

THE PROPHETIC WORD TODAY

Why You Should Not Come To Church

Text: Jer. 7:1-15, 21-23

Introduction: In college, Ross Geyer, like Jeremiah in his boldness, prayed this prayer on Easter Sunday, "Thank you for all these people who have made their annual pilgrimage to church."

Some were angry; many questioned his taste; but he stood in a noble tradition. That sounds like what Jeremiah would do. In fact that sounds like what God told Jeremiah to do.

It was just a short time before one of the annual feast days when people from all over Judah would come and go into the temple in great masses.

Jer. 7:1-2a ¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ² "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word,

So Jeremiah went and stood at the main entrance. Early in the morning the crowd came, dressed in their Sabbath best. Their hair was combed, clothes clean. Piously they climbed the stairs. About midway up the stairs, their eyes fell on the stalwart figure of a young man. His face is stern; his gaze meets theirs. It is as though his eyes could see right thru them and peer into their minds and hearts. They knew that man. He was Jeremiah. The man whispers to his wife, "He's the one who lambasted me the other day when he saw me go into the temple of Baal. I guess he is here checking roll at the feast. I bet he's glad to see me here. Now he will be convinced that I am a son of Abraham."

But as he approached, Jeremiah began to speak to the many gathered at the entrance. He was ranting and raving, but he was not passing out compliments.

Jer. 7:2-15, 21-23 ² "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all *you of* Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!" ³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD *are* these.'

⁵ "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, ⁶ *if* you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after

other gods to your hurt, ⁷ then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

⁸ “Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. ⁹ Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, ¹⁰ and *then* come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations’? ¹¹ Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen *it*,” says the LORD.

¹² “But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. ¹³ And now, because you have done all these works,” says the LORD, “and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, ¹⁴ therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. ¹⁵ And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren—the whole posterity of Ephraim.

²¹ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. ²² For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. ²³ But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’

Probably a very few, if any, of those who heard what is today called “The Temple Sermon” responded. But to be sure, they were challenged to think about their motives for coming to the temple.

Jeremiah challenged them to answer the question, “Why have you come?”

This morning, let me ask you that same question, “Why have you come?”

Now I want to share with you those reasons to come to church which God says are wrong and those He says are right.

I. GOD’S PEOPLE SHOULD NOT COME TO CHURCH FOR THE RITUAL.

A. A serious problem in Jeremiah’s time.

Reform under Josiah – Began when Book of the Law was found. (2 Kings 22-23 summarize account)

The king had a change of heart. The people only had a change of external custom.

Josiah worshiped from his heart.
The people copied the forms.

Josiah laid a sacrifice on the altar to atone for sins of which he repented.
The people brought sacrifices instead of repenting.

Josiah held sacred those words “the temple of the Lord” because it was a special place to meet God.
The people chanted “the temple of the Lord” like a magical formula to ward off trouble.

The temple choir sang with precision. The priests read the law most eloquently. The interior was well cleaned and polished. Worshippers dressed well. But they never brought their hearts and had a face to face encounter with the Living God.

When Josiah died, the bubble burst. Soon the external ritual was even forgotten. The people reverted to Baal worship.

B. Some today come because of the externals.

1. Good choir
2. Good preacher, well, maybe not here; but there are places people come because of the preacher.
3. Good LCG teacher
4. Good program

You know that’s why they come, because you let the choir be off a few Sundays, or the preacher is out of the pulpit, or change the Lifechange class or alter the program and they’re gone! Nothing wrong with wanting or having those things – we should. But those aren’t the reasons you ought to come to church.

Friend, if something like that causes you to stay home, you’re coming for the wrong reason. (Note – I didn’t say stay home. It is worse to stay home for the wrong reason than come for the wrong reason. I’m not giving you an out.)

God has said through His prophet...

My people should not come to My house for the sake of rituals and externals.

That is also the point Jesus made with the woman at the well. Don’t confuse true worship with externals. Because some do come for external rituals.

