

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 3
WEEK OF JUNE 21



Growth Group Summer 2020
Speaking Truth at the Gate
Week 3 – June 21, 2020 - Jeremiah 7:1-8, 21-26

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

In Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah makes his way to one of the seven temple gates to deliver his words of prophecy, or as we would think about it today, his sermon or message. He stands and begins to speak. Some think this is the same sermon as in Jeremiah 26. Jeremiah 26:8-11 indicates that after he spoke, Jeremiah was attacked and threatened with death. This message was probably proclaimed around 609 BC when Jehoiakim was king.

The false prophets, of Jeremiah’s time, had continued to proclaim the message that as long as the temple was standing, then things would be fine in Judah. The problem was that they were not calling the people to practice obedience. God was not concerned with their sacrifices, but more with the condition of their hearts. The presence of a temple, in which certain sacrifices were offered, was no guarantee of God’s provision and protection. If the people did not obey the covenant, talked about in Deuteronomy, there would be problems.

In verse 3, Jeremiah tells the people to reform their ways so that God would allow them to continue to live in Judah. God had made it clear, in the Ten Commandments, that Israel was to honor him and honor one another. Verse 6 shows us that God expects His people to care for the disadvantaged and downtrodden. As James 2:17 reminds us, “faith without works is dead.” Our faith is meant to be expressed in the caring of those who are in need or crisis.

As we move into the second part of our text (verses 21-26) we see Jeremiah dealing with the issue of sacrifice. People were “technically” making their sacrifices, but there was a lack of commitment to being obedient to God’s word. They were in a sense “playing at church.” They were doing all the right things externally, but nothing was happening in their hearts.

In the days of Moses, the people had been told to obey God so it might go well with them. However, they had not listened and went backwards instead of forwards. Jeremiah warns his listeners that they are following in the same path. They are likewise going in the wrong direction.

Jeremiah’s “job” that day was to “speak truth” at the temple gate. As we read in Jeremiah 26, the people were not pleased with what he had to say. Obedience is hard and walking in God’s ways is not always easy. However, Jeremiah does make it clear that there are blessings that come when one walks in God’s ways.



Exploring the Text

Read Jeremiah 7:1-8, 21-26

⁶ This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ² “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 who come through these gates to worship the Lord. ³ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!” ⁵ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, ⁶ if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, ⁷ then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. ⁸ But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

²¹ “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! ²² For when I brought your ancestors out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, ²³ but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you. ²⁴ But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward. ²⁵ From the time your ancestors left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. ²⁶ But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their ancestors.’

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Have you ever had to deliver a difficult message to someone?
- 2) The people of Judah thought their religious works and obedience were a faithful response to God’s will. Part of Jeremiah’s prophecy is instructing the people of Judah to be obedient to God. What does it mean to you to “walk in obedience” ?
- 3) Can you think of “deceptive” words that the church has taught historically, or in recent history?
- 4) Who were the vulnerable people Jeremiah mentioned in verses 5-7? As you look at our society and community, who are the vulnerable among us today?
- 5) Why do the people of God have such a difficult time keeping on the right path (see also Jeremiah 6:16)?
- 6) Faith and works are important parts of being a Christ follower. Do you struggle with finding a balance between those two things?
- 7) Jeremiah 7:3 talks about reforming our ways. Is there a place in your life that you think needs a little “reforming”?
- 8) What step could you take this week to move forward, not backward, in your obedience to God?