

Church people can still believe lies. One lie is that attending church regularly will guarantee you God's protection, in spite of many sins and a lack of repentance in your heart. In our passage, God confronts such presumption.

So far in chapter 7, we saw the deception exposed by Jeremiah in the famous temple sermon. One of the main themes was their worship of idols, right alongside of claiming to worship God. Today we are reminded what a terrible sin this is.

Horrible sins appropriately receive horrible punishment from God, driving us to consider what Christ experienced on the cross, leaving us thankful.

1. Horrible, detestable sins were brought into God's house. (7:30-31)

The people were trusting in God, but they were also trusting in the Queen of Heaven, or Baal, or anything else that they could find. They even brought their idols into the temple of God. By doing this, they seemed to be thinking that they were covering their bases, but they were actually defiling the temple. They were thinking that they were worshipping all the gods acceptably, but the only true and living God spoke up in *verse 30*, where God says this to Jeremiah, "...*the sons of Judah have done evil in My sight, declares The LORD. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by My name, to defile it.*"

Why does God demand exclusivity to Him, and why is God so intense about it? This is the relationship between God and a child of God. We would understand this instinctively, if we compare to the relationship between a husband and a wife. God expects us not to serve other gods also, for the same reason that a wife wouldn't like it if her husband went on a date with 3 people: his wife, his mistress and his other lover. The same reason that a husband wouldn't like if his wife went on a date with 3 people - her husband, the man of an affair and her other fling. Spouses expect exclusivity. God expects exclusivity. That is the kind of relationship we have with God.

The first commandment of the Ten Commandments says, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" It is the first commandment in the list, because it has the highest priority. We must always be very careful to ONLY worship God. To add anything is to destroy our walk with God.

Today we have a name for this destructive sin - we call it 'Christ plus.' It means we are offending God by committing the horrible sin of worshipping Christ plus anything else.

Christ summarized the same truth this way in Matthew 6:24, “*No one can serve two masters...*”

From God’s perspective, what the people did in Jeremiah 7 was an abomination. We think that it would be bold and clear, like setting up a Hindu statue just past the church kitchen counter downstairs. What if the elders allowed it? Even if we left the worship the same, and all the Bibles and hymnbooks, the presence of that statue in this building would tarnish the reputation of our church’s stand for Christ. Nor do we allow adult magazines in the tract rack. That is bold and offensive idolatry.

But idolatry is much more subtle. This passage is aimed at people who would identify as Christian, but it is not very deep. This is the sort of thing for people who sometimes attend church, and do not care for formal religion, and do not like when things get too intense and earnest. In general, they attend because they would like to believe that there is some Deity up there who hears a prayer in an emergency, and someone above who looks out for us, and a cosmic agent who finally catches up to the bad guys and makes them pay using a general sort of karma logic. They identify as Christian as opposed to muslim or atheist, because upon the loss of a loved one, they would like to enjoy pleasant thoughts of some afterlife among the stars or angels. They like to bring to mind these sorts of things by removing their hat or bowing their heads respectfully for a short prayer at a big event, or by helping to raise a Christmas tree, and decorating it, but not really getting too deep into that God stuff.

All of this is a lie. But they prefer the lies. They have no idea how dangerous the lies are.

Back to our story - in the ancient temple, things got worse. Verse 31, God reported the detestable facts of the case to Jeremiah this way, “*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, nor did it come into My mind.*”

High places were simply places of worship. In those days, worship was not like our building of a church with a pulpit and pews. Instead, they would build a raised platform out of stones, so that they could worship.

Topheth meant firepit. It was the location where the people took their boys and girls to throw them into the flames.

Human sacrifice. Child sacrifice. Burning their children. This was beyond child neglect, beyond child endangerment, beyond child abuse. This was child homicide. Pediticide, which is the murder of a minor. Because it was parents

murdering their own children, we even have a name for that - filicide. And if they were young babies, it is infanticide. This is something only non-believers would even consider doing, right?

