

**Life's Ultimate Questions:
What about My Heart?
Jeremiah 7:1-12**

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Introduction: We are in a series of messages that we are calling “Life’s Ultimate Questions.” Questions like: “What is the purpose of my life?” and “Is God watching over me?” Today, we raise this question: “What about my heart?” Our text for this series is the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet in the last days of Old Testament history before the exile. Jeremiah’s purpose is to give warning of the judgment of God and call people to repentance. Jeremiah speaks in chapter 2 *generally* of the people’s sins. They have committed two evils: they have turned away from God and they have turned toward false gods. Here in our text this morning, Jeremiah gets *specific*. He points to the specific sin of the hypocrisy of their worship. In fact, as the text lines out for us, Jeremiah is called by God to station himself at the entrance of the temple and proclaim this message of false worship.

Text: This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Stand in the gate of the house of the LORD and there call out this word: Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who enter through these gates to worship the LORD.

³“This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Correct your ways and your deeds, and I will allow you to live in this place. ⁴Do not trust deceitful words, chanting: This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD. ⁵Instead, if you really change your ways and your actions, if you act justly toward one another, ⁶if you no longer oppress the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow and no longer shed innocent blood in this place or follow other gods, bringing harm on yourselves, ⁷I will allow you to live in this place, the land I gave to your ancestors long ago and forever. ⁸But look, you keep trusting in deceitful words that cannot help.

⁹“Do you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and follow other gods that you have not known? ¹⁰Then do you come and stand before Me in this house called by My name and say, ‘We are delivered, so we can continue doing all these detestable acts?’ ¹¹Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your view? Yes, I too have seen it.”

This is the LORD’s declaration.

¹²“But return to My place that was at Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at first. See what I did to it because of the evil of My people Israel.

Introduction: So, imagine the scene. This morning, just a few moments ago, as you made your way into this building, suppose that there had been a preacher outside—maybe on the front steps that face Lee Avenue. Instead of welcoming you into the air conditioned building, the preacher would have been preaching.

“Hey, all you people who come into this building set apart for the worship of God. You are not ready to worship a holy God. You are only here out of habit. You are only here because you think God might bless you if you come here. You are only here because you are trying to be a good Baptist. What about your

sin? What about the lies you told this week? What about the pornography you have viewed this week? What about the adultery? You are about to sing songs of worship to Almighty God, but haven't thought about God all week. What about the unethical business deal that you participated in this week, but rationalized it by saying, 'I needed the money.'"

That would be kind of odd wouldn't it? But, this is exactly the scene of Jeremiah 7.

In other words, as people are going into worship, there stands Jeremiah preaching. An odd scene! An uncomfortable scene! The importance of Jeremiah's message is that here is God's man proclaiming God's Word in front of God's house to God's people.

Jeremiah's sermon is a sermon about the purity of our hearts which leads to the purity of our worship. We must guard our hearts. About what must we be careful to guard our hearts?

I must guard my heart against ...

1. Cold-hearted religion (7:1-8)

The Deception of Israel *"The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord."*

- The worship of Israel was more lip service than heart.

God's indictment against Israel was that they trusted in vain words. They ran into the Temple to sing songs, to read the Law, to carry out sacrifices, but they did not obey God. They stole, committed adultery, shed innocent blood, and committed lots of other sins. They thought that they could come to the Temple and just by their presence in the Temple wipe the slate clean.

The Deception of the Modern Church

Does that same kind of deception happen in the modern church? Absolutely! Here are some examples.

For the Individual

Examples: Baptism, Church membership, busyness, church attendance, giving, good works, family heritage, etc.

For the Church

Examples: Busyness, Growth, Programs, Buildings

The Non-Deception of God *"words that cannot help" (7:8)*

God is not deceived. The result of deceptive worship is that there is no profit in worthless worship.

