

Jeremiah 7-10

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[0 : 00] Please turn to Jeremiah. You're going to need a Bible tonight. So if you haven't got a Bible, greeters are there.! And it's grown.

I think there are probably about 50-odd, 60-odd there this morning. So I'm lots to be thankful for. Thank you for your prayers. This week, Jeremiah 7 to 10. And next week, Jeremiah 11 to 15. So that's your homework. Jeremiah chapter 11 to 15. I've had to prepare this sermon and slave over it and work hard at it.

Jeremiah, on the other hand, is given a sermon. God dictates it to him. And it is an absolute belter, as you'd expect. Interestingly, the sermon is not preached straight away.

We're going to have to wait until chapter 26 until he delivers it. But in Jeremiah's collected works, really, it's included to back up the impact of chapters 2 to 6.

[1 : 20] Because Jeremiah wants to convince his initial hearers and the hearers that are in Babylon in exile, and to convince us of this very simple truth. That religion kills, but God gives life.

And that is the message of Jeremiah 7 to 10, really. Religion kills, but God gives life. Chapter 7, verse 1 to 8, verse 3 revolves around that first part.

Religion kills. And one of the interesting things about Jeremiah, especially in these early chapters, is how poetry and prose is mixed up. There's the roller coaster of really intense poetry, of chapter 2 to 6.

But in chapter 7, you get gentle prose in order to kind of calm us all down. And look at how it begins. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord.

Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word, and say, hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. And God gives Jeremiah the sermon to preach.

[2 : 26] He says, go to the turnstiles of the temple, where you'll have maximum impact. Go to the welcoming door, and where people mill around, where people go in and people leave.

And the message of this sermon is, verse 3, religion kills. Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words.

This is the temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord. That was the religious mantra of the day. That the temple is indestructible, inviolable.

And therefore, we're secure. And Jeremiah says, it's deadly. Anyway, back in the days of Hezekiah, when the Assyrians had threatened God, threatened God's people, God had said this to them.

He said, thus says the Lord concerning the king of Syria, he shall not come into the city, nor shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast a siege mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return.

[3 : 28] And he will not come into the city, declares the Lord, for I will defend the city to save it for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David. And that promise had been turned into a national slogan.

God has always defended the temple, and he always will. Except he won't. And no amount of repeating that slogan will make any difference.

According to verse 8, they are deceptive words, and they need to amend their ways. And if they don't, their religion will kill them. It's one of the things that's most surprising about the Bible, that it is so anti-religion.

From the beginning to the end, the Bible exposes human religious activity, whether they're talking about doing the right thing, or going to the right place, or saying the right words without reference to God.

He says it is toxic to people like you and I. And in this case, the focus falls on treasuring the temple as the symbol of God's sponsorship of his people.

[4 : 32] Their underlying attitude was, we've got the temple, we are the people of God, so we can live any way we like, but God says, think again. Now, I should warn you that Jeremiah's sermon is not a happy sermon.

And the logic of the chapter is that spiritual hypocrisy, which flows out of spiritual deafness, will lead to spiritual death.

Chapter 7, verse 5, God addresses their spiritual hypocrisy head on. He says, And it seems that they are showing up to the temple like model Jews, but at home they're deceiving each other. They exploit the vulnerable. They worship other gods. In other words, they are hypocrites. Now, there is a sense, isn't there, that we're all hypocrites.

And we'll never escape that. There's always going to be some disconnect between what we say and what we do. And we need to face that truth about ourselves and be quick to admit it.

[5 : 52] The fact that we have been joined to the Lord Jesus, and yet are still sinful, means that we never quite manage to live up to what we say. But there's another sense in which we need to take very, very seriously the fact that hypocrisy is ultimately fatal.

We can never just dismiss hypocrisy as an unfortunate part of the human condition between now and the new creation. Hypocrisy in the Bible, particularly spiritual hypocrisy, is the ultimate sign that all is not well with our walk with the Lord.

And what the Lord tells Jeremiah to say to his people, look with me at verse 8, Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely? Make offerings to Baal.

Will you go after other gods that you've not known? And then you come and you stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and you say, we are delivered. Only you go on doing those abominations.

Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. Your lives give you away.

