The Sermon At The Gate
Jeremiah 7:1-11

Introduction

Some Bible teachers call this Jeremiah’s Sermon At The Gate or Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon (7:1-10:25).

The Sermon was given in one of the most trying times in the history of Judea and Jerusalem. The Assyrians power has not been severely reduced under the new power Babylon. The Egyptians had defeated Israel’s army and killed King Josiah. Josiah’s son Jehoahaz had ascended his father’s throne, only to be replaced 90 days later by Jehoiakim, an inexperienced and evil ruler. Jehoiakim had sworn allegiance and loyalty to Egypt and introduced pro-Egyptian policies. The threat of the Babylonian invasion was looming large on the horizon (see The Preacher’s Outline And Sermon Bible; p.104;).

The people said they believed in God, worshipped the Lord, but their hearts were distant. Throughout the week they lived as if God wasn’t real; but still held on to the shell of the Temple Worship and the Mosiac Law. The people did not really observe the Law of Moses or keep the commandments. When the Temple Feast Days came around, or the Sabbath came around, they would go to the worship services, offer the sacrifices, ask God to forgive them and bless them; but when they left the service their lives were largely unchanged!

But it gets worse. They never really gave any thought to exercising true repentance, true humility, true obedience, because they thought going to the Temple, offering the prayers, offering the sacrifice, made them acceptable to God. The people were by and large convinced that it did not matter all that much to God how they lived during their week; as long as they continued to honor God by praying, giving, going to the Temple, offering the sacrifices.

Once again the message is one of rebuke, warning and exhortation. The message is addressed to those in Judah who hold on to outward religious forms, rituals but who have abandoned true Biblical faith. Some in Judah and Jerusalem continued to come to the Temple, to observe religious rites, festivals, and sacrifices. The message is centered on those who have deceived themselves into thinking that they have a right relationship with God because of superstitious loyalty to the outward forms of religion but do not have true Biblical faith. Jeremiah warns those who deceive themselves (vv.1-7) by believing the false teachings and fallacies of the false prophets who promise safety because of the presence of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jeremiah points out the fact that God was willing to destroy the Tabernacle at Shiloh because of the rebellion and wickedness of the people. Self-deception (vv.1-15) leads to self-destruction (7:16-8:17). Later Jeremiah will be ordered to cease praying for the people (v.16).

In a scathing sermon Jeremiah points out superstitious religion leads to superstitious worship that has no value (vv.1-15); prayers that do no good (vv.16-20); sacrifices that fail to cleanse (vv. 21-26); discipline and direction that result in no change (vv.27-8:3). In the next several chapters
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Jeremiah will expose false worship in the temple; false prophets and the Law (chapter 8:4-22) and false confidence in God’s covenant (Jeremiah 9:1-26).

The message was unwelcome. They were not ready to hear that worship does no good apart from true heartfelt repentance, change in mind and heart, and willingness to trust and obey God. That prayer has no value apart from repentance and obedience. Offering sacrifices has no value apart from repentance and obedience. That God’s discipline and correction has no value apart from true repentance and obedience (7:27-8:3).

False Worship In God’s Temple

Jeremiah 7:1 (NKJV) 1The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,

Jeremiah 7:2 (NKJV) 2Stand 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!

Jewish men were required to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the feasts of the Lord (Deut. 16:16). The prophet Jeremiah was ordered to position himself at the gate or the entry way into the Lord’s temple and preach to the people who were coming to worship the Lord. In the time Jeremiah; Solomon’s Temple had six gates; three into the outer court; three into the inner court; where the the High Altar stood, and the Temple proper. This may have been one of the gates leading to the inner court!

The Temple was to be the place where people heard The Word of the LORD but also to offer sacrifices. Jeremiah’s message is not three “p’s” and a promise but four scathing indictments. Your worship does you no good (vv.1-15); your prayers do you no good (vv.16-20); your sacrifices do you no good (vv.21-26); and the discipline and correction of God is doing you no good (7:27-8:3).

Jeremiah calls the people to consider; worship! What constitutes true worship? That is the question Jeremiah asks and answers; worship is more than ritual, more than ceremony, ritual must include a dedicated life to God.

Repair And Restore Your Relationship With God

Jeremiah 7:3 (NKJV) 3Thus 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.

What was Jeremiah’s message? Repent. It was the only way the people would be allowed to stay in the land of promise.