A man sat down to supper with his family and said grace, thanking God for the food, for the hands which prepared it, and for the source of all life. But during the meal he complained about everything. The meat

was too tough, the vegetables were too salty, and the bread was stale. His young daughter questioned him, "Dad, do you think God heard the grace today?" He answered confidently, "Of course." Then she asked, "And do you think God heard what you said about the meat, vegetables, and bread?" Not so confidently, he answered, "Why, yes, I believe so." The little girl concluded, "Then which do you think God believed, Dad?"¹

2. Concealed Sin (7:9-11)

The Analogy of a Robber's Den

Jeremiah employed an analogy with which Israel would relate. Thieves in those days would steal and then go hide out in dens in the countryside until they felt it was safe to return to town. Jeremiah indicated that many going to the Temple were using the Temple in a similar way to the den of thieves.

The Answer

God says, "I have seen it." You do not hide your sin from God and your worship is worthless.

The expression "face the music" is said to have originated in Japan. According to the story, one man in the imperial orchestra couldn't play a note. Being a person of great influence and wealth, he had demanded that he be given a place in the group because he wanted to perform before the emperor. The conductor agreed to let him sit in the second row of the orchestra, even though he couldn't read music. He was given a flute and, when a concert would begin, he'd raise his instrument, pucker his lips, and move his fingers. He would go through all the motions of playing, but he never made a sound. This deception continued for two years. Then a new conductor took over. He told the orchestra that he wanted to audition each player personally. One by one they performed in his presence. Then came the flutist's turn. He was frantic with worry, so he pretended to be sick. However, the doctor who was ordered to examine him declared that he was perfectly well. The conductor insisted that the man appear and demonstrate his skill. He had to confess that he was a fake. He was unable to "face the music." In the realm of Christian service, many professing believers go through the motions, but they are only pretenders. Someday they will be called upon to stand before the Judge of heaven and earth, and their deception will be revealed. God will then separate the phonies from the real Christians. No one will be able to hide in the crowd. Each will be made to face the music.²

3. Complacency (7:12)

Jeremiah's mention of Shiloh indicates the complacency that Israel had in their worship. Shiloh was a town 18 miles north of Jerusalem. Shiloh had a special significance in the history of Israel. Shiloh was the first place of the Tabernacle in the Land of Canaan. Shiloh was the historical place where the land was divided among the tribes. Shiloh was the place where God called Samuel to be a prophet. However, this historical significance of Shiloh had not shielded Shiloh from the judgment of God. That once proud historically religious place was in ruins.

¹ Copied from SermonCentral.Com, (James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 433.)

² Copied from Sermon Central index, "Deception."

If Israel thought they could be protected as the result of just a place, they only needed to visit Shiloh to recognize the futility of a place. The significance of the mention of Shiloh is that it exposed the faulty thinking of trusting in the past. Today says nothing about tomorrow. Yesterday says nothing about today. Our heart must be maintained every day.

Have you become complacent in your relationship with God? Have you become satisfied? Are you living on the strength of yesterday's relationship with God? Be careful!

Samson is one of the great leaders God used in the times of the judges as spoken about in the Book of Judges. Samson is well known for his hair. The Bible reveals that this is related to a vow that his parents made for him, and that his great strength was tied to his hair. Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. When the Philistine leaders, Israel's enemies, found out about Delilah, they offered her money to find the source of his strength. Three times he lied. Eventually, he caved in and told her the real source of his strength. While he was sleeping, she cut off all of his hair and he was weakened. She called for the Philistines. He awakened thinking that he would whip them just like every time before, but now his strength was gone. Here is what the Bible says: "But he did not know that the Lord had left him." (Judges 16:20) I am afraid that we are just like that sometimes.

Hope for Keeping My Heart Pure

Is there any hope for keeping my heart pure? Yes, but a pure heart is dependent upon surrender. The universal signal for surrender is to put hands in the air. Maybe we need to do that today. Get rid of the deception, turn ourselves in, and submit to His authority.

Remember the scene—there is a preacher out on the front steps. Regardless to the oddity of that scene, I want to ask this question—As it relates to your life, would there be any truth to what he was saying?