

Loving the Institution and Hating the Gospel

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Date: 09 December 2012

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[0 : 00] Well, now, let's turn to our Bibles and to the prophet Jeremiah for our reading this evening. And how's the sound? Is everybody hearing all right? Nobody's nodding, so I presume you can't hear. You can hear? Yeah, it's good. Good. Okay.

Well, we're reading in Jeremiah chapter 7 through to chapter 8, verse 3. Church Bibles, the page is, somebody? 635, if you have one of the blue church Bibles.

So reading then at Jeremiah chapter 7 and verse 1. And again, what an appropriate passage we've come to as we think about the true and the false temple of the Lord.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word. And say, hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, amend your ways and your deeds and I will let you dwell in this place.

[1 : 20] Do not trust in these deceptive words. This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name, and say, we are delivered, only to go on doing all these abominations?

Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. Go now to my place that was, in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel.

And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, when I called you, you did not answer. Therefore, I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

They will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, the offspring of Ephraim. As for you, speaking to Jeremiah, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.

[3 : 18] Do you not see what they are doing in these cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for their queen of heaven.

They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. Is it I whom they provoke, declares the Lord? Is it not themselves to their own shame?

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.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. 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.

But this command I gave them, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.

[4 : 23] 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.

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. Yet they did not listen to me, or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck.

They did worse than their fathers. 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.

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.

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. For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the Lord.

[5 : 37] They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name to defile it. 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.

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, and 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.

And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste.

At that time, declares the Lord, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, 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, and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the hosts of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served, and which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshipped.

[6 : 58] And they shall not be gathered or buried, and they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the Lord of hosts.

Amen. And may God give us strength to hear his word. Thank you.

Please, that passage in Jeremiah, it's on page 634, and we'll have a moment of prayer as we turn to the word of God. Let's pray. Father, we pray indeed, as we have just sung, that you will enlarge and inflame our hearts.

We want to hear your word, and we pray that, as those disciples long ago, our hearts may burn within us, our eyes may be opened, that we will be sent into the world bearing that message that can indeed snatch sinners from the brink of hell, that can build up your temple in these days.

And we ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I grew up in a small village on the east coast of Scotland, and in the early years of the 19th century, at the time when my parents, my grandparents were young, God did wonderful things around the fishing communities there, and indeed right down the English ports like Grimsby and Lowestoft and Whitby, and right up into the northeast of Scotland, the fishing ports there.

[9 : 22] God laid his hand on a barrel maker turned evangelist called Jock Troop, who preached powerfully in these fishing communities, and hundreds of people were swept into the kingdom.

And some of you here will remember that in later years, he was associated with a former tent hall here in Glasgow. I see Norrie is nodding, so I checked my facts.

Now, as I say, in the generation of my grandparents, they were converted, many others were converted, and the afterglow of that revival lasted into the generation of the youth of my parents, who also, and other members of my family, were converted.

A real work of God had happened. By the time I was in my teens, that afterglow was fast fading. All the religious communities that had grown up as a result of troops preaching enough revival were still there, but the fires were burning low.

And why? Because institutionalism had taken over. More concern with red tape, with correct procedure, with buildings, with rules and regulations.

[10 : 37] These became, first of all, equally important to the gospel. And then they became more important than the gospel. And ultimately, they set out to try to destroy the gospel.

That's always what happens when institutionalism takes over. And so it is here in Jeremiah. Do not say, this is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.

That's why I'm calling my sermon this evening, loving the institution and hating the gospel, because that's what happened in Jeremiah's day. And that's what's happened in every day since, when institutionalism has taken over.

This is Jeremiah's famous temple sermon. First 15 verses really are the temple sermon proper. I'm going to spend most of our time on this. But the other material from verse 16 up till 8 verse 3 is really supporting material, which has obviously been brought together, probably by Jeremiah's scribe Baruch, whom we meet later in the book, because it bears so much on this subject.

There was another version of this in chapter 26. That may mean that Jeremiah, like many another preacher, preached similar things at different times.

[11 : 57] But if it is the same sermon as chapter 26, it's being preached at a hugely significant time. The great reforming king Josiah had just died after his massive efforts to reform national life.

And he had been followed by his son Jehoiakim, a very, very different kind of man who hardly waited until his father's eyes were closed to return to idolatry.