No. In Leviticus 18:21, God's people needed to be warned not to sacrifice their children to the false god Molech, and in Leviticus 20, God said that anyone who does this, would be put to death. King Ahaz sacrificed his son. Some during Manasseh's reign offered their children to the gods of Canaan, which provoked God to anger.

They thought they were doing what God wanted them to do. These parents loved their children, and they loved God more. So despite their recoiling at the thought of harming their children, they did so out of a misguided devotion to God. They had the best intentions, but still killed their children. They saw their sins, and how angry God was, and they thought God wanted them to atone for their sins by offering their children, instead of seeing that God was going to offer His son.

They fundamentally misunderstood the heart of God. It was the false gods that seemed to require child sacrifice – how cruel, how harsh. No, the true God is the only God who loves His people.

Not everything done supposedly in the name of God is pleasing to God.

Think of it – even when we put the best spin on the motive of these parents – that they were trying to serve God, when we dig deeper, that must mean that they loved themselves more than they loved their kids. They wanted to buy their own salvation at the literal price of their children. That is a raw selfish action.

God made it clear in His Word here in verse 31, that God did not command it, and God did not even think of such a thing. They were doing the opposite of what God wanted them to do.

The actions are so primitive and barbaric, and the reasoning behind them so unconscionable, that it seems to have nothing to do with today.

But look again. Where do people choose themselves over their own children in our times today? To have a young mother request a skilled doctor to end the life of her own unborn child, despite her intimate relationship between mother and child, isn't that barbaric? The baby responds to Mommy's mood, mommy's food, and Mommy's schedule. The baby feels pleasure and pain, very early. What is the moral difference between what happened in the Valley of Jeremiah's day, and what happens in the clinics of our day?

What we learn clearly from this passage is the murder of children is a spiritual problem. It is a religious ritual, at its core, because we are people who understand right and wrong. Since the people who kill children have left

worshipping God correctly, what god are they worshipping? The god of her career plans, the god of her own reputation, the god of her economic status, the god of personal comfort.

This makes sense of the pro-choice movement. Why do they view pro-lifers as wicked? Because theirs is a religious belief. They see abortion as an act of religious devotion. Devoted to a woman's rights, to materialism, to access to pleasure, and to the absolute power over one's own body and one's own life.

It is a spiritual problem.

We pray and picket for the laws to be changed. But even if the laws are changed, the problem is not solved. We cannot solve spiritual problem with legal action and passing of laws. It is a spiritual battle. What are our weapons for spiritual battle? Prayer. The Word of God. The peace of the gospel of grace, and the love of Christ.

We do not confront abortion by condemnation. The Christian approach is never shaming. Not anger and viciousness. Not vilifying people. Certainly not violence, as if that can be done in the name of God. Remember - that was what the child sacrifice itself was, in the ancient valley!

Let's go back to the spiritual issues and examine ourselves. Every time a career is put ahead of the family, we are showing a smaller version of the same spiritual problem. Every time anger prevents loving discipline. Every time a child must adjust to the parent's interests instead of the parent adjusting to the child's interests, the same heart attitude is on display as was seen in that ancient valley.

Christian parents are called to love their children more than they love themselves. Christian parents sacrifice themselves for their children. Isn't that literally what Christ did – sacrificed Himself for the children of God.

How we spend our money and time, how we discipline and raise our children, all reveal on a daily basis whether or not we make sacrifices for our children, or offer our children up as sacrifices for ourselves.

2. God's judgment transformed even the very name of that valley. (7:32-34)

What will be God's judgment on the Valley of the Son of Hinnom? Verse 32 contains the answer, "*Therefore, behold, the 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 Slaughter, for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere.*"

This means that those who slaughtered their children, will themselves be slaughtered, and in the very same place, the same valley. In fact, the valley will take on a new name to reflect the gruesome scene. What will happen when God issues such severe judgment that there is no more room to bury the dead? First they will bury wherever they can. Then they will fill up the valley. Then, as verse 33 shows, “...*the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away.*”

God’s judgment now is even more severe. The verdict is death without dignity. Executed by God, and without a proper burial, to show God’s curse upon them. No one will be left to chase away the vultures.