[7 : 03] You're living a double life. You've made the temple a hideout for criminals. Can't you see that? And that's the problem, isn't it, with spiritual hypocrisy.

It's always painfully obvious to other people, but it's so difficult to spot in ourselves. Why is that? Think about that. It's because spiritual hypocrisy is caused by spiritual deafness, which is what makes it so difficult to hear, when other people, and even God himself, are shouting hypocrite at us. There's nothing subtle about Jeremiah. Look at verse 13. Now, because you've done all these things, declares the Lord, when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer. Therefore, I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim. He's saying, just as God's chosen place in Shiloh, it was closed down, because of the corruption of Eli's sons, and just as the land of Israel fell to the Assyrians, now the temple of the Lord is going to go the same way.

Ignoring God leads to pretense, which leads to judgment. And that is just the way it is. Back in the beginning, God had freely given, and graciously given, and chosen Israel as his people, as his son.

[8 : 43] Not because of any goodness in them, but because he loved them. He said he would come, and make his presence obvious, that he would live right at the center of their national life.

He spelled out for them, do you remember in great detail, how they would live a beautiful life with him. And all Israel had to do was listen, and obey, and they would be blessed.

And they would delight in life with God himself. But they wouldn't listen. And instead, they got religious. Chapter 7, verse 22, For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers, or command them, considering burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this command I gave them, listen to my voice.

And I will be your God, and you shall be my people, and walk in all the ways that I command you, that it may be well with you. But verse 24, they didn't obey, they didn't incline their ear, it's the same word, listen, but they walked in their own counsel, the stubbornness of their heart.

And they went backwards, not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I persistently sent all my servants, the prophets, to them day after day, yet you did

not listen to me, or incline your ear.

[9 : 54] Verse 27, So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. Verse 28, And you shall say to them, this is the nation that did not listen to the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline.

Truth has perished, it's cut off from their lips. God says to them, you need to read your Bible in the right order. You need to go to Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 4, because the basic model of following me is listening.

Listening to God's word, and everything else flows from that. We listen, and then we obey. In every detail of life, and that includes sacrifice, but religion just does not listen.

It runs straight to the empty conveniences of religious ritual. I hope you can see the issue here.

Spiritual deafness leads inevitably to spiritual hypocrisy, and then it will lead to spiritual death.

And that explains chapter 7, verse 16, and following where Jeremiah says these awful words. Look at verse 16, As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede for me, for I will not hear you.

[11 : 06] Do you not see what you're doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?

The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, the women need dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven, the queen of heaven.

And they pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. Is it I they provoke, declares the Lord? Is it not themselves to their own shame? Therefore, thus says the Lord God, behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place.

God says, there's no point praying now. The die is cast. And God has promised blessing if you will listen, but if you refuse to listen, he promises curse.

And God is doing what he promised. So do not pray to me asking me to do what I've not promised to do, God says.

Spiritual deafness leads to spiritual hypocrisy, which in turn leads to spiritual death. And God tells Jeremiah, make the point with brutal force in what is left of this little sermon.

[12 : 16] They're to call in, verse 29, the bald, mourning woman. Cut off your hair, cast it away, raise a lamentation on the bare heights, for the Lord has rejected and forsaken this generation of his wrath.

Psalms verse 30, the spiritual death of exile is on the way. They've set their detestable things in the house that's called by my name to defile it. They've built the high places in Topheth, which is a fire pit, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it even come into my mind.

There's dead bodies everywhere, verses 32 and 33. But worse is to come. Chapter 8 is one of the darkest passages in the whole of the Bible. Judah's fate is sealed.

The bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the hosts of heaven, which they've loved and served, which they've gone after, and which they've sought and worshipped.

And they shall be gathered or burned. They shall not be gathered or burned, and they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I've driven them, declares the Lord of hosts.

[13 : 33] Do you get the point? It's really simple. Spiritual hypocrisy begins with spiritual deafness, and in the end it leads to spiritual death. And that's God's sermon outline to Jeremiah.

We're going to find out how it played out when he preached it. You can probably guess how it played out. I wonder how it played out to those who were actually in exile, to those who are reflecting on their experience a generation and a half later.