What was Jeremiah’s message? Repair and restore your relationship with God and others.
The rood meaning of the word “amend” means “to be well” or “to make well”. All is not well in Judah and in Jerusalem. Important changes need to be made. The word “ways” means the consistent and settled way of doing things! “Ways” means patterns of conduct. The word “doings” means the individual acts of specific people!

Haggai the prophet would say, “Consider your ways” (Haggai 1:5,7).

Are you well? Is everything well in your life?

*Jeremiah 7:4 (NKJV)* 4Do not trust in these lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.

What was Jeremiah’s message? **Refuse the lies of the false prophets. They must not place their trust in the false prophets lying words; false confidence in the Temple and Temple Worship, they must not trust superstitious religion.** The lying words relate back to chapter 6 (vv.13-14); the false prophets had lulled them into a false sense of peace, prosperity, security and acceptance. The false prophets believed greed was gain, and wealth a sign of prosperity. The temple of the Lord is repeated three times, to emphasize the theme of their message! The people of Judah were God’s people, The Temple was God’s Temple, sacred in His eyes, dedicated to Him, and God could not possibly allow the pagan armies to overrun and destroy His Temple! God wouldn’t allow something bad to happen to the Temple! **The people forgot that The Temple was already defiled, desecrated.**

Jeremiah positions himself at the gate; in the shadow of the Temple--to remind the people--that the Temple offers no security to those whose character and conduct are unacceptable to God.

The people began to see the Temple like a good luck charm.

The Lord promised David; “if your sons keep my covenant. . . . their sons also for ever shall sit upon your throne. For the Lord has chosen Zion. . . ‘This is my resting place for ever’” (Psalm 132:12-14). Ephraim forgot the promise was conditional. . . if. . . and David’s son did not keep God’s covenant. . . the people thought Jerusalem was impregnable and the presence of the Temple guaranteed the security and safety of the city against any disaster.

*Jeremiah 7:5 (NKJV)* 5 For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor;

What was Jeremiah’s message? **Reform, remodel, reorganize your behavior. Change your behavior.**

The people must obey God and change behavior.
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Treat people fairly.
Do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless, or widows.
The Lord wanted genuine reformation. The Lord wanted the people to pursue justice.

This is not social justice absent God; absent personal change.
The expression “thoroughly” is much stronger in the original language. We might read this “If amending you amend your ways... “if executing you execute justice”.

*Jeremiah 7:6 (NKJV)* 6if 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,

**Don’t murder.**
**Don’t follow false gods or worship idols.**

The Bible pays close attention to the plight of strangers and aliens. Other religions and systems of social philosophy and social justice would pay close attention to family loyalty, fidelity, but ignore the outsider. Jesus talks about this;

*Matthew 5:46 (NKJV)* For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Concern for the alien and the stranger is repeated (Exod. 20:10; 22:21; 23:9; Deut. 24:17-22). The man of faith cares for the alien, not because they belong to the same tribe, or because they share ties of language or culture, or faith--but because they are human beings, created in the image of God, loved by God, treasured by God. **In the care of the stranger or the alien, the concept of humanity was born!**

**Care for the helpless and the hurting is at the heart of Biblical Judaism and Biblical Christianity. The fatherless, the widow...**the verse gives a threefold division of man’s duty in which the weak stand first, before the shedding of blood, or idolatry.

The shedding of innocent blood may refer to child sacrifice, or murder or the miscarriage of justice. Look at the expression “to your own hurt”. Injustice, idolatry, murder does not hurt God--it hurts the unjust, the idolater and the murderer.

*Jeremiah 7:7 (NKJV)* then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

*Jeremiah 7:8 (NKJV)* Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit.
The prophet repeats the sentiment in verse 4; but with a slight difference; in verse 4 it was a negative imperative; now the statement is made as a fact. You trust lies. The lies have no benefit.

*Jeremiah 7:9 (NKJV)* Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know,

The question comes in the form of an accusation. Will Ephraim (here the Jewish people) persist in the sins mentioned in the preceding chapters? The Hebrew verbs are infinitives. . .more literally the text reads, “what?” “to steal?” “to murder?” “to commit adultery”? etc.

The implication is carried over from the previous verse; you trust lying words that cannot profit”

What? So you can continue to steal, to murder, to commit adultery, to swear falsely, etc. Do the math. Between verse 6 and verse 9 the people were guilty of breaking at least five of the ten commandments (Exod.20; Deut. 5). But the false prophets assured the people that the presence of God's Temple in Jerusalem guaranteed them blessing protection from their enemies and freedom from judgment.

