

Hymn number 35: *"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Bow down before Him, His glory, proclaim."* Number 35.

***SInging*** (2.5 minutes)

We've come to worship God, our Father. We've come to acknowledge His power and His authority. We've come to give thanks for His care and His keeping. We've come to offer ourselves in the service of Christ. *"Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we praise and worship you for your goodness, love, and mercy. As* ***CREATOR*** *of the world, you give us life and breath. As* ***PRESERVER*** *of all life, you sustain us day by day. As* ***REDEEMER*** *of mankind, you show forth your love in Jesus. We praise you that the Lord is king and that His spirit has been poured into our hearts; and in Christ we join the heavenly host to praise, to worship, and adore. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth proclaim your greatness. Praise be to your name, oh Lord, most high. Amen."*

We turn to the word of God. Before we read the passage from our Jeremiah---which we're going to study this morning, I want to read from the second Book of Chronicles, chapter 34---the reform of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34 and part of chapter 35; and that'll give us the **BACKGROUND** for Jeremiah's prophecy in chapter 7 and part of chapter 8 of his prophecy.

2 Chronicles chapter 34. *"Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king, and he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem. His was a good reign, as he carefully followed the good example of his ancestor, King David. For when he was 16 years old---in the eighth year of his reign---he began to search for the God of his ancestor, David. And four years later, he began to clean up Judah and Jerusalem destroying the heathen altars and the shame-idols on the hills.*

*"He went out personally to watch as the altars of Baal were knocked down, the obelisks above the altars chopped down, and the shame-idols ground into dust and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. Then he burned the bones of the heathen priests upon their own altars, feeling that this action would clear the people of Judah and Jerusalem from the guilt of their sin of* ***IDOL WORSHIP****. Then he went to the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon---even to distant Naphtali ---and did the same thing there. He broke down the heathen altars, ground to powder the shame-idols, and chopped down the obelisks. (Those were, in fact, phallic symbols.) He did this* ***EVERYWHERE*** *throughout the whole land of Israel before returning to Jerusalem. And during the 18th year of his reign, after he had purged the land and cleaned up the situation of the Temple, he appointed Shaphan, son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah, governor of Jerusalem, and Josiah, son of Joahaz, the city treasurer, to repair the Temple.*

*"They set up a collection system for gifts for the Temple. Money was collected at the Temple gates by the Levites on guard duty there. Gifts were brought by the people coming from Manasseh, Ephraim, and other parts of the remnant of Israel, as well as from the people of Jerusalem. The money was taken to Hilkiah, the high priest for accounting, and then used by the Levites to pay the carpenters and stone masons and to purchase building materials, stone building blocks, timber, locks, and beams. He now rebuilt what earlier kings of Judah had torn down. The workmen were energetic under the leadership of Jahath and Obadiah. Levites of the sub clan of Merari, Zechariah, and Meshullam of the sub clan of Kohath were the building superintendents. The Levites, who were skilled musicians, played background music while the work progressed. Other Levites superintended the unskilled laborers who carried in the materials to the workmen. Still others assisted as accountants, supervisors, and carriers.*

*"One day when Hilkiah the high priest was at the Temple recording the money collected at the gates, he found an old scroll, which turned out to be the Law of God as given to Moses. 'Look!!' Hilkiah, exclaimed to Shaphan, the king's secretary. 'See what I found in the Temple. These are the laws of God.' Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and Shaphan took it to the king along with his report that there was good progress being made in the reconstruction of the Temple. 'The money chests have been open and counted and the money has been put into the hands of the overseers and workmen,' he said to the king. Then he mentioned the scrolls and how Hilkiah discovered it; so, he read it to the king.*

*"When the king heard what these laws required of God's people, he ripped his clothing in despair and summoned Hilkiah, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, Abdon, son of Micah, Shaphan, the treasurer and Asaiah, the king's personal aide. 'Go to the Temple and plead with the Lord for me', the king told them. 'Pray for all the remnant of Israel and Judah...for this scroll says that the* ***REASON*** *the Lord's great anger has been poured out upon us is that our ancestors have not obeyed these laws that are written here.'*