You see, the great reforms of Josiah, just like the reforms in an earlier generation of his great grandfather, Hezekiah, were simply destroyed, dismantled by those who would never like to.

Every time you get a movement of revival or reform, of course, there are those who don't like it and they wait until the reformers have gone. If Jehoiakim had listened to Jeremiah, or indeed if he could have read the book of Daniel, he would have trembled.

The book of Daniel opens, the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Loving the institution and eating the gospel.

[13 : 11] So let's look at these verses then. And first of all, we have a doomed structure in verses 1 to 7. The temple is doomed. Let's imagine the scene.

It's probably one of the great festivals. Deuteronomy says, at the great festivals, festivals such as unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, the feast of tabernacles, the pilgrims had to present themselves before the Lord.

And as they approached, the temple mount, priests would be singing what is called an entrance liturgy. And we sang an example of that at the beginning. Psalm 24 was one such liturgy which was sung as the pilgrims made their way up to the temple.

Possibly, the priests would be singing, who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord and who will stand in his holy place. And then perhaps a solo voice would reply, the one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to idols nor sworn deceitfully.

And here, instead of an entrance liturgy, here is Jeremiah in full flight. Do not say, this is the temple of the Lord. And this writes at the very heart of the hypocrisy.

[14 : 31] Look at verse 4 again. Do not trust in the lie, literally. Do not trust in these deceptive words. Remember, a thing we've noticed several times in Jeremiah is the theme of false prophecy.

These guys who are preaching easy, comfortable gospels that people would like. Notice by contrast, verse 1, the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord.

This is not Jeremiah's opinions. Jeremiah isn't saying, I don't like this place very much. Jeremiah is saying, this is a word from the Lord. The empty words, the lie said, simply because the temple is there, God is there.

Simply because this is a building where rituals are going to be performed, this guarantees God's presence. Now in the reign of the great reforming King Josiah, the temple had indeed for a short time become the center of God's worship.

If you read in Kings and in Chronicles, you'll find that Josiah literally dumped by the cartload, the idolatrous apparatus, just as his great-grandfather Hezekiah had done.

[15 : 44] But there had grown up the deluding idea that the temple was inviolable. And indeed, it was the spectacular rescue of the city and temple back in Hezekiah's reign that had started that delusion.

God had rescued his city, God had rescued his people. God had shown he was stronger than the gods of the nations. But that was because there was a godly king on the throne who turned to the Lord.

Read Hezekiah's great prayer in 2 Kings 19, Show them, O Lord, that you and you alone are God. Very different to these guys going to the temple and worshipping Asherah poles and fertility goddesses and so on.

It's an utter delusion. A building, an institution that once honoured God. If it ceases to honour God, then it simply ceases to exist.

Empty words, and Jeremiah says, there's going to have to be effective reform, verses 5 to 7, if you truly, you see, in Josiah's day they had superficially mended their ways.

[16 : 53] They had painted over the surface. They had gone along with the king, but their hearts were not changed. radical repentance is needed. Execute judge justice, the very character of God.

Concern for true justice, concern for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, concern for the vulnerable, those whom God especially protects and especially cares for, the character of God himself.

The rejection of violence, shedding innocent blood, is no accident. When you read the flood story back in Genesis 6, one of the reasons for the flood is that the earth is filled with violence, and so it is, so it is here.

And the root of all this, going after other gods to your own harm. Now, it's never, of course, put that way. When people go in for idolatry, it's never said this will harm you.

What's usually said is something very different. This will liberate you. This will set you free from the old views. This will create a church that people will want to come to.

[18 : 03] All you need to do is look around at the empty churches. All you need to do is look around at the places where once the word of God was preached. There is nothing sacred about a building.

We know that, don't we? And so it is here. This is a doomed structure, and it's doomed because, why is it doomed? Because God has turned against it.

Ekebode, where is the glory? The glory has gone. It's written over it. Secondly then, Jeremiah goes on to talk about a double-minded attitude in verses 8 to 15.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely? Jerusalem is awash with religious talk.

Jerusalem is absolutely full of religion. But it's simply not true what they are saying. They are paying lip service to the Lord.

[19 : 04] It's no accident that verse 9 is repeating the commandments of the Decalogue, of the Ten Commandments, of the words of Moses. Nominal religion is always full of pious talk, isn't it?

It doesn't require any change of heart, it doesn't require any change of life. All it needs is empty, deceptive words. Ignoring God's words, they take refuge in the institution.

