



Jeremiah 7:1-7
True Heart Religion

Jeremiah 7:1 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.

Most of the greatest sermons and addresses in the bible were deeply shocking to the people that they were delivered to, they pushed people out of their comfort zones, challenged their presuppositions, and often slew a lot of sacred cows. For instance Elijah on Mount Carmel rebuking the people for their pluralism, **"How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."** Peter at Pentecost telling the crowd in Jerusalem that the Messiah they said they were waiting for had come, his name was Jesus, and that **"Him...you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death"** Stephen before the Sanhedrin **"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you."** (Acts 7:51) Paul standing only a little way off from the Parthenon, the great temple of Athena, had the audacity to say, **"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything"** (Acts 17:24-25)

And looking at those we might be tempted to say, how unloving, but the purpose of these sermons was not merely to beat up the listeners, the purpose was to awaken and challenge the listener, to open their eyes, and show them the true state of affairs and then to send them in the right direction that they might be saved.

Now if you are peacefully sleeping and I wake you up by pouring a bucket of cold water over your head, you are probably going to be very angry, but if I do that because your house is on fire and I couldn't rouse you any other way, I'm pretty sure that when you're safely outside watching as the fire-department battles the inferno that your not going to hold a grudge against me. You see if the people

see the danger, and heed the warning and flee from the wrath to come, they are grateful. If on the other hand they don't heed the warning and refuse to acknowledge the danger you are just going to be angry at the guy with the bucket. I was for instance always angry at people who told me I was a sinner, until the day that that my heart was changed and I really knew for the first that I was a sinner!

The Lord here is using Jeremiah to do the same thing, to wake His people up, and to show them, that what they were trusting in wasn't going to save them. He preaches root and branch against Judah's useless civil religion, and he does so at the very heart of it – the TEMPLE. God sent Jeremiah to one of the seven gates of the temple courts, and I'm sure he would have had a large audience. The Temple would have been filled with people who had come to sacrifice, and you have to remember that sermons were not normally preached, so Jeremiah would have created quite a stir when he started preaching this one. We'll find out incidentally in chapter 26 that it was certainly not well received by the priests and the leaders of Judah it very nearly resulted in his execution. He wasn't a priest but he slew at least 3 sacred cows that day.

The first was this, the religion of Judah was not heart religion, it had become outward and formalistic. So the Lord condemns the very worship they put SO MUCH STOCK IN. We do the STUFF so God must be impressed! The people went up to go through the rituals of sacrifice, but it was all empty. They worship, they physically “shawcaw” which means to bow down, but their hearts remained unbowed. They went through the rituals – and incidentally many of the rituals by this time had been corrupted by the addition of pagan elements God hadn't commanded – but they had no intention of keeping the covenant. The Lord had said again and again, that he was not fooled by this kind of heartless worship *“Therefore the LORD said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men” (Isa. 29:13)*

There was no true submission, no Love to God, and consequently no desire to really obey his commandments. The Lord therefore tells them they need an inward reformation and revival, they needed to trust Him, to Love Him not going through outward show. And here is the good news, the Lord promised that if they would do that, they would be allowed to dwell in this place, and that not just for time, but forever and ever.

Now that begs the question, how could you dwell in the Temple or the Land forever and ever? The answer is of course that you can't dwell in the physical temple, but the Temple was always intended to be a model for heaven. It was visible expression of God's promise to dwell in the midst of His people, and the desire of God's true followers is always to be with God. So like the sacraments and the sacrifices they looked beyond them to see what they represented. That is why David was able to declare at the end of Psalm 23 – *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.”* He didn't mean in Temple forever, His great longing was to dwell in courts of heaven with God forever. Is that your desire? Do you also experience church as just a brief foretaste of the glory to come? And the promise that they would dwell in the land forever did not mean just land here on earth, but in what the promised land symbolized, that is the heavenly country:

Hebrews 11:16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The Second was this, they had to stop putting their trust in the physical temple, and thinking that merely because the Temple was in the midst of Jerusalem, that the Lord God would always intervene to save them in an emergency as the false prophet's had declared. Now it is the habit of unregenerate today when they hear the word church, to think of the physical building. But that isn't the church, the church is the ekklesia, the assembly, it's the PEOPLE not the building, and it is within their hearts that He dwells or He is not in the midst of His people:

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

They had fallen into the mistake of thinking that the Lord dwelt in houses made with Hands, but the Lord had said that while this was the place they were commanded to make their sacrifices that he would dwellt **"With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones."**

Don't believe the lie about the physical temple, being your assurance.

