

Personal  
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Allen Power

Jeremiah 7:1-15

Today's text is known as Jeremiah's "temple sermon" because God plainly said to the prophet: *"Go to the entrance of the Lord's Temple, and give this message to the people: 'O Judah, listen to this message from the Lord! Listen to it, all of you who worship here!'"* This warning was for "church people" who were literally walking into God's house.

- What are some "labels" people might use to describe their religious affiliation? What are some popular "labels" evangelical Christians use?
- Several years ago I began to use the term: "Follower of Christ."
- How does that differ from terms like "Christian" or "believer?"

The famous evangelist Billy Sunday said, *"Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile."* What do you think he meant by that statement?

The point: If someone from our "Monday through Saturday life" bumped into us at church, would they be surprised to see us in a church or would they think: *"Yeah, that makes sense?"* The question to ask ourselves is: Are we just attending church or are we BEING the Church?

- So, what was this tough message being delivered to temple-goers?

**3** This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: " 'Even now, if you quit your evil ways, I will let you stay in your own land. **4** But don't be fooled by those who promise you safety simply because the Lord's Temple is here. They chant, 'The Lord's Temple is here! The Lord's Temple is here!'"

- God gave Jeremiah another tough assignment. Stand in front of the temple and confront the "church attenders" with their "false religion, idolatry, and hypocrisy. Jeremiah was almost put to death for this sermon, but he was rescued by the some of Judah's leaders (see chapter 26)."<sup>iii</sup>
- Verse four: How had some superstition developed regarding the temple? In our day, how might people feel that way about church membership?
- Judah thought of temple attendance and religious ritual like a "lucky rabbit's foot." *"As long as we have the temple, we're covered."*
- God said, *"Don't be fooled by those false prophets who promise that!"*
- Verses 5-11 are a call to turn from their sin including examples of their sin.

**5** But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; **6** only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans,

and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshiping idols. **7** Then I will let you stay in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever. **8** “ ‘Don’t be fooled into thinking that you will never suffer because the Temple is here. It’s a lie! **9** Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and burn incense to Baal and all those other new gods of yours, **10** and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, “We are safe!”—only to go right back to all those evils again? **11** Don’t you yourselves admit that this Temple, which bears my name, has become a den of thieves? Surely I see all the evil going on there. I, the Lord, have spoken!

- Imagine the reaction of these pious temple-goers when Jeremiah listed those sins. We can see why this message almost got Jeremiah killed!
- They had made the temple a “den of thieves.” Jesus would use that term.
- Warren Wiersbe wrote, “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!*”<sup>iii</sup>
- How might someone today use church membership as a “cover” for sin?
- How might denominations fall into the trap of doing the same thing?
- These religious people were not about serving God and people; they were about PRESERVING their reputations and their religious institution.
- God gave Isaiah a similar message around 100 years before:

**Isaiah 1:11 (NLT) — 11** “What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?” says the Lord. “I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

**Isaiah 1:14–18 (NLT) — 14** I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them! **15** When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims.

- That was the judgment but listen to the grace:

**16** Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways. **17** Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows. **18** “Come now, let’s settle this,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.

- God’s people were attending church but not BEING the Church.
- Back to Jeremiah 7. God ended His warning with some historical facts.

**12** “ ‘Go now to the place at Shiloh where I once put the Tabernacle that bore my name. See what I did there because of all the wickedness of my people, the Israelites. **13** While you were doing these wicked things, says the Lord, I spoke to

you about it repeatedly, but you would not listen. I called out to you, but you refused to answer. **14** So just as I destroyed Shiloh, I will now destroy this Temple that bears my name, this Temple that you trust in for help, this place that I gave to you and your ancestors.

- “Archaeological evidence suggests that after the Philistines defeated Israel and captured the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 4:1-11), they destroyed Shiloh around 1050 BC. Jeremiah issued God's challenge: See what I did to it. Shiloh had been Israel's worship center, but God destroyed it because of His people's evil ways. He would do the same to Jerusalem.”<sup>iv</sup>

**15** And I will send you out of my sight into exile, just as I did your relatives, the people of Israel.’

- Spoiler alert: The people refused to turn from their sin. God gave them 40 years of Jeremiah’s warning before He allowed the Babylonians to destroy the Temple, burn Jerusalem to the ground, and capture the people.
- So much for their “temple theology” that as long as the temple stood in Jerusalem they would be safe.
- Religious ritual wasn’t a lucky charm after all.
- How can we apply this to our world today? How can we BE the Church instead of just attending church? It’s about relationship not religion.
- If we’ve trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, His Holy Spirit living in us will convict us when we start using church membership as a “cover” for sin.
- Paul wrote instructions to the church at Ephesus for BEING the Church:

**Ephesians 5:1–7 (NLT) — 1** Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. **2** Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. **3** Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. **4** Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. **5** You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. **6** Don’t be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. **7** Don’t participate in the things these people do.

- Verses one and two are the formula for BEING the Church:
  - “Imitate God...in everything you do, because you are his children.”
  - “Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.”
- Sinful people like us can only accomplish that because:
  - “He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us.”
- Other thoughts?

## So, What's the Takeaway?

- Attending church and serving Jesus are not necessarily the same thing.
- Sadly, some people join the church as a “cover” for a sinful life. A cynical ploy to burnish their tarnished reputation.
- A California minister named Wilbur Rees wrote a poem entitled “Three Dollars Worth of God.” Listen to the words:

*I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.  
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,  
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk  
or a snooze in the sunshine.  
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man or pick  
beets with a migrant.  
I want ecstasy, not transformation.  
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.  
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.  
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.”*

- I don't think anyone in our group falls into that category. Jesus said, we will know we would be known by our “fruit” (Matthew 7:20) and I see lots of “good fruit” in this group.
- Still, this is a good reminder for us even if we are sincerely striving to imitate Christ through the power of His Holy Spirit.
- It's worth asking myself: If someone from my “Monday through Saturday life” bumped into me at church, would they be surprised to see me in a church or would they think: “*Yeah, that makes sense?*”
- The question to ask ourselves is: Are we BEING the Church or are we just attending church?
- This week, let's live so there's no doubt WHOSE we are. Let's strive to not just attend church but to BE the Church.

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<sup>i</sup> — Billy Sunday, "Billy" Sunday, the man and his message: with his own words <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/27312-going-to-church-doesn-t-make-you-a-christian-any-more>

<sup>ii</sup> Life Application Study Bible copyright © 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. All rights reserved.

<sup>iii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Decisive* (p. 42). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iv</sup> Explore the Bible – Leader Guide – Lifeway 2023