

Jeremiah 7:1-16

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Preacher: Rev Donald Martin

- [0 : 00] As I was preparing to come here to be with you this weekend, comments by one of our politicians, Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Conservative MP about abortion and same-sex marriage, was being widely debated across the news media, and probably still is.
- Many were saying he was not fit to be an MP, and this was a guy that they thought might lead the Conservative Party at one time, and they're now saying there's no chance of that, even he is saying the same.
- But why should that be? Because he holds a biblical viewpoint on moral issues, secondly, which many people in our day and generation do not want to fear, because it interferes with the way that they want to live their lives.
- Jacob Rees-Mogg, in our day like Jeremiah and his day, whose story and part we consider tonight, is going against the flow.
- He's fighting against the way of the current of the world. It's worth reading David Robertson's blog, if you're on the internet, and many of you I'm sure are, on this very issue.
- [1 : 21] This is Jeremiah, in the Old Testament. He was given, and sent in a sense, a very hard task.
- A hard and difficult task by God. To reach out to a people, who just did not want to hear from the Lord. Couldn't have been easier for him. Jeremiah all his days seemed to be up against it.
- It appears that throughout his ministry, he was fighting against this flow. He was going against the current, right from the outside. But the Lord, but the Lord, promised to be with him.
- The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.
- Before he was born, this is what the Lord told him. Ah, sovereign Lord, he said. I do not know how to speak. I am only a child.
- [2 : 27] Does that mean he was a timid man? Possibly. Jeremiah was one of the Jewish prophets. He prophesied for about, well, from about 650 to 570.
- He lived about 650 to 570. He prophesied for about 40 of these years at least. It was the tumultuous time in the history of the nation of Israel and Judah.
- And he had been raised up as a prophet to the nation. Spending his days reproving them for their godlessness.
- In chapter 5 and verse 31, we'll read these words. The prophets prophesy lies. The priests rule by their own authority. And my people love it this way.
- But what will you do in the end? That's how it was. And the people of God then, as now, need to show discernment as to whom they listen.
- [3 : 36] It's a concern that so many people have been taken in by false prophets. Not only in that day, but in our day.

By charismatic preachers. People who are well able to speak and win over people. Maybe on religious TV programs.

And they follow them. And they spoke to their ministries. I remember one of them was asking his congregation of congregations to raise enough money to buy a new jet fund. Ridiculous.

So this prophet Jeremiah served in Jerusalem and Judah roughly about 600 years before the coming of the Messiah.

He was a contemporary of Ezekiel, of Habakkuk, and of Obadiah. Right over that time. And although some people in the land were bent on destruction.

[4 : 34] And the reforms brought in by young King Josiah in 621 was a real source of encouragement to Jeremiah. It was a change of light at that time.

Sadly, the reforms didn't go far enough. I'm afraid to hear no of this. But that's what didn't happen. The reforms didn't go far enough. In order for the Lord's judgment to turn away from the nation.

So Jeremiah's ministry spanned over about the reign of four kings. Often spoken about as a weeping prophet. He whipped over a nation.

And even though he stood against all the wrong that was happening in this day. He prayed for the people. But the Lord one day told him.

To pray no longer. Don't pray anymore for these people. And Jeremiah was stressing in his day the importance of our personal responsibility before God.

[5 : 44] You find that in chapter 31 in particular. People still need to do that in our day. Responsible as to how they live their lives before God.

Tactically, the people of Judah at that time in Jeremiah's day were idolatrous. They were adulterous. They rebelled against God. They rebelled against his covenant.

They didn't want to hear what God was saying. And what did that result in? Well, eventually, King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, took Judah into captivity in 586 BC.

The exile that was to last for 70 years. This was a chastisement from God. And Daniel discovered this for the last 70 years when he was held captive in Babylon.

So the message that God gave Jeremiah to give to the people was very clear. Disaster was coming. Kings from the north were coming judgment against Judah.

[6 : 52] And the Lord asked him. And the Lord asked him. Why have you forsaken me? We've heard these words before.

Why have you forsaken me? What fault did your fathers find in me that they strayed so far from me?

We could ask the same question in our own day and in our own generation. What fault did your fathers find in me that they strayed so far from me?

They coerced at other nations. They followed the gods. They wanted other nations to help them in battle. What should they have done?

They should have turned to the Lord and sought God's help. Chapter 3 and verse 1 says, But you have lived as a prostitute with many laws, quoting other nations.

