

Series: Jeremiah: Faith During Opposition	Reference: Jeremiah 7:1-11	Title: Wholistic Worship	Date: 08.15.2021
Website Writeup:			
<p>God's not pleased with hypocritical ritual. He desires wholistic worship seen in life-transformation. Where are we tempted to go through the motions just to appease God? Since Jeremiah reminds us, God's interested in the true state of our heart & life-transformation which comes out in very practical action of care towards others.</p>			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Please open your pew Bibles to Jeremiah 7:1-11, p___ & hold your place as we will read it later together.... Anyone who's had teenagers, or been one, knows kids sometimes say one thing & do another. Hopefully you have rules that your kids shouldn't drink alcohol until they're of age, drive intoxicated, take drugs, should save themselves for marriage, do their homework & chores, among other things.

Once I got in trouble as a teenager for something I can't remember now, but remember my fathers reaction, which is more important for me to remember. He said calmly & sadly, "I can't trust you anymore." That devastated me. As a young man with a developing mind, I didn't fully grasp how my dishonesty & disobedient actions could affect my fathers heart. It pained me more than any punishment to hear those words. I wanted my fathers approval & trust, and had done something to break that. There was a wedge in our relationship. I learned that day, and as a father myself later, that when a child says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure dad," then goes out to do the opposite, it hurts the father. Other cultures use the language of shame, a child's disobedience brings shame on the fathers name & shame hurts. But it's not only disrespectful, it's also worrisome to the father for the wellbeing of their child.

In a perfect world a fathers wishes would be respected & differed to inside & outside the house, given their wisdom & knowledge. Children of other cultures seem very aware that their words & actions reflect their fathers name. A father transfers his character to a son or daughter, pouring into them what he knows to be good & right, and will bring life & safety, making them a trustworthy reliable person, marked as someone who not only does good, but is good.

Is God not the same, with like feelings & concern for the development & direction of His children? As imperfect as earthly fathers can be, God is not. My dad was stellar as far as fathers go, but he's an imperfect guy like all of us. Comparatively, God's direction can be fully trusted as absolute best. This is why worship is crucial for intimacy with Him & development of character. A disobedient hypocritical lifestyle, not only brings shame to His name, but drives a wedge in our relationship with God & is harmful to us.

With that in mind, read along with me, Jeremiah 7:1-11...*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2"Stand at the gate of the Lord's house & there proclaim this message: "Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. 3This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says:*

*Reform your ways & your actions, and I will let you live in this place** [*can also be translated, “and I will dwell with you.”].

This is a message God gave Jeremiah to deliver at the gate of the Temple. Traditionally during pilgrimage feasts worshippers would be greeted at the gate by someone asking them to examine their moral lives prior to passing through the gates. A practice which had likely lapsed by this time.¹ But Jeremiah picks it back up calling out the justifications people used & their hypocrisy in even coming to the Temple. It continues in v4...Do not trust in deceptive words & say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!”

This phrase was indicative of the presence of the Lord among them, and we talked about the importance of God’s presence last week. The Temple itself was believed to be the place of God’s presence. It was probably said three times in the Temple liturgy as it is here. *To make more sense, we could change the words to say...“Do not believe that it will help you to go on repeating the words: God lives here, God lives here, God really lives here!”*² And that’s why the words were deceptive, they were using the Temple as a sort of talisman - they thought nothing could happen to them due to its presence. Later in this chapter (which we will not read) God points to Israel’s past to remember Shiloh where the Tabernacle of God had first dwelt (Josh. 18:1; Jud. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3; 4:3–4), to remember how it was abandoned & destroyed by the Philistines due to Israel’s wickedness. God allowed that to happen then, why wouldn’t He do the same during Jeremiah’s day.

In comparison, one pastor says this about the Church today, “In the West we’ve somehow been able to separate believing the Truth from how we live.”³ We can enter church, be theologically correct in what we say, with little to no impact on how we live, which is what Jeremiah is confronting in these people. We can’t say God lives here, without a total change in our beliefs, values & actions. Worship is a life event, not a Sunday event, *and it’s indicated by very practical things some of which he defines in v5...*

*5If you really change your ways & your actions & deal with each other justly, 6if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow & do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, 7then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever & ever. 8But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. 9“Will you steal & murder, commit adultery & perjury, burn incense to Baal & follow other gods you have not known, 10and then come & stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe” - safe to do all these detestable things? 11Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been **watching!** declares the Lord.*

¹ (Peter C. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1-25*, World Biblical Commentary 26 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018], 120)

² Barclay M. Newman Jr. and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on Jeremiah*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003), 209.

³ (Transformation, Bob Roberts p33)

These lifestyle changes were true worship, not just showing up at the Temple saying the right words. I propose to you...**God's not pleased with hypocritical ritual. He desires wholistic worship seen in life-transformation.** We'll learn, passionately saying 'yes, yes, yes, Lord' in here, while leading a dichotomous lifestyle in other areas of life, isn't worship of God at all, rather it's worship of something else. And this damages our relationship with God, shames His name, impedes our development as children & His mission to the nations! And, at some level it can indicate we're not safely under His wing as we would think - that possibly salvation has not occurred in our hearts.

