jeremiah did not want them to be destroyed.

Verse 17, Jeremiah pleaded with God to be the refuge for him.

Verse 18, Jeremiah wanted the day of truth to come, when it would be made abundantly clear to everyone that it was not Jeremiah who would be put to shame, but rather the people. *“let them be dismayed, but let me not be dismayed...”*

Leaders sometimes stand alone in faithfulness to God. Yet the faithfulness of one person can have such good impact that it is hard to measure.

3. A heart test. God’s gift of a day of rest is an abiding command that reliably indicates our spiritual health. (v.19-27)

Here comes the test from God. One of God’s Ten Commandments is to keep one day of rest, on which people will not work. Exodus 20:6, *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”* Amos 8:5, the hearts of the people are revealed, when will the Sabbath be over, *“that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances...”* Their hearts were not in the Sabbath, but rather wanted to make money and rip off people to make more money. God’s command for everyone to rest was getting in the way of their goals. Their idol was money.

What would happen when God tested the people of Judah? Here comes.

The test started when The LORD asked Jeremiah to stand at the gate in verse 19.

In verse 20, Jeremiah was to speak to kings and all the people.

In verse 21, the message was preserving the day of rest and worship.

Verse 22, not to work on the Sabbath day, but rather to keep it holy.

Verse 23, the people did not listen to God.

Verse 24, if the people listened and obeyed, then verse 25 kings will sit on the throne of David, and the city will have people, and verse 26, the people will worship God.

Verse 27, but if the people would not keep the command concerning the day of rest, then God would kindle a fire to devour Jerusalem.

Do we understand this? Do we grasp why God is so concerned about the Sabbath during the final days of sinning Judah? The nation is in crisis, yet God is telling the people not to carry a load through the city gates on the Sabbath day.

Why?

God set aside the Sabbath day as a day of rest, commemorating the day God Himself ceased from the work of creating the world, and God Himself RESTED.

Sabbath rest is a picture of trusting God, following God, shutting down all of our own activities in order to remind ourselves that we are not redeemed by our own activities, that we are not able to improve ourselves by ourselves.

This is a crucial test of faith. Do we get a change of heart by a gift of God, or is by our own self-improvement? The keeping of the Sabbath reveals that you understand salvation is all of God.

This gives hope because if there was true repentance, the people would be saved from God's wrath.

If the covenant was observed in the lives of the people, then the dynasty of David's kingship will be maintained, and from the North will come peaceful migrations of people. But if the covenant was disobeyed, the complete destruction of Jerusalem would be coming.

The heart test for the day of rest is whether or not we rely on God. We need to lay down all of our means of earning for one day, as an act of faith. It means systematically allowing time in our lives for worship and for rest, even at the cost of personal advancement.

In the test that God gave through Jeremiah, we see a scene at the city gate of busy activity of businesses shipping products. Stand at the shipping hub. Stand at the fulfillment center. Stand at the cross-section of the sports world and the entertainment world. There is a place where the activity is noticeable. The kings come there. The investors come there. The sellers come there. The buyers come there. Right then and there, are the people obeying God's command to rest? Are they remembering the Sabbath day? Are they keeping the day holy unto the Lord?

One commandment can be a test of our hearts.

Whether or not we use Sunday for rest and worship can be a measure of our spiritual lives – our hearts! This chapter about our hearts includes an example with a solemn warning about our need to observe this pattern, this commandment from God.

CONCLUSION:

A historian named Edward Gibbons wrote many volumes about the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The first volume he wrote in 1776, the same year the United States declared its independence. The last volume he published in 1789, the year that the United States Constitution went into effect.

It is interesting in God's providence that the books about the crumbling of one of history's greatest empires was published during the time that the US was being established. Perhaps God was warning America.

What were the chief factors that led to the fall of Rome?

The Roman Empire did not fall because of climate change or a massive earthquake or even an epidemic of disease.

According to the books by Gibbons, the root causes of the collapse of Rome were moral and spiritual.

The decline of individual morality and of community virtue.

The breakdown of the family.

The rise of unrestrained pleasure-seeking and ceaseless entertainments.

A fascination with sexual gratification.

The declining influence of religion on the people and the culture.

