

Jeremiah's Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 7:1-15

Turn to Jeremiah 7 please. Jeremiah lived about 100 years after Isaiah. Isaiah told Hezekiah, 100 years earlier, that the Babylonians would come and take all Jerusalem's treasures to Babylon, and would take Hezekiah's own descendants as well. That all happened in Jeremiah's time.

In Jeremiah 7 we find Jeremiah's temple sermon. It is probably his most famous sermon, and it summarizes his book and his message. Today we look at Jeremiah's temple sermon. In Jeremiah 26, we find out what happened when Jeremiah preached this. We'll take a look at that too. But first we'll go through the sermon.

God's Instructions to Jeremiah: Stand at the Gate of my House (Jer 7:1-3a)

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ² *“Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message: “Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord.”* ³ *This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says:*

What we have in Jeremiah 7 is what God told Jeremiah to say. Which he did say. First God told him where to stand. *Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message.* So Jeremiah shall go to the big doorway and speak.

“This is what the Lord says to all you who come through these gates to worship the Lord.” This message is from the Almighty God of Israel to active worshippers.

1 – What God Wants (7:3b-8)

Change your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. “This place” would be Jerusalem and particularly the wonderful temple that Solomon built. Change your ways and your actions. Their lives are all wrong. Change how you live, and you can stay.

⁴ *Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!”* God is saying, “There is no magic in being in my house.”

⁵ *If you really change your ways and your actions; [that is:]*

(1) [if you] deal with each other justly, ⁶ *(2) if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and (3) [if you] do not shed innocent blood in this place, and (4) if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,* ⁷ *then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.*

What was the problem? The problem was not their worship. The problem was how they treated each other the rest of the time. The problem was their ways and actions. The problem was what they had been doing before they came to the temple, and what they would do after they left.

If they will change what they do outside the temple, then God will continue to meet with them the temple. Outside the temple, they even worship others gods. They think they are safe to do this, and they say to each other, *This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!*

These people worshipped with energy in the temple. And they thought that was enough. And that was a deception. Some voice was lying to them, saying everything was okay because they worshiped in the temple of the Lord. But it was not okay.

What God wanted was for them to change their ways and their actions when they were **not** in the temple, and then they could continue to worship and live there. That's what God wanted.

2 – What the worshippers were doing (7:8-12)

⁸ *But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.* ⁹ *“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.*

3 – Why the Jews Felt Safe, and Why they were Not Safe.

You can tell that Jeremiah's audience felt secure, and that this safety is a deception. They needed to wake up. The Jews were counting on two things to keep them safe. (1) God told David that his descendants would be on Israel's throne forever. (2) God had chosen Jerusalem, Zion, as his earthly home, the place for his temple, where he would meet with his people.

There is quite a bit of truth in both of these, isn't there. There is. So when a prophet like Jeremiah, and a few others did this too, said that God would destroy Jerusalem if they did not change their ways, the priests and other prophets would say, “no, don't listen to that, that's false, God told David that his descendants would always rule, and God chose Jerusalem as the place for his presence, you are safe, completely safe, God would never do that.

Here is what they had forgotten, and why they were not safe. Back to Moses and the exodus. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, and in about 3 months they got to Mt Sinai, were Moses had seen the burning bush.

God said to Israel, “You have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. If you obey me fully, and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession.” And the people all said, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” Ex 19

Then God gave them the ten commandments, and told Moses some other laws. Moses told the people what God had said, and Israel responded with one voice, “Everything the Lord has said we will do.” Then Moses wrote it down, and read it all to them again, and they said again, “We will do what the Lord has said, we will obey him.” And then Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on them, and they were God’s covenant people.

The Jews in Jeremiah’s day had completely forgotten about all that. Moses told them back then, “If you walk away from this, if you ignore this, you are in big trouble with God, he will punish you.” Moses said all that. But by Jeremiah’s time, they had forgotten. They had the temple, and they had the David king, everything was good, and they were safe.

When we come to the Lord, we repent. We repent and are baptized, and we receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. Don’t forget that we repented. That means, we decided to live in God’s ways, we submitted our lives to God’s ways. Don’t forget. God hasn’t.

Back to: 2 – What the worshipers were doing.

God took the people back to the ten commandments. “*‘Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury (i.e. false witness, lie), burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things? God just listed five or six of the ten commandments.*

They had forgotten the basic covenant – God will take care of them, free them from the Egyptians, divide the Red Sea, give them water from the Rock and manna from heaven, and they for their will worship only him and live in his ways. They forgot this, so they weren’t safe.

V11 *Has this house, which bears my Name, become your robbers’ den? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.* Robbers steal and kill, and then go to their hideout to be safe. As far as God was concerned, Judah had turned his house with his name on it into a robber’s hideout, the place where thieves are safe. As if God did not see how they lived their lives!

We have been taught this, too, that we are safe because we’ve made a decision to follow God, we’ve put our trust in Christ, we worship with God’s people. But what about our life out there, our ways and our actions? The NT never says anyone is “safe” who is not living in God’s ways.

We have warnings like Jeremiah’s in the NT, too. James says that faith that does not change our ways and our actions is dead, and that faith cannot save. We’ll come back to this later.

4. God has judged before, and will again (7:12-15)

¹² Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³ While you were doing all these things, declares the Lord, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. ¹⁴ Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors. ¹⁵ I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.