Israel's history's replete with this sort of hypocrisy & deviation. Notice the references to their sin in vv5, 6, 8 & 9...they include injustice, oppression, murder of the innocent, trusting deceptive words, adultery, perjury, following Baal & other gods, robbery & hypocrisy.

This stuff's nothing new. From Adam & Eve it all went downhill as they hid their differences, exchanging harmony for hostility, placing themselves under the dominion of Satan who sought to destroy them. But God doesn't desire coerced worship & allowed them to stray. **Then, Cain & Abel, the first murder, from there to Noah & the starting over by God when in Genesis 6:5 it says, "Every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually."** There's a large history of the Israelites following God, not following God, devotion waxing & waning, out of Egypt, into the desert, on to Mount Sinai, making a golden calf, through the Judges, on & on.

When Israel entered Canaan, the Canaanites worshiped a number of gods which the Israelites were to have nothing to do with. Baal the supreme deity of many gods for one, was the male deity of the land or fertility; his title meant landowner.

Then there was Ashtoreth (or Venus in Rome, Aphrodite in Greece, Ishtar in Babylonia & some others) who was the Goddess of fertility & war. She was imaged by Asherah poles, which were phallic symbols which decorated the high places. They believed if these deities saw them in lascivious acts of orgies, incest, adultery & the like, these deities would be aroused & bring forth rain making their land fruitful.

Within this religious structure was a temple priesthood of good looking young folks - as your act of worship, you were to go to the temple & perform sexual acts which included orgies, incestuous, homosexual & adulterous acts as your spiritual form of worship.

An obvious byproduct of these practices were unwanted pregnancies. Babies with no known father. So, there was a third god, Molech, the god of fire. He demanded child sacrifice. Molech was the solution to the unwanted byproduct of the worship of the other two deities - the abortion solution for ancient people. This is one reason for Gods extreme disgust & anger.

So, these words in Jeremiah have a deeper meaning when we know history. We don't know the extent to which this stuff was practiced at the point of Jeremiah's ministry, but Baal is mentioned, so it was evident at some level.

All these various practices produce a people who have very little character of God, so usury, perjury, theft & oppression are simple obvious byproducts of such character. Have you ever noticed, one sin leads to another? I watch crime stories on Youtube. Most typically aren't psychopaths, but people who made small bad choices leading to larger bad choices. It's like a small unmanned boat sitting on what looks like a placid lake, but we don't notice the gentle undercurrent. If it's not moored to the solid land, it slowly floats out from shore. If we only worship here in this room, but not with all of our heart, mind, strength & soul, with actions reflective of Him we also slowly drift away.

Jesus used the same words in Mark 11 when He overturned the tables at the Temple as God does in v11 of this passage. He said Israel had made the Temple to be 'a den of robbers'. A place where Israel would go out, do anything they wanted, and then come back to hide at the Temple as if it could be their sanctuary, although their lives were in all other ways unreflective of God.

To understand Jesus' words we have to understand that facing the Sanctuary & the Court of the Priests was the Court of Men, behind it the Court of Women, then a large area, the Court of Gentiles, in which Gentiles were allowed to enter, but could go no further. It was this Court of the Gentiles in which the scene was played out in Mark 11. The missional front porch of Judaism where the Gentile, who didn't know God, could see the Israelites worshipping & displaying God's glory & character before them. Where they could learn about who God was by watching God's people in active worship. Where they could be surprised the Jews weren't just concerned for themselves, but also concerned for them both theologically & practically - that's the heart of God! That Israel, being so closely connected to God's heart, was praying for the nations to know & experience God themselves & caring for them in a real life manner! And remember Jeremiah & Israel were to be a light to the nations.

Yet, in Mark 11 Israel's corruption was being played out in full view of the Gentile Nations - unreflective of God's heart. Instead it was selfish, self-centered & greedy. All the different non-jewish people groups who'd gathered there, either out of curiosity, or because they're sincerely searching, weren't receiving what God desired for them. They're not seeing God's people reflect His character or heart, rather just a selfish concern for themselves.

There was a need for exchanging money from one currency to another. Money from three sources circulated in Palestine: Imperial Roman money, provincial Greek money & local Jewish money. Money changers provided the Tyrian (Jewish) coinage for the annual temple tax (Ex. 30:12-16) required of all male Jews 20 years & up. This was in exchange for their Greek & Roman currency, which featured human portraits & considered to be idolatrous & unusable in the Temple tax. So money changing wasn't the problem in Mark 11.

