

5. Deceitful above all things

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As you all know, the heart is a muscular organ in both humans and other animals, which pumps blood through the blood vessels of the circulatory system. Blood provides the body with oxygen and nutrients, and also assists in the removal of metabolic wastes. The human's physical heart is not much different than other mammal ones.

But our spiritual heart is not located within the chambers of the heart muscle. Since animals do not have a spirit, they don't need salvation through Jesus Christ. I am sure that some theologians and animal lovers would like to argue that when animals, especially people's pets, die, they also go to heaven. I don't see any biblical references for their argument. But I do know that the apostle John mentions about horses that Jesus and the believers from heaven will ride as they will come down to earth in the Book of Revelation 19.

Scientology, Confucianism, Humanistic Theory, and Atheism believe that humans are basically good. And they have to, because if they believe that humans are not good, then, they need someone to rescue them from damnation. But the Bible clearly tells us that we are no good sinners. Even the best person in the world in the best day is still a sinner.

Human hearts have been wicked from the Garden of Eden. We were doomed from the beginning because of their sins. Don't think that we would be better if we were there. But can humans become so bad that even our merciful God says, "Enough is enough"? Yes, He does have a limit in His patience. The ancient Israelis at the time of the prophet Jeremiah were about to find out that they pushed the Lord one too many times. May we learn from their wickedness, so that we wouldn't displease Him.

A. DO NOT PRAY FOR THEM

Jeremiah 14:11-14 Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good. 12 "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence." 13 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'" 14 And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.

For the third time (chapter 7, 11, and here), Jeremiah was told not to pray for the Israelis because they were too far gone with their rebellion and idolatry. God's judgment came in several different ways – famine, pestilence, and the invasion by Babylon military.

At this point, the Israelis could bring all of their sacrifices to the Lord and fast and pray, but they could not change His mind. Then, someone would say, "You said that they were fasting and praying. Why wouldn't the Lord see their plea?" Oh, He saw it as well as their back-to-the-idolatry hearts if they got their prayers answered.

Listen, anyone can pray and fast during the time of difficulties. Have you not heard that there are no atheists in foxholes? When we must repent of our sins, we, first,

must confess and repent of our sins, and second, sincerely seek the face of our God. To cry because of the consequences that sin causes is to show remorse, not repentance.

How would you like to be told not to pray for a certain group of people by the Lord because He is going to punish them? I'd be shaking in my boots though I am not one of them.

The nation of Israel was destined for the destruction because of their disobedience and idolatry. They couldn't blame God for their fate.

I wouldn't be surprised if America will be at the stage of "no-turning-back" as the Supreme Court is about to make homosexual marriage legal in this country. I strongly believe that it will seal the doom of this once God-fearing nation.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's days declared peace in their kingdom. Why were they false prophets? There were two tests of a true prophet or prophetess in Israel:

1) Their predictions should be 100 percent accurate.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'-- 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

2) Their messages must agree with the Law of God.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'-- which you have not known--'and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Even if a professed prophet performed miracles, he or she was a counterfeit if God's revealed truth in the Word did not support the message. Miracles are no guarantee of a divine call.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders

B. GOD WOULD NOT RELENT

Jeremiah 15:1-4 Then the Lord said to me, "Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. 2 And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Such as are for death, to death; And such as are for the sword, to the sword; And such as are for the famine, to the famine; And such as are for the captivity, to the captivity." ' 3 "And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction," says the Lord: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. 4 I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.

Moses and Samuel were two great intercessors of Israel. Moses put up with the stiff-necked Israel people in the wilderness for forty years. There was a time when the Lord told Moses, "Mo, step aside. I am gonna fry these people extra crispy and start a nation with you." OK, that was JKV – Joonho Kim's paraphrased version. But Moses interceded on their behalf and the Lord had mercy on them again.

Samuel was the judge of Israel. But the people of Israel wanted to have a human king over them like the rest of the kingdoms instead of the Lord as their king. When Samuel cried out to the Lord for this, this is what He said to his servant:

1 Samuel 8:7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

King Manasseh did horrible things in Israel. Though he had a great godly father king Hezekiah, he brought back idolatry and made the kingdom far worse. The Lord wasn't punishing the nation for the sins Manasseh committed, but because the people of the nation chose to follow the sins of Manasseh. While he was in a Babylon jail, he repented. Would you believe that the Lord had mercy on him and forgave and brought him back to his homeland again? Yes, our God is that merciful and much more.