But what has it got to do with us today? So the first application is really obvious, isn't it? Are you spiritually deaf? Because spiritual deafness is a condition that persists this side of Jesus' coming. You don't need to tell me, you don't need me to tell you that it's more than possible to be a follower of the Lord Jesus and to be exposed to the Word of God and not pay the blindest bit of attention to it.

It's possible to get out of the bed in the morning to congratulate yourself that you've opened up your Bible and to allow your eye to range over the page without hearing and believing the Word of God. It's possible to sit through church, allowing God speaking into our lives without realizing that it's

actually God who speaks to us and about us.

[14:59] And then we have a spiritual hearing problem. And if we don't address our spiritual hearing problem, in the end, it will lead into full-blown spiritual deafness, which in turn will produce all kinds of complications.

And is this the pressing need that you and I need to address? Because act quickly. Because spiritual deafness will inevitably, and it will quickly lead to spiritual hypocrisy if you don't do anything about it.

It's spiritual deafness which allows you and I to have an inflated view of ourselves. It's spiritual deafness that creates the context where we can start to deceive ourselves.

And see, if we aren't hearing God speak, what does God do when he speaks? He corrects, he shapes us, he exposes us, he humbles us, he straightens out our thinking.

And if we refuse to hear him, sooner or later, we start to believe our own publicity about ourselves. We start thinking about ourselves more highly than we ought and gradually we start judging other people by the measure of our own incredibly high standard.

[16:15] And we become smug and pharisaical and high-handed and hard-hearted. And our antenna becomes finely tuned to detect the sins of others, but it's oblivious for our own.

And it stinks. And so I hope you know that nothing does more damage to the church than the corrosive stench of hypocrisy.

You see, the problem with spiritual deafness is this, it's progressive. You don't wake up one day and suddenly you're spiritually deaf. It gradually happens, doesn't it?

And the thing is this, as we stop listening, it becomes harder and harder to listen. And so it becomes easier and easier to continue in our hypocrisy.

The more that we ignore God, the easier it is to ignore God and we do damage to ourselves. And the easier it becomes to dissipate. It's not rocket science. And so, children, your parents, they tell you this, I hope, that the more that you sin, the easier it becomes to sin.

[17:25] It's why mum and dad, they want to correct you, they want to stop you in your tracks while it's beginning, because the more you sin, the easier it becomes to sin.

And so, children and young people, you need to know that it's not just for you, it's for us as well. The pastor who calls his people to repentance and faith, but he refuses to apologise to his family for anything.

The youth group leader who desperately wants to disciple the young people and yet he thinks he's got nothing to learn. The husband who insists that his wife submit to him, but he's actually got no, interest in submitting to the Lord Jesus.

The elder who rails against the immorality of society, but secretly is addicted to porn. The friend who prides herself on loyalty, but she'll use any confidence for her own interests.

The young person who prays that her friends will come to know the Lord Jesus, but she indulges in gossip about others. Hypocrisy comes in many forms and many guises, but it's dangerous and we may have slipped into that.

[18:40] And so many of us are really skilled manipulators, aren't they? You know what to say to me, I know what to say to you, and we can hide the reality of our hearts really easily. And so tonight would be a great time to come clean before God.

Because let me tell you this, spiritual hypocrisy will end up in only one place, and you are dicing with spiritual death tonight, if that's you. And so these issues, according to the Lord Jesus, they're not small issues, are they?

This kind of pretense imperils your very soul. And I don't think it's wrong to say this, that actually this is, in many ways, the dominant note of Jesus' ministry, isn't it?

Nowhere does this note of the danger of hypocrisy sound more clearly than in Luke 18. Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves and that they were righteous and they treated others with contempt.

There's two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. And the Pharisee stood by himself and he prayed, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men. I'm pretty decent.

[19:51] I'm not an extortioner. I'm not unjust and adulterer. I'm not like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tithe of all I get. But the tax collector, he stood at a far off in a distance and he wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven.

And he beat his breast and he said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And Jesus says, I tell you that this man went home to his house justified right with God rather than the other.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Religion kills. And spiritual deafness leads to spiritual hypocrisy, which leads to spiritual death. And this is a hard message to preach and it's a hard message to hear. And one of the effects of religion is the hardness against anyone who exposes our pretense.