Ignoring the commandments, they do what suits them. And they pay lip service to the Lord. But they're also ignoring their history and throwing away their future.

Verse 11. Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Now that of course recalls something else, doesn't it?

These are the very words our Lord Jesus Christ used when he cleansed the temple. Obviously referring to these words of Jeremiah and obviously underwriting these words of Jeremiah when he cleanses the temple of his day.

[20 : 11] Malachi says, the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. And of course the Lord Jesus Christ is the true temple. He is the one around whom we gather.

He is the one who replaces all these old structures. So they are ignoring everything they have been taught.

And what's this about Shiloh? I will do, verse 14, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name and in which you trust and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers as I did to Shiloh.

Now Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle from the desert was set up after the people entered the land. You can read about this in Joshua 18.

And it was destroyed. Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines. You can read that you can read that story in 1 Samuel when they attempt the people of God once again attempted to use the Ark of the Covenant as a kind of magic.

[21 : 19] We'll take the Ark of the Covenant into battle and the Philistines will be defeated. Now you can see that's simply superstition. They were treating the presence of God as if he were simply a convenient talisman.

Read that story in 1 Samuel 4 and 5. It's absolutely fascinating. Because when the Philistines capture the Ark they take it into the temple of their god Dagon and place it there discovering the following morning that Dagon has been turned into Humpty Dumpty in front of the Ark.

And why? Why is it that God rejected his people when they took it into battle but honoured the Ark of the Covenant when it was placed in the pagan temple?

It's because the Philistines were trying to pretend that their god was as powerful as the Ahi the creator of heaven and earth the lord of creation.

And this same thing is happening now. It happens every time when the institution becomes more important than the gospel. Verse 15 I will cast you out of my sight as I cast out all your kinsmen all the offspring of Ephraim Ephraim a name often given to the northern kingdom who had already been carried off to Assyria and indeed in an earlier generation the prophet Amos had warned the people of the north.

[22 : 43] Amos had said you are the only nation I have known not known about but you're the only nation I've entered into a relationship with therefore you're inviolable of course not therefore I will punish you for all your sins.

a double minded a double minded attitude a doomed structure and a double minded attitude always go together. If we're interested in religion if we're interested in red tape and procedure and practice then there is just no future for us.

There is no life there there is no there is no spirit there and the Lord simply and so simply leaves that aside. and that's the temple sermon proper.

Now I want to say a word or two I'm not going to go into detail from 716 verses 8 to chapter 8 verse 3 a doomed structure a double minded attitude leads to a demonic and devilish religion.

What happens when the true gospel is rejected? Well it opens the door to unreality it opens the door to it opens the door to delusion it opens the door to all kinds of deceit and confusion but much more seriously it opens the door to Satan.

[24 : 09] Satan loves religion Satan deludes millions of people by religion religion that's divorced from reality it's no accident that the book of Jude describes the way of Satan as the way of Cain because Cain is the patron saint of religion read back in Genesis 4 what did Cain do?

Cain gave to God what he thought he ought to give to God he rejected God's revelation now clearly Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice because God had revealed it to him Cain had presumably received the same revelation and rejected let's remember these people in the very early days before there was any scripture the Lord must have revealed himself we don't know how we don't know in what detail and so it is here that these people know better they reject the prophets and above all they reject Moses and notice this terrible verse 16 as for you do not pray for this people do not lift a cry or a prayer to them and do not intercede with me for I will not hear you they've got to the stage where Lord is no longer going to revive to reform they're doomed they've gone too far across the centuries we hear the words of

Elijah if the Lord is God follow him if Baal is God follow him I don't want to go into this in detail but I do want to point out two things first thing I want to point out is the wasted sacrifices verse 17 do not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the children gather wood the fathers kindle fire the women knead dough and make cakes for the queen of heaven here is demonic parody of family worship the families are worshipping together but they are worshipping the queen of heaven the goddess Astarte whose worship was institutionalized by the worst of all the kings Josiah's own grandfather Manasseh the one who ruthlessly undid the reforms of his father Hezekiah and the prophet Ezekiel tells us that the Asherah pole the symbol of the queen of heaven was actually set up in the temple that's like having a mistress and inviting her into the family home that's how deadly it is wholesale dreadful parody of family worship that's the point