For 300 years, The Roman Empire persecuted Christians. But then an emperor declared Christianity would be officially allowed, then the official religion. The institutional Christian church triumphed in the Roman Empire!

But the church became rich and powerful...and corrupt.

Moral decay set in.

The church itself ceased to be a force for morality and virtue in Rome.

The Christianized Roman Empire crumbled from within.

Rome had not been conquered in 800 years, but they were about to fall.

The Christian church had become so weak, and now so afraid of a hostile enemy takeover, that the church permitted Christians, out of deep fear and last-ditch effort, to offer sacrifices to the pagan idols in the hope that the false gods would protect them from invaders. The head pastor of the leading Christian church officially allowed idolatry.

The foundation for a strong society is not the military nor the economy.

The foundation is citizens with a strong moral fiber, strong religious faith, and strong Christ-centered families that train up their children in the Word of God.

Jeremiah watched the death of a nation.

The people of Judah had been infected with idolatry, starting with godless leaders, and trickling down to every regular person.

Jeremiah was faithfully preaching God's Word, but no one would heed.

Evil and godlessness pervade our universities and government institutions.

Vile ideas and images are piped into the homes of Christians through electronic channels and the internet.

The desire for wickedness is engraved on hearts with pens of iron, so that they cannot be erased. Wickedness spreads and grows from parents to children, to grandchildren. God appeals again and again through His preachers. Repent and turn back to God. But sin and rebellion grows, even in the families in the church.

There are only two pathways.

Towards God or away from God.

Application of sermon to you is 3 points of sermon applied to you.

1) Admit that you have a bad heart, and ask God to give you a new heart through Christ's cross. The idea that people are basically good is a naïve and unrealistic secular worldview. You know better. You know that your heart was bad, until

Christ rose again and sent His spirit to regenerate you. You know that your sin nature is still capable of bad. You have no business walking away from God, when you have a new heart. Walk toward God. Romans 2:29, *“a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit...”* Ask God to write His Word on Your heart.

2) If you are a church leader, then lead people back to God. If you are not a church leader, then follow the church leaders back to God. We rebuild this country by building up our families and together building up our churches. If you are a Dad or a Mom, then you need to lead your children to Christ and His Church. If you are a grandparent, then talk with your grandchildren about Christ and get them to church. Build strong marriages and strong families. Honor your father and your mother. Instead of us getting more and more discouraged about our country or the churches in our country, get more and more active in the things that God has for us each to do. Philippians 4:12-13, *“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* Walk with Christ, and walk with church leaders who walk with Christ.

3) Examine your use of Sundays, and ask God to give you a change of heart. You are a Sabbath-breaker. We deserve judgment for that. But Jesus died and rose again to bring Sabbath-breakers to true Sabbath, to true spiritual rest and refreshment. Sundays are a gospel issue. God gave us a whole day in seven to be super-spiritual above all other duties that God gave us in our lives. You don't have to make the bed. You don't have to do laundry, vacuum, or sweep. You don't have to go to work or work from home. You don't even have to work on church business on Sunday. Leave our treasurer alone on Sundays. What do we do with all of this extra time? Not entertaining yourself. You are tired? Then rest. Vegging out is not resting. Take a nap. And when you get up. Read the Bible. Never say that you don't have time to read the Bible. You have a whole day in seven. That is 52 days per year for you to learn the Word of God. What are you doing with your one day of rest each week? That is a true test of your spiritual heart condition. Let your Sunday be dedicated to rest and worship. Everything else can wait.

If you are concerned about our country, spiritual resting is the place to start. Spiritual resting is a top priority. What does resting mean? Resting means to stop trying to rescue yourself. God does all the work of our rescue. We are at rest because Jesus did a fantastic job of saving us. We don't have to save ourselves, and we couldn't anyway. Resting in the work that Christ has done for us makes us like

a tree planted by a river. Psalm 1:3, “..that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.” No matter what is happening in the crumbling nation in which you live, you are like a tree that bears fruit for Christ’s eternal kingdom. How? You have had a change in heart. You don’t trust in yourself anymore. You don’t trust in government structures. You trust the Lord. You rest in Him every Sunday. For you, there is a place and a time to rest and get refreshed.