*"So, the men went to Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, son of Tokhath, son of Hasrah. Shallum was the king's tailor living in the second ward. When they told her of the king's trouble, she replied, 'The Lord God of Israel says, "Tell the man who sent you, 'Yes, the Lord will destroy this city and this people. All the* ***CURSES*** *(of Deuteronomy 28) written in the scroll will come true; for my people have* ***FORSAKEN*** *me and have worshiped heathen gods, and I am very angry with them for their deeds. Therefore, my unquenchable wrath is poured out upon this place.' But the Lord also says this to the king of Judah who sent you to ask me about this, tell him the Lord God of Israel says, 'Because you are sorry, have* ***HUMBLED*** *yourself before God when you heard my words against this city and its people, and have ripped your clothing in despair and wept before me, I have heard you,' says the Lord, 'and I will not send the promised evil upon the city and its people until after your death.'"'*

*"So, they brought back to the king, this word from the Lord. Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people (great and small) to accompany him to the Temple. And there the king* ***READ******THE SCROLL*** *to them---the covenant of God that was found in the Temple. As the king stood before them, he made a* ***PLEDGE*** *to the Lord to* ***FOLLOW*** *His commandments with all his heart and soul, and to DO what was written in the scroll; and he required everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin to subscribe to this pact with God---and all of them did. So, Josiah* ***REMOVED*** *all idols from the areas occupied by the Jews and required all of them to* ***WORSHIP*** *Jehovah their God. And throughout the remainder of his lifetime, they continued* ***SERVING*** *Jehovah, the God of their ancestors.*

*"Then Josiah announced that the Passover would be celebrated on the first day of April in Jerusalem. The Passover lambs were slain that evening. He also reestablished the priests and their duties and encouraged them to begin their work at the Temple again. He issued the order to the sanctified Levites, the religious teachers in Israel. 'Since the ark is now in Solomon's Temple and you don't need to carry it back and forth upon your shoulders, spend your time ministering to the Lord and to his people. Form yourselves into the traditional service corps of your ancestors, as first organized by King David of Israel and his son Solomon. Each corps will assist particular plans of the people who bring in their offerings to the Temple. Kill the Passover lambs and sanctify yourselves; and prepare to assist the people who come. Follow all the instructions of the Lord through Moses.'*

*"Then the king contributed 30,000 lambs and young goats for the people's Passover offerings, and 3000 young bulls. The king's officials made willing contributions to the priests and Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel---the overseers of the Temple---gave the priest 2,600 sheep and goats and 300 oxen as Passover offerings. The Levite leaders, Conaniah, Shemaiah, and Nethanel, and his brothers Hashabiah, Jeiel, and Jozabad gave 5,000 sheep and goats and 500 oxen to the Levites for their Passover offerings. And when everything was organized, and the priests were standing in their places, and the Levites were formed into service corps as the king had instructed, then the Levites killed the Passover lambs and presented the blood to the priests, who sprinkled it upon the altar as the Levites removed the skins.*

*"They piled up the carcasses for each tribe to present its own burnt sacrifices to the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses. They did the same with the oxen. And then as directed by the laws of Moses, they roasted the Passover lambs and boiled the holy offerings in pots, kettles, and pans, and hurried them out to the people to eat. And afterwards, the Levites prepared a meal for themselves and for the priests---for they'd been busy from morning till night offering the fat of burnt offerings. And the singers---the sons of Asaph---were in their places following directions issued centuries earlier by King David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, the king's prophet. The gatekeepers guarded the gates, and didn't need to leave their posts of duty, for their meals were brought to them by their Levite brothers.*

*The entire Passover ceremony was completed in that one day. All the burnt offerings were sacrificed upon the altar of the Lord, as Josiah had instructed. Everyone present in Jerusalem took part in this Passover observance; and this was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread for the next seven days. Never since the time of Samuel the prophet had there been such a Passover. Not one of the kings of Israel could vie with King Josiah in this respect involving so many of the priests, Levites, and people from Jerusalem and from all parts of Judah and from over in Israel. This all happened in the 18th year of the reign of Josiah."*

***Revival????***

Jeremiah was in Jerusalem at the time. He was exactly the same age as Josiah. Many people would've said, "We've turned the corner. It was a kind of great big festival of light; and the crowds had gathered in the capital, and they had responded to the call of the head of the people of God. But listen now to what **JEREMIAH** thought of it. Chapter 7 and the first three verses of chapter 8.