Thirdly, he tells them the idea that they had to stop thinking that they could live in disobedience to the Lord's commands and that he would be satisfied if they just left off sinning for long enough to visit the temple. Now it wasn't surprising that they weren't obeying his commandments, because if you don't love the Lord, you won't be able to carry out His commandments, so many people who have tried to amend their lives by their own power have found that out. It was inevitable therefore that if they disobeyed the first set of 4 commandments regarding their duties towards God that they they would disobey the second set regarding their duties towards man. So they had to thoroughly amend their ways, stop oppressing and shedding innocent blood, stop committing idolatry. In a word they must learn LOVE. Or as Jesus put:

Matt. 22:37 Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 "This is the first and great commandment.

39 "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

It was only if they would do that, that they would have any hope, because the Lord had already shown them that he was not going to give in to their demands that do what they wanted, like what they like, say what they said: *Psalm 50:21* **These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.**

God will not remain in the midst of an idolatrous and rebellious people

Applications: 1) Now here I'm going to slay a sacred cow myself. One of the things that we must NOT be satisfied with or fall into, is precisely the kind of CIVIL RELIGION that Judah had. A formalistic religiosity, that is nationalistic but powerless and destructive. We wonder sometimes how it was that the nation began to become so ethically bankrupt and godless in the 1960s, and we often contrast the 60s with the 50s saying that the 50s were a time of high religion, and the 60s were some

sort of aberration that came out of nowhere but the truth is that in the 50s America was succumbing to the same kind of CIVIL religion that destroyed Judah, and the 60s were the fruit. If you have difficulty with that listen to the words of a famous essay on the state of American religion written by Sociologist Will Herberg in 1955:

"The religiousness characteristic of America today is very often a religiousness without religion, a religiousness with almost any kind of content or none, a way of sociability or 'belonging' rather than a way of reorienting life to God." "In fact" Herberg contended that "the authentic character of Jewish-Christian faith [was] falsified and the faith itself reduced to the status of an American culture-religion." When judged by the standard of authentic Christianity or Judaism, this "civic religion of the American people" is "incurably idolatrous," in that it "validates culture and society, without in any sense bringing them under judgment."

He commented: "For the individual the church can easily become an emotional service station to relieve worry. In the church God pats the individual on the back, assures him that he is important, and sends him back to the world the same as he entered. The religion of the American church is often a 'faith in faith,' a 'religion in general.' It does not generate its own values, but instead sanctifies the values present in the general community."

As President Eisenhower put it: *"Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is"*

We need Fervent heart religion that centers not merely on religion but on CHRIST. That doesn't have faith in faith, but faith in CHRIST.

2) Let your religion therefore be of the heart!

Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;

29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

The heart is the seat of true saving faith. "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified" (Romans 10:10). A man may believe that Jesus is the Christ, as the demons do, and yet remain in his sins. He may believe that he is a sinner, and that Christ is the only Savior, and occasionally wish that he was a better man. But no one ever lays hold of Christ, and receives pardon and peace, until he believes with the heart. It is heart-faith that justifies.

Let it be full of love to Christ, to truly know Christ is to love Christ

Can you say with Peter: **"Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."**

"Christianity is a heart religion; and if you cannot say, from the very depths of your being, "Christ is all," you have neither part nor lot in the blessings and privileges of the gospel; and your end will be destruction, everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord." - Spurgeon

Heb. 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

“That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, “fervent in spirit,” and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: Rom. 12:11, “Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” – Jonathan Edwards

And let it result in obedience, John 14:15 " **If you love Me, keep My commandments.**

21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

If that is your heart and that is your trust, then the Lord truly is your Shepherd and you will dwell in His House forever.