This is not Biblical faith, but raw superstition. Religious objects become talismans to protect from harm. As if the very possession of such an object is what protects!

Jeremiah will expose their superstition and shatter their silly theology that religion saves!

Edmund Burke said, “Superstition is the religion of the feeble minds”. In what world can you justify theft, murder, adultery, hypocrisy and idolatry and the Worship of the Great God and Savior Jehovah?

*Jeremiah 7:10 (NKJV)* 10and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

The question from the previous verse continues; the people who had sinned, come to the Temple; imagining that their presence at the temple, gave them free reign to continue to sin.

Part of the reformation was prompted by something similar. The purchase of indulgences. The idea that you could buy forgiveness. Both Jeremiah and Luther knew that God forgives sin--on the basis of God's provision--and what provision has God given us for the forgiveness of sin?

Jesus. God forgives sin--on the basis of repentance from sin and unbelief and trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Religion grows like a weed and righteousness languishes under the false idea that righteousness and godliness is legalism.
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The expression “called by My name” means “put my name there!”

A.W. Tozer wrote; “I can offer no worship wholly pleasing to God if I know that I am harboring elements in my life that are displeasing to Him. I cannot truly and joyfully worship God on Sunday and not worship Him on Monday”.

Do we sin that grace can abound? Heaven forbid.
Jonathan Edwards wrote, “The more a Christian hates sin, the more he desires to hate it”.

Do you love sin or hate it? Spurgeon preached; “We cannot bear sin--when it is near us, we feel like the wretch chained to a rotting carcass; we groan to be free from the hateful thing.”

Jeremiah 7:11 (NKJV) 11Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord.

Jesus quotes this verse in a New Testament passage!

Matthew 21:13 (NKJV) 13And He said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7. Jesus emphasizes robber--Jeremiah emphasizes “den”; the place thieves go after they’ve done their dastardly deeds.

“A den of robbers is the place where thieves go to hide after they’ve committed their crimes. Thus Jeremiah was declaring that the Jews were using the temple ceremonies to cover up their secret sins. Instead of being made holy in the temple, the people were making the temple unholy! A century earlier, Isaiah had preached the same message (Isa. 1), and much later Paul wrote a similar warning to Christians in his day (Eph. 5:1-7; Phil. 3:17-21). Any theology that minimizes God’s holiness and tolerates people’s deliberate sinfulness is a false theology” (Warren Wiersbe; Be Decisive; TBEC; Old Testament; The Prophets; p.87).

In the book of Amos (5:21-24) the Lord said, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . .Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. The prophet Isaiah said, “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? . . .Who requires of you this trampling of my courts? . . .cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa.1:11-12; 16-17).

When Isaiah preached the most powerful nation on the earth threatened Jerusalem; but God defeated the armies of Sennacherib. A century later the people had grown smug, they were convinced that God’s covenant made the people safe forever; Jeremiah tried and failed to convince the people that true safety, real security, godly assurance, comes from being totally
committed to the Lordship of God. Religion can never serve as a substitute for real faith in a real God. As a matter of fact, religion can be a downright hinderance to Biblical faith.

True faith involves real trust and real confidence in the true and living God. In the book of Deuteronomy God spelled it out to His people; “If you forget the Lord your God . . . you shall surely perish” (Deut. 8:19). Once again Jeremiah calls on the people to repent. Why? Do avoid the awful consequence both to their character and to their worship; but also because of the inevitable judgment that is soon to come (vv.12-15).

The Lord’s Covenant with the Jewish People included both blessing and curse; prosperity and adversity; blessings if they obeyed, judgment if they didn’t obey. The Jewish people were reminded over and over again, but chose to continue in personal sin and reject God’s warning.

Conclusion

What happens when people trust a building, a statue, or a religion instead of exercise true Biblical faith?

The just shall live by faith.

The people would come to the Temple and say, “we are delivered” and then go and sin some more. In the next section the Lord will point to Shiloh, once the most sacred place for the Jewish people. This is the place where the Ark of the Covenant was stored. But in a critical battle the people brought out the Ark as a talisman, a good luck charm, to defeat their enemies, only to watch the Philistines capture the Ark. The sanctuary in Shiloh was destroyed. God warns He will do to the Temple, what He did in Shiloh; and to the people of Jerusalem what he allowed to happen to the Northern Tribes.