Then the Lord said to Jeremiah, *"Go over to the entrance of the Temple of the Lord and give this message to the people. 'Oh Judah, listen to the message from God. Listen to it all of you who worship here. The Lord of heaven's armies, the God of Israel says, "Even yet, if you will leave your evil ways, I will let you stay in your own land. But don't be fooled by those who lie to you and say that since the Temple of the Lord is here, God will never let Jerusalem be destroyed. You may remain under these conditions only if you stop your wicked thoughts and deeds, and are fair to others, and stop exploiting orphans, widows, and foreigners, and stop your murdering, and stop worshiping idols, as you do now to your hurt. Then and only then will I let you stay in this land that I gave to your fathers to keep forever. You think that because the Temple is here, you will never suffer? Don't fool yourselves. Do you really think that you can steal murder, commit adultery, lie and worship Baal and all of those new gods of yours, and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, 'We are saved!' only to go right back to all those evil things again. Is my Temple but a den of robbers in your eyes? For I* ***SEE*** *all the evil going on in there. Go to Shiloh---the city I first honored with my name---and see what I did to her because of all the wickedness of my people, Israel. And now," says the Lord, "I will do the same thing HERE because of all the evil you have done. Again and again, I spoke to you about it, rising up early and calling, but you REFUSE to hear or answer. Yes, I will destroy this Temple as I did in Shiloh---this Temple called by my name, which you trust for help, and this place I gave to you and to your fathers---and I will send you into exile just as I did your brothers, the people of Ephraim."'*

*"****PRAY NO MORE FOR THIS PEOPLE****, Jeremiah, neither weep for them nor pray, nor beg that I should help them, for I will not listen. Don't you see what they are doing throughout the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? No wonder my anger is great. Watch how the children gather wood and the fathers build fires, and the women knead dough and make cakes to offer to the queen of heaven and to their other idol gods. Am I the one that they are hurting?" asks the Lord. "Most of all they hurt themselves to their own shame." So, the Lord God says, "I will pour out my anger. Yes, my fury on this place. People, animals, trees, and plants will be consumed by the unquenchable fire of my anger.*

*"The Lord of heaven's armies---the God of Israel---says, 'Away with your offerings and sacrifices. It wasn't offerings and sacrifices I wanted from your fathers when I led them out of Egypt. That was not the point of my command; but what I told them was, "Obey me and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. Only do as I say, and all shall be well,"' but they wouldn't listen. They kept on doing whatever they wanted to, following their own stubborn, evil thoughts. They went* ***BACKWARD*** *instead of forward ever since the day your fathers left Egypt until now. I have kept on sending them my prophets day after day, but they* ***WOULDN'T LISTEN*** *to them or even try to hear. They're hard, and stubborn, and rebellious---worse even than their fathers were.*

*"Tell them everything that I will do to them, but don't expect them to listen. Cry out your warnings, but don't expect them to respond. Say to them, 'This is the nation that* ***REFUSES*** *to obey the Lord its God, and refuses to be taught. She continues to live a lie. Oh Jerusalem, shave your head in shame and weep alone upon the mountains, for the Lord has* ***REJECTED*** *and* ***FORSAKEN*** *this people of His wrath, for the people of Judah have sinned before my very eyes,' says the Lord. 'They've set up their* ***IDOLS*** *right in my own* ***TEMPLE****, polluting it. They've built the altar called Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and there they burn to death their little sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods---a deed so horrible, I've never even thought of it, let alone commanded it to be done. The time is coming,' says the Lord, 'when that valley's name will be changed from Topheth---or the Valley of Ben-Hinnom---to the Valley of Slaughter, for there will be so many slain to bury that there won't be room enough for all the graves, and they will dump the bodies in that valley. The bodies of my people shall be food for the birds and animals, and no one shall be left to scare them away. I will end the happy singing and laughter in the streets of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah, and the joyous voices of the bridegrooms and the brides for---the land shall lie in* ***DESOLATION****. Then,' says the Lord, 'the enemy shall break open the graves of the kings of Judah, and of the princes, and priests, and prophets, and people, and dig out their bones and spread them out on the ground before the sun and moon and stars. The gods of my people whom they have loved and worshiped... their bones shall not be gathered up again nor buried but shall be scattered like dung upon the ground. Those of this evil nation who are still alive shall long to die rather than live where I shall scatter them,' says the Lord of heaven's armies."*