As if the scene is not bad enough, verse 34 shows the loss of the family. Rather than healthy families producing weddings, there will be no such joy and gladness. In our entertainment, marriage is mocked. In our public places, parents treat their children badly. Divorce happens at an alarming rate. This is why young people in our culture are hesitant to get married, and why some weddings are muted joy, rather than a time for the whole community to have unlimited rejoicing.

That brings us to our third point.

3. Horrible, ironic punishment from God prefigures hell itself. (8:1-3)

As we turn to verse 1 of chapter 8, we learn that even the previously buried leaders of Israel will meet the same fate of becoming unburied and exposed bodies. How? The bodies will be brought out of their graves! Verse 1 reads, “*At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs.*”

The remains and the bones will be dug up, and then desecrated, right along with the others whose dead bodies were food for the vultures.

Verse 2, “*And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground.*”

The irony is that their dead bodies will be exposed to the very things that they have worshipped. It operates as a type of sacrifice to the false gods, but the whole thing is God mocking false worship, because the supposed gods of sun and moon cannot protect their people. Only the true God can protect His people. The punishment matches their wrongdoing. Those who did not protect their children, will not have their own bodies protected.

Verse 3 takes it one step farther. Those who are still alive, will be so horrified that they would prefer death.

The Valley of Slaughter is an early display of hell. The Old Testament called it Son of Hinnom, and the New Testament uses the same word, and it is Gehenna. In English, that is translated as hell. The Bible points to the same place of burning, cruelty, and horrible things. The reason it is horrible is because God is not in that place. The absence of God. Here Jeremiah shows us the torment of a place where God sends people who will not return to God.

Rather than respond with self-righteousness, and chastise others for walking away from God, and rather than responding with anger, and condemning others for the problems in our country, we should grieve. We grieve the sins of others, because God is being dishonored. We should join the writer of Psalm 119, in praying to God like he did in Psalm 119:136, *“My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep Your law.”*

We grieve. And we also present the truth. The truth is that there is a way to become right with the holy God. We do not sacrifice our children. Pastor Tony reminded us in his sermon series on Abraham from Genesis 22, how God taught us all that Abraham should not sacrifice his son Isaac. Why? Because that was the kind of sacrifice that was done in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. God’s people don’t do that.

Well, then what is the way to become right with the holy God? It is as Abraham said to his son Isaac in Genesis 22:8, *“God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* God never intended for Abraham to kill Isaac – it was a test of Abraham’s faith, that Abraham truly believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and that God would fulfill His covenant promises through Isaac.

God never commanded child sacrifice, nor did it ever enter God’s mind. God never wanted Abraham to go through with it. But something else entered God’s mind. God would provide the sacrifice. On that day for Abraham, the sacrifice provided was a ram. But that ram only pointed forward to the true sacrifice. It was Christ who would be the sacrifice for us.

The sacrifice of Christ would later change everything. God would have Jeremiah prophesy about it in chapter 31 of Jeremiah’s book. Listen to Jeremiah 31:38, *“Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD...(v.40), The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes...shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever.”* This valley, that was formerly filled with bodies and ashes from child

sacrifice, will no longer be the valley of slaughter, but the valley of life that is sacred to the LORD.

Because Jesus Christ would later be reduced to death, and then come to life again, we believers will not need to die, nor will we need to be punished. All of the anger of God was poured out on Jesus to the full and to the end. Jesus died our death, and He was slaughtered like a lamb for us. The valley of slaughter has become the city of life.

The New Testament apostles agree with the Old Testament prophecies, and the apostles love to pronounce this good news of this slaughter of Jesus winning eternal life for us. For example, the apostle John wrote in Revelation 21:4, *“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

That valley of slaughter has become holy to the LORD. The earthly Jerusalem saw its worst slaughter when the Son of God Himself was put to death just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus rose and ascended, and is building for us a New Jerusalem. We will not be punished and slaughtered. Instead, as those covered in the grace of Christ and purchased by His blood, we as God’s people will live with God forever and ever.