At the beginning of the book of Samuel, the early days of Israel in the promised land, before king David, the tabernacle they made in the wilderness was set up in a town called Shiloh. That's where old Eli was the priest, that's where Hannah took her son Samuel to serve the Lord.

Because the Israelites sinned against God, did the same things the Jews were doing in Jeremiah's day, God destroyed the tabernacle. It seems the Philistines came and burned it, although the story is not told in the Bible. That would be 5-6 hundred years before Jeremiah. But the people listening to Jeremiah could travel 20 miles north and see the spot. *Go see what I did.*

God is trying to get rid of that false sense of safety, that they can live however they want, as long as they worship actively in his temple. That didn't work in Shiloh, and it won't work here.

The whole time now that you have been ignoring our covenant, says God, *I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer.* God tried hard to call them back, but it did not work. *Therefore, what I did to Shiloh, I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors. I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.*

5. Epilogue in Jeremiah 26: Jeremiah nearly executed

When Jeremiah finished, the priests and the prophets and the people were ready to execute Jeremiah righteously for blasphemy. They thought he had done a terrible thing, he had spoken against the Lord's house. They thought it evil to say God would repeat what he did in Shiloh.

Priests and prophets are a big problem in Jeremiah, they do not serve God, they are just in the religion business. The officials of the city, and the elders, said "no, we must not kill him, he's spoken to us in the Lord's name." The officials reminded the people that Micah had prophesied the same in Hezekiah's day, and Hezekiah did not kill Micah, he repented, and God relented.

And there is another story in Jer 26. Jeremiah preached this early in the reign of king Jehoiakim. Another prophet, named Uriah, had preached the same thing. When Jehoiakim heard, he tried to kill Uriah. Uriah fled for his life to Egypt. Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt to find him and bring him back, and they did. And when Uriah was back in Jerusalem, king Jehoiakim had him killed.

That has to be within a year or two of Jeremiah preaching his sermon at the temple. Which means that when Jeremiah went to the temple gates to say what the Lord told him to say, Jeremiah knew he might not live until the next day. It was a dangerous sermon to preach.

6 – What about Us?

It is the same for us. That's the short story. We'll take a look at a teaching from Jesus, and from Paul, that sound the same. I don't think this is a problem in this church, because we understand that following Christ means we live in some ways and not in other ways. But it is good to get reminded.

And we are all aware of our ongoing sinfulness, which makes these words terrifying. This sermon scares me, too. But people, that's just a different lie. We don't have to cure the fear lie with the safety lie.

In the sermon on the mount, Matthew 5-7, Jesus teaches us how to live. That is as fine a summary as we have of how Jesus wanted his people to live. This sermon ends with the parable of the two builders, which teaches this: People who hear Jesus' words *and do them* are wise, they will be safe in judgement. People who hear his words *but don't do them* are fools, and will be wiped out in the judgement.

We have a basic choice, to steer our actions and our ways towards the Lord's teaching, or to ignore his teaching in daily lives. It is the same choice the Jews had, with the same consequences.

Jesus knows we don't do well with this, so he gave us a prayer, in the middle of the sermon on the mount. "Father, don't lead me into temptation, I don't do well, rescue me from evil, I need your help. I want your name to be honoured in my life, I want your kingdom to fill me, I want to do your will, forgive my sins as I forgave those who sinned against me."

There is help available for this, and Jesus told us how to get it. God helps us live this way. God forgives our sins. But we don't just pray for forgiveness, we pray the whole prayer! It's the disciples' prayer.

The alternative is to listen to Jesus words, but not change our ways and actions. That makes us foolish builders, and it will lead to the kind of disaster Jeremiah promised. Doing lots of church and worship things does not change this. Jesus said prophesying and doing miracles does not change this. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

Briefly from Paul. In Gal 5, Paul lists the works of the flesh, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He covers both of these in just 5 verses, beginning Gal 5:19. It is a great summary of what God wants. The works of the flesh are what Jeremiah's audience was doing, the fruit of the Spirit is what they were not doing, and judgement was coming.

And in those five verses, what does Paul say about the works of the flesh? *I warn you know, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

So I can't see that it is any different for us than it was for Jeremiah's audience. Each person has a basic choice to make: I will worship God and submit my whole life to his ways. Or not. The people who decide to do this fail often. That's not the problem. The sermon on the mount assumes daily failure. The problem is not caring any more of our whole life submits to his ways.

We forget our repentance, or we lose interest in it. Let's not do that. These things were written down as examples, to keep us from going down those paths. Now, let's turn this into prayer.

PRAYER: God our Father, we want to live in your ways. We want to be hearers of your word and also doers. We get sloppy about this; keep us on the right path. We want to be wise builders. As our Lord taught us to pray, don't lead us into temptation, we don't do well Father. Rescue us from evil, we need your help on this every day. We want your holy name to be honoured in our lives, we want your kingdom to flood us, and go out from us, we want to do your will. Forgive our sins as we forgave those who sinned against us. Thank you for giving us prayers like this, thank you that you answer prayers like this, thank you for calling us, and warning us, thank you for your Holy Spirit, thank you for ongoing forgiveness, thank you Father that you are completely on our side in this. Amen.