***The Message: Religious Activity Without Obedience***

I think you've already got the ***MESSAGE*** for this morning. It's a message offering God a lot of **RELIGIOUS *ACTIVITY***, but not doing ***WHAT HE TELLS US***. And every one of us needs that message.

***Contrast Between the 'Revival' of Josiah and the Way of Jeremiah***

There were ***TWO* YOUNG MEN** in Judah in the year 620 BC who were desperately concerned about the condition of their nation. They were both, by this time, in their early twenties, possibly even early thirties. They were in their prime. They both wanted to do something about the state of the nation. The difference was that one of those young men had the power to **IMPOSE REFORM**, and this he proceeded to do. And by fear to law from his throne, he changed the face of the nation. The other young man had no power but the power of his own voice and the power of God's Spirit. And we are going to study this morning the ***CONTRAST*** between how ***JOSIAH*** tried to put the situation right, how much he achieved and how much he failed to do. We are going to see that history vindicates ***JEREMIAH*** as the one who understood most deeply the ***real*** ***need*** of the human heart.

***Josiah: Revival (?) Through Imposed ‘Reforms’***

**A CALL TO *REFORM*** is not enough. It is not enough. Well now, the facts are these---I read them for you in Two Chronicles. Josiah was a good boy. At the age of 1, he underwent a religious conversion, and from then on, he wanted to be like his ancestor, King David, and know God as well as King David knew him, and be a man---a king--- after God's own heart. So, he began already, to put things right. He noticed that the very building of the Temple of God was shabby and neglected. And so, the very first thing he thought should be done would be to bring the place of worship to the same condition as his own palace and the people's homes. And he started a renovation scheme, and collected the money, and started the work. And you notice that intriguing little thing---that they had discovered music while you work 2,600 years ago; and the people had a mind to do it and they loved to do that.

You see, that doesn't challenge your life. You can wield a paintbrush without a change of heart. You can get on with a singing ***WITHOUT*** a change of heart. You can do all those things ***WITHOUT*** repenting; and you can believe that you're doing them for God and that you're really doing something that pleases him---so they got on with it. And then as they cleaned out the cupboards and they turned out all the rubbish that had accumulated in that Temple, they found an **OLD SCROLL**. It is a tragic comment that it was covered with cobwebs and had not been used in years. They had had worship ***WITHOUT*** the Bible for too long. There are still people who don't want too much of the Bible in worship. "Let's just worship!" But the Word (God's Word) must be at the ***HEART*** of all true worship. And if people don't gather to hear the ***WORD***, they can't ***WORSHIP*** properly.

They'd been going through the ***SERVICES***, but they hadn't been going through the ***BIBLE***. Hilkiah discovered it, gave it to the king. He read it and he shook, and he realized that God wants far **MORE** than a spring clean of His sanctuary---that He demanded much **DEEPER** things than that. So, he tried (bless him) to put them into practice. After all, he was king. He could pass the laws; he could order the whole nation to put itself right. He could try and ***MAKE*** people good by 'act of parliament'. And so, he tried...very hard. And those of you who agitate for the **GOVERNMENT** to put things right in Britain, learn from Josiah...learn from Josiah!! And so, he tried; and he began to destroy the foul idols that had sprung up outside most villages and towns in his country.

And he really made them eat dirt. He ground those idols to powder. He scattered it on the bones. He dug up the graves of the priests and prophets who'd led the people astray. He did everything he could to bring the message home, but he was doing it as king. It was part of an established religion. It was by **ORDER OF *LAW***. This was to be the religion of his country from now on. And you **DON'T** change the situation **THAT** way. If you want to have this confirmed, read **ENGLISH HISTORY**: how time and time again the government, or the king, or the queen of this land has tried to ***IMPOSE* RELIGION**--- tried to ***MAKE*** people good by act of parliament, tried to change the face of England by ***LAW***. It **CAN’T** be that way...can't be done. However sincerely it may be attempted, religion cannot be imposed by the state.

