**BCM Bible Study – September 13/14, 2017**

**Jeremiah: Ritualistic Worship and Disobedience**

Temple Sermon: Ritualistic Worship

* *Background: Jeremiah 7:1-8:3 is known as the “Temple Sermon.” It was very likely delivered by Jeremiah around 609 BC during the reign of Jehoiakin, one of Judah’s last kings before being taken into exile. Jeremiah gives this indictment of Judah while standing at the gate of the temple, the heart of Jewish life where many people would be coming and going to worship God, or so they thought.* (Reference: New Bible Commentary)
* **Read Jeremiah 7:1-12**
	+ Consider again verses 4 and 8; both mention that Israel’s trust has been misplaced. In what have they placed their trust?
		- Read to your group: *Evidently, the Judeans had adopted a ritualistic saying that they thought had some sort of salvific power. They were likely basing this false hope on an over-emphasis of the Davidic covenant*: **Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16** (note that David is being spoken to by God). *One author puts it this way: “The people assumed David’s descendants would rule forever, and God’s blessing would rest on Jerusalem and the temple no matter how Judah lived.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*
		- Are there certain religious activities (going to church, baptism, serving the community, financial giving) that you struggle with leaning too heavily upon for God’s acceptance?
		- How can we participate in these good, God-ordained activities without becoming ritualistic?
	+ Aside from empty words, for what else does God indict Judah?
		- What characterizes the wayward behavior of Judah in verses 5-6?
		- Is it surprising to you that these are the sins that God mentions first? Why or why not?
		- What does this teach you about the heart of God and how do you think this translates to modern society?
		- *Interesting note: verse 9 is an allusion to the 10 commandments.*
	+ God, through Jeremiah, juxtaposes two concepts in this passage: empty rituals and sinful behavior.
		- Why do you think God talks about these two things together in this passage?
		- From your experience, how do these two things feed into one another?
		- Positively, how to genuine worship and obedient behavior fuel one another?

*Verses 12-15 given an example of a previous Israelite sanctuary that had been destroyed. If this can happen at Shiloh, it can happen in Jerusalem. In verses 16-20, God tells Jeremiah to stop praying for the people because their extreme wickedness – his patience is coming to an end despite innumerable chances he has given them to repent.*

* **Read Jeremiah 7:21-26**
	+ Verse 23 is an allusion to the Mosaic covenant. **Read Exodus 19:1-6**.
		- What does God promise Israel? What does he declare about them?
		- Upon what is this contingent?
		- What reason does God give them to obey?
	+ *Reflecting on everything that has been read so far, it is evident that obedience itself is an important aspect of genuine worship.**In fact, if we are simply saying “going through the motions” and our lives do not reflect obedience to God or a striving and openness towards repentance, our worship, like the Judeans, is empty.*  **Read John 14:21, Romans 12:1**. How do these verses shape your definition of worship?
		- When do you find that it is most difficult to be obedient?
		- Why do you think walking in your “own counsels” (v.24) is often so attractive? Why is this misguided?
		- How have you seen God work in your life in the past? In what way does this encourage obedience on your part?
	+ *Our society often exalts the idea that something is only authentic when we feel that it is true or important. Along these lines, many would scoff at the idea of obeying God’s law when we do not feel like doing so. Many would say that this is empty, ritualistic worship.*
		- How would you respond to this statement?
		- Why is obedience authentic worship regardless of our excitement about doing so in the moment?

Conclusion

*In the following verses, Jeremiah declares that Judah will become a wasteland of death because of their idol-worship and disobedience. The community leaders had lied to the people about their spiritual well-being like a doctor who tells a sick patient that he or she is healthy. Jeremiah grieves for the people because of God’s coming judgment to which they are blind; he weeps repeatedly. The people are worship idols made of stone and wood instead of the living God! As a result, God has no choice but to send them into exile. In the midst of this sad, severe language, there is striking statement from God that shows his desire for people to return to him:* ***Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.***

Break up into small groups to answer some of these questions:

* What are some things aside from God that you tend to put your hope in?
* What does it look like to know the Lord in the way described in this passage? How does it strike you that he delights being known in this way?
* Have you identified anything tonight that you wish to be different about your spiritual life? (empty rituals, disobedience, etc.) How can this group support you in seeking transformation from God with regard to these things?
1. Encountering the Old Testament, Bill Arnold and Brian Beyer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)