[7 : 54] And he's pleading with them. Would you now return to me? Even although they had distanced themselves from the Lord, the Lord had let them go.

They were still his people. He wanted them back. He wanted them to have a relationship with him. That may well apply to someone in this congregation tonight.

You have wandered away from the Lord over a period of time. And the Lord has called you to him tonight. Would you return to me?

Because he wants to bless you. He wants to show you his love. He wants to have fellowship with you. You may have been for the last number of years playing in the world's playground.

Enjoying yourself for a season. But still, what you heard from your mother's knee is still there. It doesn't go away. And God has come to you again tonight and said, Will you now return to me?

[9 : 07] You've had enough of the world. And you've found no happiness. No lasting happiness. I want to give you eternal joy, says the Lord.

The Lord is asking you tonight to consider the awaits. Well, you know Israel's history. The basic history is that Saul was the first king of Israel, followed by David and followed by his son Saul.

David's son Saul. And trouble emerged through Saul. And the reign of Solomon's reign resulting in the nation dividing into two Israel, the north of 10 tribes, and Judah in the south of two.

Israel in the north had already been taken into exile in 712 BC. They were away. The Babylonians had come.

Or the Assyrians had come. And why was this film not taken at that time? Well, it seemed that the kings of the north wanted a buffer stone between themselves and the kings of the south, the kings of Egypt.

[10 : 18] It was to fall in 586, but not before many warnings of disaster had been given.

And in chapter 6, the kings of Israel declares the Lord. I am bringing a distant nation against you, an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand.

And in chapter 6, the warnings intensify. The Lord says, They didn't want to hear the Lord.

All along the way, they seem to have snubbed their noses at the mercy that God has wanted to show them, at God's rule. And, of course, right throughout this time, they were going through the motions of worship.

And there was a stench in God's nostrils. It had no pleasing aroma. 6 and 20 says, What do I care about incense from Sheba?

[11 : 54] Sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable. Your sacrifices do not please me. What a terrible situation to find themselves in.

Judas' unfaithful. Judas unfaithful. Judas unfaithfulness. Judas unfaithful. Ultimately brought the Babylonians as God's instrument of judgment.

But he was still holding out the olive branch. But, if you heed my warnings.

If you heed my warnings. Jeremiah 6, verse 2 says, Look, a man is coming from the land of the north. A great maze has been stirred up from the ends of the earth.

But God could have stopped that, had the people repented. Jeremiah 6, verse 2 says, Jeremiah 6, verse 3 says, I think he was quite timid.

[12 : 53] Not very forthright in himself. At the beginning he didn't want to speak. I'm so young. But it seems that God had given him a platform.

And he had become a powerful voice to the nation. Whether they listened or not, he was still a powerful voice. And his message. Ultimately.

That God wanted to show the people of Judah mercy. God didn't want to destroy them.

God didn't want to take them out of place. God wanted to show them mercy. But they refused to listen to him. And I think the seventh chapter, which we read from tonight, contains one of the most important speeches.

And in it, he's attacking those who appear to be religious. But are actually hypocrites. They go through the motions in the religious ceremonies.

[14 : 02] And as we take part in the communion services over this weekend. And as we come to the Lord's table on the Lord's day morning.

And we eat bread. And we drink wine. In memory of him. It's possible to just go through a ritual. I pray that's not the case for anyone who will sit at the Lord's table.

On the Lord's day morning. That each person will examine their hearts. And get right before the Lord. Before taking their place there at the table. This is what the Lord says.

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. Stand at the gate of the Lord's house. And there proclaim this message. Hear the word of the Lord.

All you people of Judah have come through these gates to worship the Lord. But where they come into worship. And here at the temple gates is a solitary figure of Jeremiah.

[15 : 11] He's proclaiming the word that's being given to him by the Lord. And the people are going to the place which was a symbol of God's presence at the temple.

That was where the Lord could be met in these days. And the crowd is passing through the gates to the temple. It's giving Jeremiah that opportunity to address the people.

As they come into the temple precincts to offer their sacrifices. The message was given after the reign of King Josiah.

Who had helped reform the nation. Maybe he had gone far enough as we said earlier on. But he had gotten back into the habit of worshipping Yahweh.

But the new king. King Jehoiachin. Couldn't have cared less about God and worshipping. Nevertheless, the people had to go through with the habit of celebration.

[16 : 19] Which included the huge festivals. Did he have to hear? And during these festivals.

Crowds. Multitudes. Came through the gates of Jerusalem. I'm going over to Jerusalem.