I remember having an interview with the right honorable Giavonny Roberts when he was Minister of State for Education, in connection with a commission report that we were producing eight years ago. I remember asking him, "What is your considered opinion of the effects of having ***COMPULSORY*** religious education in school since 1944?" And his reply, "**Negligible**. Negligible." I agreed with him. He told me his own two teenage children---daughter and son---had both recently found the Lord and been converted. He said they did it ***IN SPITE*** of all the religion they had at school. They did it because they went to a group of people who were on fire for God.

You can't ***MAKE*** people good. You can't do it from the top. You can't ***IMPOSE*** religion in the heart. You can spring clean a house of worship; you can pass a law forbidding certain things and they won't be done outwardly. But God looks at the ***HEART*** of people and asks*, "Do they still* ***WANT*** *to do it or do it in secret"*, that's the important question. And so, Josiah did his best; and he had the biggest Passover they've ever had, and he piled up the carcasses of animals sacrificed by the thousands---as if God is the kind of God who likes a bigger pile of sacrifice more than a smaller pile. Do you see the thinking? But he ordered it all; and he set a good example, and he was a good king. And because he was good, and because he meant it sincerely, God said*, "I will not bring disaster while you live."*

But this dear king was killed in battle at the place called Megiddo. A 'battle of Armageddon' came, and the Egyptians killed Josiah. You notice what God says, *"Because* ***YOUR*** *motives are sincere in this because* ***YOU*** *are seeking me, I'll hold this off until you've gone. But I can see perfectly well that this is imposed on the people, it is not* ***THEIR*** *desire, it's* ***YOURS****, Josiah. And so, I will only keep* ***YOU*** *from this. I can't keep* ***THEM****."* Reform that's ***IMPOSED*** is not the answer. ***REFORMATION*** is no substitute for ***REPENTANCE***. And if you study church history, that lesson is written large upon the pages.

Now, what did **JEREMIAH** think about all this? It's one of the puzzles that scholars have debated. You see, the interesting thing is that though Josiah and Jeremiah were literally contemporaries--- they were born in the same year---and though they lived within a few miles of each other, and though they were both tremendously concerned about the nation, in all the story of Josiah's reform, Jeremiah isn't mentioned once. Did you notice that? And in all the story of Jeremiah and in all his prophecy---50 chapters of it or thereabouts---Josiah is not mentioned once. And here were these two---and the only two---working for the redemption of the nation at the same time, and they seemed to have had nothing to do with each other. And Jeremiah came in for a lot of criticism because he ***DIDN’T*** join in the popular ***PROTESTS***, and the popular ***MOVE***, and the popular ***REFORM*** which the king had had done. But Jeremiah held off; and he said in his prophecy, *"It's too* ***little****, too* ***late****. It's too little, too late."* (Which is the headline, the Surrey advertisers put above my letter this week: 'Too Little, Too Late'). Now, the amazing thing is that Josiah got the support...Josiah got the support...the people did it. They came from all over the place. The Archbishop of Canterbury is getting the support of the people. All the women's institutes of Surrey have pledged him their support this week. Is that going to mean that all the women's institutes are repenting, that they will now sing better hymns than did those feet in ancient time, which is sentimental rubbish? Does it mean we're going to get back to God---that we really are responding and realizing that it's God who has brought these troubles to us?

***Jeremiah: True Revival Through a ‘Change of Heart’***

Now this is the ***DIFFERENCE*** between Josiah and Jeremiah; and this is why Jeremiah was sent by God from Anathoth to go and live in Jerusalem and to go and preach at the ***GATE*** ***OF THE TEMPLE*** to catch the crowds coming in---for there had been a return to worship, and the crowds were following the king, and it had become popular again to go to church. And Jeremiah stood at the gate of the Temple, and he said, "God has told me to tell you something."

