

24th April 2016

Integrity in worship - Jeremiah 7:1-29

Jeremiah 7 is a sermon preached by the prophet probably in 609-608 BC. Spoken in the courtyard of the temple amid the crush of people coming to worship, his words were outrageous. They almost cost Jeremiah his life (the context is probably Jeremiah 26). Years later, for the bewildered in exile, this sermon answered the question *Why?* “Why did the impossible happen? Why was the temple – the dwelling place of God - destroyed?”

1. Worship of God calls us to change our ways (vv.3, 5-7)

The earlier reform initiated by King Josiah was impressive, after 57 years of evil reign. Idolatry and corruption were banned; the temple was repaired and God’s Law was rediscovered. Yet change seemed to have been skin-deep. Worship was not leading to holy, just and compassionate everyday living. Impressive religious resolve is an empty lie without a whole-hearted commitment to reflect God’s character and care day to day.

2. Worship of God challenges our assumptions (vv.4, 8-15)

They were in the right place, and they said the right words, but they were not right. Impeccable religious performance, correct theology, an impressive temple: none secured divine insurance from destruction. God had promised David and Solomon that he would dwell with His people, but this was no unconditional guarantee. Temple worship divorced from morality was no hiding place for oppressors and idolaters. Shiloh, the revered earliest focus for worship in Israel, was now derelict for all to see.

3. Worship of God calls for listening, love and obedience (vv.16-29)

Shockingly, God says to Jeremiah: “Don’t pray for this people any more. This place will be destroyed. I don’t care for the sacrifices. I only ever wanted exclusive devotion, obedience and truth.” Centuries later, when Jesus saw similar moral decay and hard-heartedness in the temple, a scribe who understood love of God and neighbour as the primary commandment was commended as one close to God’s kingdom (Mk 12:28-34).

Home Group Questions

Start by praying **Psalm 24** together. Take time to pause, as you “climb the hill” with other worshippers, walk through the gates and prepare to come before a holy God, the King of glory. Today, we pray and read, listen and speak in His presence.

Read Jeremiah 7:1-29.

1. How do you think the original worshippers would have felt to hear Jeremiah’s words?
2. If the Temple was to be destroyed anyway, why do you think Jeremiah was asked to preach (v.2)? And why was he told not to pray (v.16)?
3. If the covenant with God has always been all of grace, why does it appear here to be conditional?
4. What assumptions might we have regarding our relationship with God, (or particular Christian traditions, institutions or organisations) that need to be challenged?
5. Jesus quoted Jer.7:11 as he cleared the temple, saying it had become “a den of robbers” (Mk 11:17). How can we hide behind a pious image?
6. Ruined Shiloh was a powerful visual aid of God abandoning His sacred place. The people of Jerusalem in the south, who hated the northern kingdom, could have felt smug about Shiloh – until Jeremiah turns to them. Can you think of examples of times we dismiss and condemn others, without heeding the lessons they might teach?
7. How can we help each other to love God faithfully and walk in His ways of compassion and justice? Pray for integrity and renewal in the church.