And I'm going over to Jerusalem. I'm going over to Jerusalem. With a group of 30 people. And we'll be there two weeks tomorrow. On the highest holy day of the Jewish year.

The day of atonement for nothing moves. they're still religious to this day many of them thank God that he's doing your work amongst the Jewish people and indeed the Arab people today and many are coming to Christ so the people here in Jeremiah's time gathered at the temple at the time of the feasts but in God's eyes the vast majority were just going through the motions and all of the motions certainly in the day of atonement the five offerings there was a guilt offering consisting of a bull or a ram for the sin of trespass there was a sin offering for the unintentional sin there was a fellowship offering so that they might be restored to an intimacy with God again there was a grain offering offered only after the blood offerings made you remember the story back in Genesis with Cain and Abel when they came with the offerings it says there

Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil in the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soils and offering to the Lord but Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock and the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering but in Cain and his offering he did not look with favour why was Abel's offering acceptable and not Cain's well I think Hebrews 22 explains that 9 and 22 explains that very well the law requires that nearly everything could cleanse with blood and without the shedding of blood without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness you see Cain had not offered a blood offering his grain offering the grain offering which he gave was insufficient for God without first having given the blood offering and then the final offering that they had on that great day or at home was a bird offering and this had to be completely burned that was a sweet aroma to God and this was to repeat it year after year after year and as I said before the Jews are still holding this day of atonement in our day a few years ago on another trip to that area when we were in

[19 : 51] Petra and as we were coming out of Petra there was little pickup trucks with sheep maybe 10, 15, 20 sheep in each of the trucks and pens all over the city of Petra and I asked the guy we had what's happening here and he said it's a festival of aid at the end of the Muslim Ramadan and he said there'll be a million sheep killed in Jordan tonight a million sheep offering sacrifice how sad how sad that is and still their sin is not atoned for through these sacrifices I've often been asked do people in the Old Testament receive forgiveness it may be a difficult question it may be tricky to answer that but I believe that those who sacrificed with a repentant heart in the Old

Testament have now received forgiveness as we have who have confessed their sins you see the sacrifice covered their sin but it didn't remove it someone wants to describe this as a post-dated check the death is covered through sacrifice but not removed so the question is when were the Old Testament sins removed atoned for it could only have been on the cross on the cross because the blood shed there is able to cover all sin the check has been cashed in the blood of Christ let me read to you from Romans 3 and 23 very funny words for all have sinned and fall short with the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ

Jesus but we often stop more or less there a couple of verses later in verse 25 it says God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood he did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished the sins committed beforehand in Old Testament times Old Testament saints were clearly saved in the way the New Testament saints were through the blood of Christ in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone to the glory of God alone as we see in scripture in this day although

Jeremiah probably did not realize all that was going on around about him with his mission and his ministry was preparing a people to meet with the Messiah challenging people before they enter the temple Psalm 15 asks Lord who may dwell in your sanctuary who may live in your holy hill he whose walk is blameless and who dares but is righteous who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander in his tongue and that's basically what Jeremiah was doing but Jeremiah's message wasn't about asking them to reflect his message was to convict them of their sinfulness this is what the Lord Almighty says verse 3 of chapter 7 the God of Israel says reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place you don't need to go into exile reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place do not trust in deceptive words and say this is the temple of the

Lord this is the temple of the Lord this is the temple of the Lord to whom are people listening today are people listening to the voice of God in our day and our generation or are they listening to the voice of the all powerful media as it seems to be God is reaching out to the people of Judah with a message of hope that they must be prepared to change their ways reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place you see their everyday living did not sit well with what they were doing in their religious practices they were going to the temple they were chanting they were making their sacrifices but their hearts were not right with God what has gone wrong with the nation just they turned their backs on God and Jeremiah saying to him do not trust in deceptive words and say this is the temple of the Lord this is the temple of the Lord this building here we trust in the building this is where the

[25 : 55] Lord dwells chapter 17 in chapter 17 the Jews were criticized for trusting in man rather than trusting in God this is what the Lord says cursed is the one who trusts in man who depends on his flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord but blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him who is your confidence in tonight is it man what man can do or is it God do you bless God and give you a tremendous life if I were to give you some of my testimony the Lord has given me a tremendous life different from what I was before and this phrase we find here is repeated throughout the book of Jeremiah this is what the Lord says over 80 times the book of Jeremiah it's the

Lord that speaks through the sermon but rather than trusting the words the Lord was given Jeremiah that day they turn to deceptive and destructive words and is that not what we still can do today and we're blinded I thought I would ask you to put up your hand if you are blinded by the ways of the world at some point in your life I'm sure most times will go up blinded to the reality of the mercy and the love and the grace of God because the world blinded you they sound during if that made them more holy, more acceptable.