And the message that he gave comes through loud and clear. "Ritual is no substitute for righteousness. Offerings are no substitute for obedience. Sacrifices are no substitute for submission. And a popular religious ***REFORM*** is no substitute for repentance of the ***HEART***." That's the message he gave a... lonely, solitary, heroic figure standing at the gate of the Temple. Why did he say this? ***NOBODY*** listened to him. They said, "You're a doom and gloom man. Why don't you encourage people? After all, they're getting religious. You should be encouraging this movement." But Jeremiah said what he did for two reasons. Number ***ONE***, he took a deeper view of the situation. He took a ***HEART*** view---an inside view, not an outside. And the other thing that I want to emphasize this morning is that he took a ***LONGER VIEW***.... a longer view---not the response of a moment, a nine-day wonder. He took the longer view. And in the lesson I've just read, he saw that the present was related to the past and the distant past, and related to the future and the distant future---that you can't just have a momentary response.

Today is yesterday's tomorrow, and today is tomorrow's yesterday. And yesterday, today, and tomorrow are part of a ***process***, and you can't isolate today and just say, "We've got a response ***TODAY***." It's also what the people did ***YESTERDAY*** and what will happen to them ***TOMORROW***. He takes a longer view.; and when you take the longer view, you see a short-term response in its true perspective. And you ask, how lasting is it? How deep has it gone? Well, pray God that Dr. Coggin will say more than he has done. And the Bishop of Guildford told me on Wednesday that he hopes to, and intends to; for much more will need to be said if this is not to be a nine-day wonder... much, much more. And what ***NEEDS*** to be said will not be as welcomed by what is imagined to be the enormous number of people of goodwill in this country. What ***NEEDS*** to be said will ***HURT***.

***The Long-Term View: Looking at the Past, Present, and Future***

So, let me look at the ***THREE*** things that Jeremiah says here. He looks at the ***PRESENT***, then he looks at the ***PAST***. Then he looks at the ***FUTURE***. He says, *"If you're really going to understand the* ***present****, you'll have to look at the* ***past****. You'll have to look at the* ***future****."*

1. ***View From the ‘Present’***

***FIRST*** of all, in the **PRESENT** he draws their attention to the Temple of Jerusalem. Well, he hardly needed to do that. It had been magnificently renovated. And I want you to realize how grand it was...how superb it was. You could take 13 English cathedrals and put them inside the Temple of the Lord at Jerusalem; and yet Jerusalem was a little town that would only cover about a 10th of the area of Guildford. Can you imagine Guildford a 10th of its size and stuck up on Stag Hill a house of God 13 times as big as our cathedral---beautifully painted, renovated, and crowds going up to it. You'd have said, "This is revival. This is the biggest thing in Guildford." And Jeremiah stood at the gate, and he said, "*You say the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord. You say that---and God will* ***DESTROY*** *this Temple."* That was his message---just when they'd renovated it, too. That hurt. What is he saying? He's saying that the very thing that you are so proud about, ---the very thing that you trust for your security---this has become **SUPERSTITION**---it's become a fetish, a charm, a talisman. You're sort of wearing it. You're thinking that as long as you live below a cathedral, you're safe.

And indeed, this is one of the snags of living in a cathedral town. Somehow seeing that above everything else makes you feel a little secure. And a big golden angel stuck on top makes us feel that the angels have a special interest in Guildford and are looking after us. That's how they felt. Jeremiah said, *"You're putting your trust in something that you can't trust."* He said, *"I'll tell you, a building is what people make it. A building is what people are like inside it."* When we asked the architect to design this auditorium, we said, "Will you please design an auditorium that will take the character of the people in it, and what they are doing in it, so that if they are really worshiping, it'll feel like a place of worship. If they're doing something else in it, it will feel like something else." I think he achieved that in design. But there may be those who may come to trust in this building; and if so, God would destroy it...take it from us.

The building is what the ***PEOPLE*** are. It's not the thing in itself, it's what the people are inside it. And so, Jeremiah looked at this beautiful building and the people in it, and he said, *"It's a den of* ***ROBBERS****...a den of robbers."* Now that's a very careful phrase. He doesn't mean that rotten things were going on inside it. A den of robbers is where they go ***BETWEEN*** their crimes. They don't commit crimes in the den. It's where they hide between. It's where they go to be nice. It's where there is honor among thieves. It's where they behave themselves. But it's an escape, because they don't behave like that as soon as they get out of it. That's the key phrase of a den of robbers. Not that if you go into it, you'll be robbed, but that everybody behaves ***NICE*** here. There is honor among thieves here. They behave themselves here, but they use it simply as a retreat. And if you watch them when they go out, it's quite different Now that's what he's saying.