And so what happened to Jeremiah is what ultimately happened to the Lord Jesus. Why did the Pharisees and the religious leaders kill Jesus?

[20 : 54] Because his message was exactly the same as Jeremiah. Religion kills, but secondly, only God gives life. And that takes us to the second movement of the section from 8.4 to 10.25.

And the gentle prose of the temple sermon in 7.1 to 8.3, well, you're back to the poetry, searing poetry. of Jeremiah in chapter 8 to 10. Initially, the focus is on the fact that, well, let's look, according to 8.4, that people get up when they fall down and come back when they go away, but not Israel.

Verse 5. Why then has this people turned away in perpetual, continual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. Even the stork in heaven, the birds knows their times, the turtle dove that swallow the crane, they keep the time in their coming, but my people know not the rules of the Lord.

Verse 8, God's people say, we're wise and the law of the Lord is with us, but verse 9, they've rejected the word of the Lord. So what wisdom is in them? Disaster is approaching.

The leaders of Israel are delusional. Look at verse 11, they've healed the wound of my people lightly, saying peace, peace, when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?

[22 : 07] No, they were not at all ashamed. They didn't know how to blush. And when catastrophe looms in chapter 8, verse 14, they're apparently taken in their stride. Why do we sit still?

Let us gather together. Let us go down the pub. Let's go into the fortified cities and perish there. For the Lord, our God, has doomed us to perish and he's given us poison water to drink because we've sinned against the Lord.

Let's just die now. And what effect does this have on Jeremiah, verse 18? My joy is gone. Grief is upon me. My heart is sick within me.

Behold, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land is the Lord not in Zion. Is her king not in her? Don't worry. It's okay. God is on our side.

Why have you provoked me to anger with their carved image and their foreign gods? The harvest has passed. The summer has ended and we are not saved.

[23 : 07] What is God doing? But as the inevitable comes, it breaks Jeremiah's heart. For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded.

I mourn and dismay has taken hold of me. He says, is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is the health of my people not being restored? The problem isn't that healing is unavailable for the people of Judah and there's plentiful supplies in the ancient chemist's warehouse.

That was filled but Israel refuses to ask for help. So Jeremiah laments chapter 9 verse 1. I don't know whether you notice something strange there.

there. Chapter 8 and verse 18 it's really clear that it's Jeremiah that is bemoaning the state of God's people. He's preaching and yet by the end of his sermon it is God's words.

It seems that the words of the prophet and the words of the Lord have morphed. Jeremiah's words are Yahweh's words and vice versa. Jeremiah's pain is the Lord's pain.

[24 : 35] Jeremiah's longings are the Lord's longings. Both God and his prophet care for his people to come back. And so if I say this reverently we see God up close and personal in the ministry of Jeremiah.

The emotional temperature continues to rise and Yahweh and his prophet they expose the sin of the people and the inevitable response from God chapter 9 verse 6 he being oppression upon oppression deceit upon deceit they refuse to know he declares the Lord.

Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts behold I will refine them and test them. Verse 9 shall I not punish them? Verse 11 I'll make Jerusalem a heap of ruins a lair of jackals and I'll make the cities of Judah a destruction without an inhabitant.

And then chapter 9 verse 12 well you've got another calm and collected prose section and it sums up the situation who is the man so wise that he can understand this? To whom has the mouth of the Lord spoken that he may declare it?

Why is the land ruined? Well because verse 13 because they forsaken my law that I've set before them they've not obeyed by voice or walked in accord with it they've stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals as their fathers taught.

[25 : 41] Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts the God of Israel behold I'll feed this people with bitter food and give them poisonous water I'm going to scatter them among the nations and I'll set the sword after them until I've consumed them and at this point the mourning women come again verse 17 to 22 the sad ladies have sung and it looks like it's all over.