I think of verse 18 they're all involved in it that's what the children are being taught this is what it's about you worship the queen of heaven and then there's the dreadful demonic worship of the god Moloch the evil god Moloch verse 31 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 the evil god Moloch whom Milton in paradise lost calls horrid god besmeared with blood to whom infants were sacrificed truly not just unreality but demonic behavior a perversion of true god given sacrifices now surely the point Jeremiah is making is this verse 22 31 sorry thus says the lord of hosts the god of Israel add your burnt offerings to your sacrifice and eat the flesh is well to eat the food for in the day that

I brought them out of the land of Egypt I did not speak to your fathers or commend them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices the point is not that god did not give the sacrifices the point and you can read about this in exodus before any sacrifices were authorized before the tabernacle was built god had one thing to say obey my voice and i will be your god and you shall be my people verse 23 and walk in all the way that i command you that it may be well with you you remember samuel said in a later generation to obey is better than to sacrifice and verse 24 sums it up they went backwards and not forward see this is not progressive undoubtedly the spin doctors of the day would be describing this as progressive exciting but it was going backwards and in chapter 17 jeremiah is to talk about true sacrifice which pleases the lord really no amount of religious activity no amount of pious talk is worth anything at all if there is not an obedient heart to obey is better than to sacrifice so there are wasted sacrifice don't bother about your religion if you're not obeying don't bother about the red tape don't bother about the institution because it is simply an empty shell a doomed structure and the wasted sacrifices are going to result in wholesale destruction verse 32 therefore the days are coming now it's raised the days are coming as so often the prophets means two things first of all it means the exile these days are coming but that exile is going to foreshadow another day verse 24 and I will silence in the cities of

[30 : 07] Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness the voice of the bride room and the voice of the bride for the land shall become a waste in the book of Revelation John takes up that and applies it not to the exile but to the last day to the destruction of the whole world system that's opposed to God because this is something that goes on throughout history and these judgments in history foreshadow the judgment on history the final judgment when everything is declared everything is open on the last day and look at verse chapter 8 verse 2 they shall be spread out before the sun and the moon and all the hosts of heaven which they have loved and served they've worshipped the heavenly hosts the heavenly hosts look on in total indifference they've worshipped the hosts of heaven rather than the

Lord of hosts isn't this what Paul says in Romans 1 worshipped the creature the creation rather than the creator who is blessed forever because this kind of worship this kind of unreality what does it lead to it leads to death and many of you will remember the passage in Ezekiel 37 the valley of dry bones where a similar picture of wholesale destruction of wholesale death as a result of bogus religion which has worshipped institutions and hated the gospel hated the word of God that's why it's so grim because there really is no choice it is life or death once again we hear the words of Moses don't we I have set before you life and death blessing and cursing therefore choose life who is the living God not dead institutions choose the living word not worthless traditions choose the

Lord Jesus Christ the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge until I finish just want to make three points just to try to press it home the first point I want to make is this is not unusual what is happening here now of course at this time of all times we are only too painfully familiar of this kind of battle I had no idea when some months ago the Lord turned my thoughts to the book of Jeremiah as the next book we might look at together I had no idea that this particular temple sermon would land on this particular day but the Lord is very gracious remember all the word is applicable all the word is relevant surely the Lord has been very gracious to us in these last months and all the various teaching and it's in a sense it's all of us of course it's the teaching and not the teacher from the various people who have preached here all these kind of things have become so clear to us this is part of the great battle of

Genesis 315 the seed of the woman and the serpent it's not unusual remember when we did the series on David you may remember towards the end of his story repeated phrase there was battle again there was another battle and yet again war broke out it's going to continue and the second thing is since it's going to continue we need to continue loving the gospel loving the word loving the Lord Jesus Christ not getting tied up with institutionalism it's always a danger isn't it there's a danger for us in the future as well that we get tied up in practice and procedure so let's continue loving the gospel loving the word and the first thing is the most important of all remember it's not our work it's the Lord's work it's his kingdom we are serving it's his gospel we are preaching it's to his name there will be the glory so let's keep humble and let's rejoice in the way the Lord has brought us praise him for all that is past and trust him for all that's to come amen let's pray

God our father how we praise you for your living word centuries ago long centuries ago Jeremiah spoke these words he must have felt that his words fell on deaf ears and that the seed fell on empty ground we thank you all these centuries later this same word is speaking to us now this same word is challenging and encouraging us help us indeed Lord to love you and to love your word and to show the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light amen