Your pride. He said, *"Don't you think that because it's the house of God that God won't destroy it. Look what he did to Shiloh,"* which was the first shrine of Israel in the holy land. And it was next door to Anathoth where Jeremiah lived as a boy; and he'd seen the ruins of Shiloh. It's one of the few places that tourists never visit today. There's nothing to see. There's just a few old stones---Shiloh. And I remember going on the bus north of Jerusalem and seeing a signpost said *'Shiloh'*. And I thought, "Well, I wonder what there is to see up there." But no guide takes you there now. And it was the holy place. *"Don't you think that God will not destroy this Temple?"*

And here comes the most extraordinary thing. As Jeremiah spoke about this beautiful, magnificent house of God thronged with worshipers in these terms, God said to him, *"Jeremiah, now* ***DON"T YOU START PRAYING FOR THEM****...don't you start praying for them."* It's incredible, isn't it? Because, as he talked, he must have begun to feel, *"Oh God, oh, can't I intercede for them? Can I pray for them?"* And God says*, "No, don't. Can't you see it's gone too far? Can't you see the situation's* ***HOPELESS****?"* Do you know there are few more terrible things in the Bible than when we're told ***NOT*** to pray for someone because the situation is too hopeless. This can happen. It's not just in the Old Testament. You read 1John chapter five and you'll find there some teaching on how to intercede for those who are sinning. And right in the middle it says, *"And there is a sin unto death. I don't tell you to pray for them."* When God says, *"****DON’T PRAY****,"* that really is the end. Well, now that's the ***PRESENT*** as Jeremiah saw it. You see, what he saw was that no matter how many carcasses were piled up in the Temple, no matter how big the congregation, he saw that in **PRIVATE** they were all still crazy, mixed-up people. I'm going to be talking tonight on yoga and Christianity. Just one example of how crazy and mixed up we are getting---that yoga is becoming a regular part of Christian life in this country. How did that happen? Well, come tonight and we'll talk about it...but it's happening. We're not aware of this happening, it's happening so slowly and so subtly.

1. ***View From the ‘Past’***

Let me now look at the ***PAST***. Jeremiah says, *"Look, let's go back into the past to find the* ***ORIGINS*** *of all this. Let's go back to the wilderness in Sinai. Do you think God said to the people of Israel in Sinai when he brought them out of Egypt, 'Now the most important thing for you to do is to pile up sacrifices for me. The most important thing I want from you is worship, good services, big congregations, and a nice building in which to worship. That's what I want.'"* And Jeremiah says, "You go back to the past and find out. Did he command offerings and sacrifices as the ***FIRST*** thing? ***NO***!" Now, the ***BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY*** (which is almost certainly what Josiah had discovered in the Temple) ... the Book of Deuteronomy puts the emphasis, not on sacrifice, but on ***OBEDIENCE***---puts the emphasis on there being one God, one altar and one people of God. That's where it puts the emphasis.

And so, Jeremiah says, "*You get back to your* ***ORIGINS****. Did God tell you to do all this? What did he tell you to do?"* Now, Jeremiah, in pointing them back to their origins and saying that offering and sacrifice is quite a ***SECONDARY*** matter compared with **OBEDIENCE** and **SUBMISSION**, was just saying what at least ***seven*** other prophets had already said. And almost at random, if I just keep opening my Bible (I have stuck papers in before I came, but I just almost picked these out at random), listen to these statements from other prophets. The prophet **SAMUEL**: *"Hath the Lord as much pleasure in your burnt offerings and sacrifices as in your obedience. Obedience is far better than sacrifice."* Or take **PSALM 50:** *"No, I don't need your sacrifices of flesh and blood. What I want from you is true thanks. I want your promises fulfilled. I want you to trust in me in your times of trouble so I can rescue you and you can give me glory."* **Here's PSALM 51**: *"You (God) aren't interested in offerings burned before you on the altar. It is a broken spirit you want, remorse and penitent."* I turn to **ISAIAH**, and I find this: *"God says, 'I am sick of your sacrifices. Don't bring me any more of them. I don't want your fat rams. I don't want to see the blood from your offerings. Who wants your sacrifices when you have no sorrow for your sins? The incense you bring me is a stench in my nostrils. Your holy celebrations of the new moon, and your Sabbath and your special days for fasting, even your most pious meetings are frauds. I want nothing more to do with them. I hate them all. I can't stand the sight of them. From now on when you pray with your hands stretched out to heaven, I won't look or listen. Even though you make many prayers, I won't hear; for your hands are those of murderers. Oh, wash yourself. Be clean. Let me no longer see you doing all these wicked things. Leave your evil ways. Learn to do good and to be fair, and to help the poor and the fatherless and the widows.'"*