Historically that story's been preached as a lesson on greed, but it's much more. It's not that Jesus didn't think someone should make money for exchanging currency, or for

their time. However, they'd created a large monopoly over the exchange of money & the sale of sacrificial animals. So, you could only get your money changed there at an exorbitant rate, which is usury. And if you brought your own sacrifice from your own herd of goats, or a pigeon, which would've been a poorer person's sacrificial choice, it most likely would be rejected. You'd need to buy directly from these guys at an inflated rate. It was shameful & didn't reflect God's heart for the poor. So the corruption inside the Temple was rampant - Israel's negative witness to the nations passing through.

Jesus wouldn't allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple since the Jews had totally disregarded this court & its purposes of being a light to the nations. The Court of the Gentiles was no longer important to them. They'd allowed it to become a thoroughfare - anyone could saunter through, leading or carrying anything they wanted. It no longer was a place of prayer & teaching, a place of evangelizing & caring for Gentile nations, it was an overcrowded busy marketplace. It had lost its purpose.

People often use claims of hypocrisy to discredit Christianity. Although some is revisionist history without clarity to the real nature of the events, sadly there's enough truth to convict the Church. They reference the Crusades, Inquisition, or the Witch Trials when the church in Europe killed 'more than five million women'...not to mention all of the social judgment, exclusion & slavery the church has supported throughout history.⁴ In this passage, instead of denying the truth that Israel's being hypocritical, Jeremiah deals with it head-on.

Jeremiah's mission becomes clear as he's warned he'd face opposition & messages like this reveal why - people don't like to be called out on their hypocrisy & sin. They didn't in Mark 11 either! Like confession in the Catholic Church can become just a way to do what you want, as long as you confess, some leaders may've looked the other way, or worse, soothed the concerns of people by telling them they could act however they wanted, then do their rituals in the Temple & still be okay with God.

But Jeremiah calls out their hypocrisy. *"Do not trust in deceptive words & say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!'"* (v. 4). Remember last week how we talked about people giving up on the integrity of the Scripture, twisting it, or chopping it apart to fit their desired narrative? Same thing here.

Which brings about the question...where are we tempted to go through the motions just to appease God? Jeremiah reminds us, God's interested in the true state of our heart. He's not pleased with hypocritical ritual. He desires wholistic worship, lifestyle-transformation. Not to just know God intellectually, or even theologically, but to know Him in the full orb of life revealed by a practical care of the needy & vulnerable. To know that He's master, we're stewards, that we're His in every sense of the word.

⁴ Mark Clark, *The Problem of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017], <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/hypocrisy-is-keeping-people-from-the-church-an-excerpt-from-the-problem-of-god/>

Jeremiah's been tasked with delivering a difficult truth. The people are going through the rituals of worship without allowing their hearts to be changed. God's telling them to "deal with each other justly" (v. 5), to cease oppressing "the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow," to not "shed innocent blood in this place," and to not "follow other gods to your own harm" (v. 6). He wants more than their worship in the Temple; He wants worship in all areas of their lives.

What does worship really mean? Historically, churches have fought over the 'right' way to worship. Some of these disagreements represent legitimate theological differences committed Christians can agree to disagree on. Others are simply matters of taste or preference, prompting church or denominational conflict that is needlessly divisive. The Worship Wars is a term people use to describe the incredible volume of fights over worship style in American evangelical churches in the '90s & early 2000s. Those fights were frivolous which often imported greater theological meaning to church differences. In this passage, God reminds His people that worship is also what they do outside of the Temple & matters just as much as what they do inside of it.

One pastor in Dallas was seized by the vision of God's heart for the fatherless in James 1:27, and started a movement which prompted his home church to give generously to support the fatherless.⁵ The president of the Pro-Life Union of Philadelphia & I have talked about possibly working on a home for single mother's in Ardmore. I'd like to do more with them since the most vulnerable are the unborn. Just this week we chose to support an immigrant family in need for a year from the Benevolence Fund & I'd love to ask you guys to give a one time financial gift today so their children can shop for winter clothes. We support workers in the Middle East & North Africa who do this work well & also chose this week to support 2 more. So, Six:Eight's doing things, but as individuals where are you?

Jeremiah's life of hard missions included this one: calling out hypocrisy & reminding Israel of the real meaning of worship. Maybe you haven't directly oppressed someone, sacrificed a child to Molech, or committed perjury. But maybe this is seen more in our indifference to suffering than anything else. We see needs & ignore them. Our worship must extend to our daily lives outside of church walls, not only because those things equally matter, but because what we do in one space affects the sincerity of what we do in the other. The problem with witness sometimes isn't the sharing of our faith, but the living of it. Jeremiah says, we cannot willingly live contrary to God's character & expect to have intimacy with God in any meaningful way. And indifference may even be an indicator of our need of salvation! As I want life-transformation for my kids, for them to reflect my heart in all they do, God wants the same of His children.

I challenge you to think through two things this week. 1. What private sin are you living which impedes your worship? 2. What ways can you worship God by supporting the foreigner, the fatherless, or the widow?

⁵ Albert Reyes, "Justice and a Heart for the Fatherless in the Global Village," Christianity Today, May 26, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/justice-and-heart-for-fatherless-in-global-village.html>