And at this point you can be forgiven of thinking I thought the second point of this passage was only God brings life doesn't sound it. I don't know what you feel listening to these sermons I can tell you what I feel preparing them it makes me want to yell okay I get it stop enough enough there's no new information here it's the same thing over and over and over again announce the spiritually deaf people until we get to chapter 9 verses 23 and 24 you know these beautiful verses I hope look at them chapter 9 verse 23 to 24 let not the wise man boast in his wisdom let not the mighty man boast in his might let not the rich man boast in his riches but let him who boasts boast in this that he understands and knows me that I am the Lord who practices steadfast covenant love justice and righteousness on the earth for in these things I delight to praise the Lord and at this point God strides like a colossus onto the centre stage and he dominates the rest of this long section Jeremiah urges his people choose God because no one and nothing compares to him let him who boasts boast in this and he understands and knows me and so you do know don't you I hope that there's a sense in which all our deficiencies and all our struggles in life can be traced back to this one question all our issues in life boil down to this one question do we know God because it's the knowledge of God that can stop us in our tracks it is God himself who can wean us off all inferior pleasures it's God himself who shows us the emptiness of every other oath it's the knowledge of God which draws us to faith and repentance it's the knowledge of God which softens our heart and puts steel in our backbone and that is why God himself towers over these chapters it's God who will judge every nation that's uncircumcised chapter 9 25 to 27 it's God who in chapter 10 mocks all superstition and their idols it's an amazing

I don't know whether he picked it up look at chapter 10 verse 1 their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field and they cannot speak they're going to be carried for they cannot walk don't be afraid of them they can't do evil neither it's in them to do good at which point Jeremiah warms to his theme he's a brilliant preacher there's none like you oh Lord you are great your name is great in might who would not fear you oh king of the nations for this is your due for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you and not to acknowledge you and not to acknowledge God is both stupid and foolish verse 10 but the Lord is the true God he's the living God and the everlasting king and his wrath the earth quakes and the nations cannot endure his indignation verse 12 it is he who made the earth by his power verse 13 when he edits his voice there's a tumult of waters in the heavens and he makes the mist rise he makes lightning it's not difficult but it is relentless and Jeremiah is driving home this really simple truth that God is God and you are not verse 14 it's really seeker sensitive language every man is stupid and without knowledge every goldsmith is put to shame by their idols verse 16 not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob for he is the one who formed all things the Lord of hosts is his name only God can give Israel hope and a future and yes chapter 10 verse 18 there is going to be judgment in the short term they're going to be slung out the land but it's not a permanent reaction it's a huge blow but it's the wound of a lover

Jeremiah cries out in verse 19 again woe is me because my hurt my wound is grievous but I say truly this is an affliction and I must bear it the invading forces approach 1022 Jeremiah affirms that it's in God alone they can find hope I know oh Lord for the way of man is not in himself that it's not in man who walks the directest steps correct me oh Lord but in justice not in your anger lest you bring me to nothing pour out your wrath but rescue me and as passages we read this we find that they're moving and they're compelling they're heart wrenching appeals for people like you and I to come home to God to come home to God in repentance and faith so there is something isn't there absolutely exhausting about Jeremiah because in chapter after chapter it is hammered home to people like you and I that religion kills but only God gives life and the not listening to God can only

end up in one place and so I hope that this book is growing on you like it's grown on me because in the fabric of this book we see God's overarching purpose the reason why it's in the Bible is to prepare us for the arrival of one who came to a temple and when he came to a temple he saw that it again had become do you remember a den of thieves and robbers and one who came to speak truth to those who have years to hear and one who came to confront spiritual hypocrisy in all its ugliness and one who said of Jerusalem

[31 : 21] O Jerusalem Jerusalem the city that kills the prophet and stones those who are sent to it how often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings but you were not willing behold your house is forsaken and I tell you you will not see me until you say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord you see Jeremiah's experience is played out for us in overwhelming detail so that we might hear the voice of the one who is to come and says all things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone the son chooses to reveal him to who says to you tonight come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me from gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for yourselves and my yoke is easy and my burden is light and one who comes and says to you

I have come that you may have life and you might have it to the full and the message of these chapters is actually relatively simple religion kills but God gives life and I wonder tonight as you sit there that your greatest need and my greatest need is to come back and to start to boast in him once more because let not the wise man boast in his wisdom or the mighty man in his might and let not the rich man boast in his riches but let him who boasts boast in this that he understands and knows me and that is the word that you need to hear and that is the word that I need to hear let's pray