C. God sometimes removes the externals.

1. Jer. 3:16 – ark of covenant would be taken away
2. The temple itself would go.

God requires some of our forms to change, lest we begin to worship the form instead of Him.

If you would let a change in one of the forms, or programs or externals about a church keep you from worshipping, you are coming for the wrong reason.

Second reason God gives through Jeremiah.

II. GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD NOT COME TO CHURCH FOR SECURITY.

- A. Temple superstition – God would not allow His holy city, especially His holy temple to be destroyed. So, as long as they were in and around the temple, they felt safe.
1. They didn't come to worship; they came for safety.
 2. They didn't come out of loyalty; they came out of fear.
 3. They didn't come with any intent to repent; they came with no sorrow for what they had done and no intent to change.
 4. They chanted "the temple of the Lord" like a magic formula.
- B. How many people still come to God's house for security?
1. Young person – lives in sin all week long among one set of friends. But because of a guilty heart, tries to wipe the slate clean each Sunday by coming to church.
 2. Business man – who cheats in business, stealing information or sanctioning illegal and dishonest activities. Come to church on Sunday and steps into another world.
 3. Wives – around their neighborhood there is no difference. But on Sunday it is socially respectable to be faithful in church.

It is easy to become like those in Judah to let church attendance become a substitute for morality. "Do what you want during the week; just be in church on Sunday and it'll be alright."

- C. Again, let me emphasize: I am not saying that I would rather those who come to church for security not come. God forbid! I would rather them come for the wrong reason than stay home. But be not deceived, those who come for security, come for the wrong reason.

What are the results of such worship?

Jer. 7:14 therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

Shiloh was the site of the tabernacle. Eli's sons were disobedient. The ark was captured. The tabernacle was destroyed.

When David comes to the throne, the temple is gone. God puts an end to false worship.

So, what is the reason to come to church?

III. GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD COME TO LISTEN, OBEY, AND WALK IN THE WAY OF THE LORD.

Jer. 7:23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'

- A. Listen – come with a sense of expectancy. Not because of preacher, or LCG teacher. But because of God's Word, "not return void." Because of the Holy Spirit who is commissioned "to teach us all things."

If your blessing in this service this morning were dependant on this preacher, you may as well go home and I ought to quit. But it's not. And you should not look to me but to Him.

I praise God when He uses me to speak to you. But I praise Him when He uses the special music, or congregational singing, or the Scripture reading, or when He speaks quietly to your heart.

Those who come to God's house expecting to hear a word from the Lord are not disappointed.

- B. Obey – come with commitment to do what God says. You meet not with mere men. "Where two or three... I will be also."

An important ingredient in worship is humble obedience. A Christian should not have to decide if something is God's will and then decide to do it. Once he is convinced that it is God's will, doing it should be his nature.

Come to listen with intent to obey the Living Christ.

- C. Walk – in the ways of the Lord. "You can't take it with you" is true of material possessions when you depart from this world.

But when it comes to what you gain in worship there is a sense in which if you don't take it with you, it isn't worth much.

To hear God and determine to obey Him for an hour or two isn't very meaningful if the fresh air and sunshine purge your mind and heart of what He has spoken to

you. You must take it with you. It should be a source of meditation, inspiration, and guidance through the week.

Conclusion: Why you should not come to church – what's worse than no religion? Jeremiah points to something worse – false religion. It is not worse in its penalty, but there is less hope for recovery.

For it is easier to win a sin-stained individual to Christ than it is to open the blinded eyes of an unconverted church member who comes not because of a personal relationship with Christ, but as a formality or for security.

Oh dear friend, if you do not come because of a personal relationship with Christ because you have never trusted Him, come today.

If you have that relationship but worship has become a formality or security, come in rededication today, vowing a sense of expectancy as you listen, obey, and walk in His ways.

If you are without a church home and you wish to worship in Spirit and Truth with us, expecting God to speak, vowing to obey, come, join with us.