The place of dying and slaughter will continue on, and it will continue to be called hell. But the people of God, with our faith in our risen Savior, will dwell with God forevermore.

Conclusion:

1. Never invent your own way to pacify God. These people thought that, and ended up sacrificing their children by putting them into the fires. God will only be pacified one way – that is the way that God has designed. In Matthew 16, we read that Jesus must... *“...be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke [Jesus], saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” 23 But [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”* Salvation must be done God’s way. God’s way is for Jesus to pay for our sins on the cross. SI – do you invent ways to pay your car insurance? Instead of sending the money that they ask for, you offer to cut the lawn of the insurance company. Or, you offer to stand near the fountains that they have and hold a garden hose, to add to the beauty of the fountains. Where are you getting these ideas? You are inventing them. God never thought of them offering child sacrifice. Stop inventing things. Do what God says. Accept God’s way of us being made right with God. It is only one way – Christ

crucified. That is it. Nothing else will do. We cannot add to that great salvation. We cannot lose that great salvation. We do not take it upon ourselves to imagine and create new ways to get on God's good side again. Not money. Not service. Not giving things up for God. Not acquiring things for God. Not traveling to a certain place, or staying put. Not a certain number of hours praying, or a certain number of prayers.

We sing this truth in the hymn Rock of Ages, verse 2, "Not the labors of my hands, Can fulfil thy law's demands; Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears for ever flow, All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou alone." Verse 3, "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling; Naked, come to thee for dress, Helpless, look to thee for grace; Foul, I to the Fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die."

Settle yourself to the fact that if you are not washed by the Savior Jesus, you will not pacify God in any other way, and you will die. However, since God is pacified by Jesus, then take comfort in the gospel of grace. As the fourth stanza of Rock of Ages says, "While I draw this fleeting breath, When mine eyelids close in death, When I soar to worlds unknown, See thee on thy judgment throne, Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee."

Listen to the trusted words of Jesus Himself, recorded for us in John 6:37, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.*" **Never invent your own way to pacify God, because there is no other way!**

2. Appreciate the crucifixion, after we studied the valley of slaughter.

After our glimpse of the dreadful valley in Jeremiah 7, think of all the mighty wrath of God that came down upon Jesus on that cross.

I remind you what we have sung,
"Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,
And did my Sovereign die!
Would he devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I!

Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree!
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker, died

For man the creature's sin.

In our closing hymn we will sing these words together, “There is a green hill far away, Without a city wall, Where the dear Lord was crucified, Who died to save us all. VERSE 2, We may not know, we cannot tell, What pains he had to bear; But we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiv'n,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heav'n,
Saved by his precious blood.

3. Love and care for all children, especially covenant children.

If you are horrified at the thought of the child sacrifice we have studied, then let yourself go far in the other direction. See children as Psalm 127:3, “*Children are a heritage from the LORD...*” When it comes to children, our God is life-giving, not life-taking. As Christian people, we cherish the children of the church. We provide for the children. Teach the children. Love them. Provide safety. Sacrifice yourself for them. Give them every advantage.

When you go to a wedding of a godly young man and a godly young woman, you let joy fill you like no other event does. That is the way through this for our culture. We need more godly young people having Christ-centered marriages, and God-honoring homes, filling vibrant gospel churches with service and loving on the next generation together. The best thing we can do for children is to pray for them and teach them. Think of this – we need a spiritual awakening in our country, right? What if God used some of the children in our church to have an instrumental role in such an awakening? What if God used some of the children in our church family to be faithful godly men and women, resulting in truly joy-filled weddings, followed by faithful service to Christ and His Church, and building of the kingdom? What if God used some of the children in our church to be faithful teachers and flaming lights for Christ in the next generation? Deacons, elders, pastors, missionaries, but in all vocations working for Christ alone, and living for Christ alone in a world gone mad. What if the way that God starts that process is by you hearing this sermon and realizing that your life is set apart by God to pour into the next generation?

Who is going to help you with that giant task?

God in His mercy.

Luke 1:50, “...*His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*”

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