But God himself in their heart just crowded out by all that's going on. And you remember what was happening in the temple in the time of Jesus when he threw out the money changers?

They hadn't changed much. They're in the right place. They're doing the right things. They're saying the right words.

It makes them feel good. But they're trusting the building and the temple instead of trusting the Lord himself. They had been deceived.

[28 : 55] They thought that God would protect them from harm if they had these chanting going on. If they said the right words and did the right things, brought their sacrifices. They thought that God would protect them from harm.

But what the Lord is wanting is a sacrifice of their hearts to him. And the sad reality is that people are in the same situation today who do not have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus.

And they're all over our nation. They're all over the world. And there are people who recite words thinking that they're getting into a place of the Lord's favour.

even saying the Lord's prayer makes them feel good. But in reality it's meaningless when it doesn't come from the heart.

Oh, how different it is when you're going to pray even the simplicity of the Lord's prayer from the heart. O Father in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come in my heart thy will be done in my heart we sing the psalms and hymns full of gospel truth but are we singing them with an understanding and a passion when we read these words do these words affect us?

[30 : 41] Oh, I'm sure there are times that you've been singing the words of scripture and the Lord has arrested you and you've been unable to sing because these words have just jumped me out of the page before you dealing with your heart.

But the sad thing is we could merely be chanting words sometimes and not thinking of it we're singing we're thinking through the tune. I hope that's not the case when we sing to God's praise but that we were amazed at his amazing grace but the wonders of his love and that is mercy.

But the Israelites and Jeremiah's day and since then and before then even thought they were right thought they were right and just by saying the right words.

They will be saved from the wrath of God if they said the right thing. It was like an insurance policy and that happens still today.

I remember when I first began ministry in the Gardens when there was another young minister that started in another congregation quite near and the regular day for communion that year had to be changed for some reason or other.

[32 : 12] It had to be postponed for a week and the day of communion was the following Sunday and the farmers had come this was in the farming district the farmers had come on the regular day of communion and one farmer said to him seeing there was no communion that day does that mean to say we have to come back next week?

It was just a form it's not a form. It's a reality of your memory the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As long as they have followed their rituals they thought in the days of Jeremiah they imagined that God would overlook their misdemeanours their sins.

We know that through religion gives honour back to the God who made us and created us and gave us life. But worshipping idols like the surrounding nations in the days in the days of Jeremiah for a good house for fertility and for many other things this was a part to the God of Israel.

And Jeremiah is really critical of the people of Israel that they won't listen because they're worshipping the temple in Jerusalem for the same reason that outside they worshipped idols they wanted some favour out of it for themselves their heart was not in it.

[34 : 01] The people of Judah wanted things to go well with them well who doesn't? Don't we all want things to go well with us? Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and die of demons or form militants?

Depart from me and help you you? Do you? You see they paid only little selves to God their hearts were hard their hearts were callous towards them but God of all people knew this and that's what I say to them he's offering he's offering them mercy if you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly if you do not oppress the alien the foulness and the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place and if you do not follow other gods to your harm and then I will let you live in this place in the land I gave to your forefathers forever and ever I remember being here in Malawi a number of years ago with Tear Fund and we met with some dreadful situations out there

HIV and age was just right at the time 25% of women of childbearing age at HIV we saw women dying of AIDS it was terrible and we couldn't but in our heart of hearts reach out to the poverty that we saw there and this verse came to mind in the epistle of James religion that God our Father accepts us pure and faultless as this to look after orphans and widows and their discess and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world God is showing his compassion to Judah and he requires that Judah are compassionate to others if their hearts were right with God they would also show compassion to others and so

God says to Jeremiah if they have a change of heart the offer is of security in him in the land of promise in the land that he gave their forefathers love to wonder if that's what God is looking for in the land of Israel today from the Jews who have settled back there they are there many of them in relief they are still as chosen people and we pray that they will come to the place where they will see that the Messiah has come and not be wailing at the wailing wall waiting for the Messiah but that they will see that the Messiah Jesus has already come and has died for their sins I will let you live in this place in the land I gave to your forefathers forever and ever but they were not open to his offer they were not open to

