

Sermon Series: After God's Own Heart

To be used with: Session 2: Honor God

Sermon Title Possibilities: The Missing Ingredient in Modern Worship

Scripture: Jeremiah 7:12-23

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study *After God's Own Heart: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments*, these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

**The Point:** Our relationship with God is seen in how we honor Him.

**Introduction:** Theologian Wayne Grudem gives as good a definition of worship as I've ever read. He defines it as "the activity of glorifying God in His presence with our voices and heart".<sup>1</sup> If I understand God's Word correctly, God is most glorified when we obey Him. If your worship does not inspire or motivate you to be a better servant of the Lord, can you truly say you have worshiped? That was pretty much the point Jeremiah was making in our text. The people of Judah were still going through the motions of worship. They were still keeping the Sabbath, and they were offering their sacrifices at the temple. Yet God not only refused to accept this kind of worship, but it flat-out angered Him. Why? Because their worship was not translating into obedience! In fact, God was so disgusted with their blatant hypocrisy that He told Jeremiah not to pray for them anymore.

## I. A sorrowful illustration. (Jeremiah 7:12-15)

- A. God reminded the people of what had happened to Shiloh.
  1. Shiloh was where God "set His name at the first". That is, it was the original home of the tabernacle.
    - a. Some 400 years earlier, the Philistines invaded the area near Shiloh and captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4:1-11).
    - b. According to archaeologists, Shiloh was destroyed at this time.
    - c. The Ark was later returned, but Shiloh still lay in ruins.
  2. The people of Judah thought the temple would protect Jerusalem from God's judgment, but they were wrong.
    - a. The temple was merely a symbol of God's presence (1 Kings 8:27).
    - b. When judgment finally fell on Jerusalem, the temple was not spared.
- B. Judah would be destroyed like "the whole seed of Ephraim."
  1. "Ephraim" referred to the Northern Kingdom.
    - a. The nation of Israel split after the death of King Solomon.
    - b. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.
  2. Judah would not get away with defying God any more than Ephraim did.
    - a. God is merciful, but He does not tolerate outright rebellion.
    - b. He was patient with both kingdoms, but His patience ran out.
    - c. If God did not spare His own people from judgment, what makes us think America will be safe from His judgment?

## II. A surprising condemnation. (Jeremiah 7:16-20)

- A. God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people any longer.
  - 1. Does this mean we should not pray for America?
    - a. America may already be under God's judgment, but that is for God to decide, not us.
    - b. Until He specifically tells us otherwise, we should continue praying for our nation.
  - 2. Why did God give this command?
    - a. The sins of the people had become so great that God would no longer answer Jeremiah's prayers for them.
    - b. God was telling Jeremiah not to waste his time or energy.
      - Maybe you've asked someone a question about a particular matter, and they've replied, "Don't ask!" What do they mean by that? They're essentially saying, "You'll find out soon enough", or "It's best that you don't know." Likewise, God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people because He had no intention of answering such prayers. It would be a waste of time.
- B. What had the people done to merit such fury?
  - 1. They were giving offerings to "the queen of heaven".
    - a. This is likely a reference to Ishtar, the goddess of war and fertility, who was worshiped by both the Babylonians and the Assyrians.
    - b. We should expect pagans to worship pagan gods, but God's own people should know better.
  - 2. If God judges America, He might begin with the church.
    - a. Peter said, "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).
    - b. Whether we obey God or not, He is still the same (vv. 19-20).
      - Not long ago, I read where the Church of England issued an apology for stating that marriage is between a man and a woman. When churches feel the need to apologize for what God's Word says, then we truly are in trouble!

## III. A simple expectation. (Jeremiah 7:21-23)

- A. Was there anything the people could do to turn away God's judgment?
  - 1. God pronounced judgment on Judah during the days of King Manasseh.
    - a. King Josiah's reforms had delayed the judgment.
    - b. Jeremiah pleaded with the people to repent in hopes that God might soften the coming judgment.
  - 2. Burnt offerings and sacrifices would not change anything.
    - a. The people were still going through the motions of worship, but their hearts were not truly in it.
    - b. Their sacrifices meant nothing without obedience (1 Sam. 15:22-23).
- B. What God wanted from them was *obedience*.
  - 1. When you're a follower of Jesus, your life does not belong to you.
    - a. None of us are perfect, but there's a difference between ordinary human imperfection and outright rebellion.
    - b. God will tolerate it for a while, but His patience eventually runs out.

2. How does God feel about modern American worship?
  - a. Whether your preference is traditional or contemporary, it doesn't mean a thing without your obedience.
  - b. Have we become more interested in the latest worship technology than we are in holiness?

**Conclusion:** Romans 1:16 says the Gospel of Jesus Christ is “the power of God unto salvation”. The word translated “power” is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get the word “dynamite”. Vance Havner used to say, “We are dealing with spiritual dynamite, so everyone who comes to our services should either get a charge or a shock. They might even get mad, but anything is better than nothing!” Remember what Wayne Grudem said about worship. He called it “the activity of glorifying God in His presence with our voices and heart”. Music is part of it, whether it's traditional or contemporary. Giving is part of it. That's why we always take an offering in the service. It's not just to pay the bills; giving is a legitimate part of worship. Preaching the Word of God is a very large part of worship. That's why the sermon is always the central part of the service. But remember, God is most glorified by your obedience. If your worship does not motivate you to be a better servant of Jesus Christ, can you really say you've worshiped?

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 1003.

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