C. SUFFERING FOR THE LORD

Jeremiah 15:15 O Lord, You know; Remember me and visit me, And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke.

The famous British preacher John Henry Jowett said, "Preaching that costs nothing accomplishes nothing." It certainly applies to the Prophet Jeremiah. Pained by the sins of his people, declaring unpopular messages that majored on judgment, and perplexed by what the Lord was allowing him to suffer, Jeremiah paid a great price to be faithful to his divine calling. If ever an OT servant had to "take up his cross" in order to follow the Lord, it was Jeremiah.

D. REMAIN A SINGLE

Jeremiah 16:1-4 The word of the Lord also came to me, saying, 2 "You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place." 3 For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them and their fathers who begot them in this land: 4 "They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, but they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth."

All Jewish men were expected to be married by age twenty. In fact, the rabbis pronounced a curse on any who refused to marry and have children. I am sure that Jeremiah would like to marry a nice Jewish gal and have a family of his own. But the ministry he was called did not give him any of personal luxuries like that. And the prophecies that he had to declare made him think twice about having a family as well.

Apostle Paul said the same thing in his epistle:

1 Corinthians 7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;

He knew that it is not easy to concentrate one's attention on the Lord's work when he or she is married and have a family.

Does it mean that it is wrong to marry and have a family if a man is in God's ministry? Of course, not. If that is the case, the qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1 would say, "An elder then must be blameless, a single man without a wife or a girlfriend, or children..." Not!!!

Proverbs 18:22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.

E. HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER

Jeremiah 16:14-15 "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that it shall no more be said, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' 15 but, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.

Jeremiah 16:19-21 O Lord, my strength and my fortress, My refuge in the day of affliction, The Gentiles shall come to You From the ends of the earth and say, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, Worthlessness and unprofitable things." 20 Will a man make gods for himself, Which are not gods? 21

"Therefore behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know My hand and My might; And they shall know that My name is the Lord.

No matter what our kids do, they still are our kids, aren't they? If we, sinners, have that much love for our own children, how much more love our heavenly Father bestowed for the people of Israel whom He chose!?!?

The prophecies that Jeremiah gave to the Israelis couldn't be any more hopeless. Yet as if God could not help Himself, that word of despair is immediately followed by a wonderful and gracious promise.

The major principles of God's messages to the Israelis in the entire OT evolved from the single act of God through the Exodus – the Passover, the Tabernacle, the Sacrificial Systems, their obedience in the Promised Land, etc.

But the second exodus that would occur at the end of the 70 years in Babylon and the third exodus from world-wide dispersion that happened from 1945 to the current days in Israel are more significant. The regathering is the final one in the consummation of Israel's national history in the last days. The reference to "all the countries" shows that the prophet was predicting a restoration from a general dispersion after the exile. The return will be through God's gracious faithfulness to the covenant He made with the patriarchs regarding the land.

F. DESPERATELY WICKED

Jeremiah 17:5-10 Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the Lord. 6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited. 7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord. 8 For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit. 9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? 10 I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

As the leaders of the Southern Kingdom, Judah had a tendency to rely on their political allies by marriages and their monetary tributes instead of depending on the power of God.

They thought that Egypt would protect them, so they allied themselves with it. Much to their horror, king Nebuchadnezzar went on to Egypt and conquered it and destroyed Judah as well. Where is Israel's hope now? When the Babylonian army overran the kingdom of Judah, the land of milk and honey became a wasted land because of their unbelief in the Lord.

The Israelis really had it made in the shade. The Lord promised to them that He would protect them from any harm of the neighboring kingdoms as long as they obeyed Him. Oh, they even promised to the Lord that they would. That promise only lasted until the death of Joshua and his leaders. While their dead bodies were still warm, these people already were pulling out those hidden idols to worship. What was wrong with Jehovah God who protected them? Nothing. They'd rather have gods which were after their appetites and encourage their carnal desires.

Are the 21st century modern people any different? Nope. Without Jesus, our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. You may say, "Oh no, I wouldn't be that bad." But the Bible says, "Who can know?" Only our God can. That's why our Lord Jesus extended His grace and mercy upon us, because we are flat out wicked without Him.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) When we must repent of our sins, we, first, must confess and repent of our sins, and second, sincerely seek the face of our God.
- 2) Our priority of seeking for help must start with the Lord no matter what.