God's offer but look you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless you remember back in Deuteronomy Deuteronomy chapter 5 and Moses was reading out the commandments to his people what did they say there we will listen and obey we will listen and obey and maybe and maybe someone is here tonight who said that in an early point in their lives and God was dealing with our souls and he said that that time Lord I'm hearing you I'm listening to you and I want to obey you all the days of my life but maybe that's not how it's been and you given another renewed opportunity tonight to change the situation between yourself and your

[39 : 12] God even although the children of Israel at one time said we will listen and obey in subsequent generations that was largely forgotten and that's why God is now asking them in the days of Jeremiah will you steal and murder commit adultery and perjury burn into Baal and follow other gods you have not known why are you doing this he's reminding them of the commandments that he gave through Moses but they imagine that they can just come to the temple and go through emotions they're in a safe place their insurance policies up to date by attending but outside of the temple of the Lord the people are still involved in what is called detestable practices will you steal and murder and follow other gods you're not known and come and stand before me in this house which bears my name and say we are safe safe to do all the detestable things as this house which bears my name become again a robber to you but I've been watching you says the

Lord I know what you're doing I know what you're up to so these sisters in the temple they're going through the motions of the worship of the Lord but only so that they can go back out to the world with assemblance of our restored consciousness but how can they be at peace when they do not live according to the ways of the Lord God is furious with that hypocrisy although they are found in this house they have no real relationship with him one commentator said this it's like a husband finding out that his wife was unfaithful to him and had an affair in the marriage bed and Jesus picked up on the word from here in

Matthew 21 my house will be called the house of prayer but you are making it a den of robbers but what about us here tonight what about us do we use the semblance of religion to protect ourselves from the rock of God that we have a genuine relationship with God in us a relationship that will last and take us through and to eternity be in his presence forever you know we can study God's word to find answers without ever having a relationship with him I was trying to remember that word earlier on Andrew in Jerusalem there's what they call the yeshivas where the Jews study the word of God and they've got fine pains with a finger on it and they've got through every single word repeating every word and they're chanting it and they're no closer to God they're no closer when we read the word of

God day by day why do we do it is it not to grow in likeness of him that our hearts might be changed that we might become more like our saviour and the Lord said to the Jews in the days of Jeremiah I've been watching you declares the Lord and just briefly the final section that we read tonight from verse 12 going out to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my name and see what I do to it because of the wittiness of my people of Israel while you were doing all these things declares the Lord I spoke to you again and again but you did not listen I called you but you did not answer therefore what I did in Shiloh I would do to the house that bears my name the temple you trust in the place I gave to you and your father or the gospel would never leave these shores would it would it could we see the gospel disappearing from these islands there were those who felt safe because the temple the beautiful building was in Jerusalem the house of God but God has taken them back to Shiloh recall the lesson of what happened to Shiloh where I had my altar

Shiloh had been at one time a reminder of God's presence to the people of Israel it was now part of the northern territory of Israel it had gone wiped out by the Assyrians about a hundred years before there was a count in Jeremiah and what God is doing is drawing from Paris into what happened to the north and in Shiloh where the tabernacle used to be and Jerusalem where the beautiful temple still stood at that day and God is simply making the point to the people of Judah that if he didn't spare Shiloh in that day and him dwelling there well why should he spare Jerusalem why should he spare Jerusalem when there was no true worship of his name there just because the building the temple was there but they thought at that time that they were better than an northern tribe they thought they were closer to

[46 : 03] God they were the real Israel as for David had his fortress so how could God destroy them but God says I will thrust you for my presence just as they did all the brothers the people of Ephra you see the religion was of no merit they were going through the motions of worship but their hearts were far from the Lord they were worshipping as and when it was convenient for them but so often God was inconvenienced to what they were doing he was getting in the way 2 chronicles 15 we read these words the spirit of God came upon us and upon it he went out to meet

Asa and said to him listen to me Asa and all Judah and Ben shall the Lord is with you when you are with him the Lord is with you when you are with him if you seek him he will be found by you if you seek him he will be found by you but if you forsake him he will forsake you and Jesus repeated similar words the tragedy of the story is that within 40 years of Jeremiah proclamations Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came with his armies destroyed the temple that place which was held in high honour all in God now here in this place whatever our past has been whatever we have done however we have stood against the

Lord we have given another opportunity to make our peace with him is there anything we are trusting in holding on to more important than giving him our heart our praise our washing turn your eyes upon Jesus in the words of him look full in this wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Thank God that some of you have realised it's already. Be with this other still to realise it. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, the full and his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow as ancient in in the light of his glory and grace.