Turn to **HOSEA**. Listen to Hosea: *"I don't want your sacrifices; I want your love. I don't want your offerings; I want you to know me."* And finally, **AMOS**: *"I hate your show and pretense---your hypocrisy of honoring me with your religious feasts and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I will not look at your offerings of peace. Away with your hymns of praise, they are mere noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music no matter how lovely it is. I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a torrent of doing good."*

Perhaps one more, **MICAH**: *"Shall we bow before the Lord with offerings of yearning calves? Oh, no. For if you offered him thousands of rams and 10 thousands of rivers of olive oil, would that please him, would he be satisfied? If you sacrificed your oldest child, would that make him glad? Then would he forgive your sins? Of course not! No, He has told you what He wants, and this is all it is: to be fair, and just, and merciful, and to walk humbly with your God."* See the difference between ***JOSIAH*** and ***JEREMIAH***? Josiah said, *"The* ***MORE******sacrifices*** *we can have, the* ***BIGGER*** *the* ***congregation****, the* ***NICER*** *the* ***building****, God is pleased."* And Jeremiah came along and said, ***"No, they live a LIE."***

1. **View From the ‘Future’**

So, we come to the ***FINAL POINT*** this morning. We look into the ***FUTURE*** now...the future. Now, you need a little geography to understand the next bit. The city of Jerusalem---the whole place has just been molded by God. And the city of Jerusalem was on a rising hill (like this) leading up to the great Temple at the top---a bit like the University of Surrey and those little hen coops on the railway side. If you look at those, and see the cathedral towering above, you get a very good impression of ancient Jerusalem---the little houses of the people rising on the hill, and the Temple above. But the analogy breaks down because there isn't in Guildford what there is in Jerusalem. At the bottom of the hill (in Jerusalem), there is a very deep valley---so deep that the sun can't touch the bottom of it; and it's deep in shade. It's the Valley of Topheth, which means *'fireplace'*, because they tipped all their rubbish down there, and they burnt it down there in the darkness. And even today you can see piles of rubbish burning in that valley, and the smoke rising out of it. And the worms eat the bits of food, and the fire is never put out. Down in that valley...even when the Temple had been renovated...down in that valley, some people (where they thought they couldn't be seen) had erected a high place, and they were burning babies to Moloch, a pagan god. You can't see the bottom of that valley from the Temple---or even the city of Zion. Way down there, out of sight, they were burning babies. Of course, human life was cheaper in those days. Most babies didn't survive the first year of their life anyway...and so, what was another baby? There were more where that came from. That was the kind of attitude. So, they burned sons and daughters to Moloch. And God looked down and said, *"I'm going to make that valley a valley of bloodshed...a valley of bloodshed. There'll come a day when even the bones of your princes, and your priests, and your prophets will be dug up and thrown in the valley: and animals will come and eat human remains."*

There is a desecration of the human body. It is a right instinct that we reverence a corpse. I know it's no longer the person I know---it's just the outside of them---but it's been a person...it's been a person; it's been part of a person. And it is right that it should be reverenced. And a body is not just a body. It's not just a lump of chemicals. It should be reverently buried and treated reverently. When you want to desecrate---when you want to say they're not human---well then, you desecrate the body even after a person is dead. And God says, *"****YOUR BONES*** *will lie bleached under the sun, and the moon, and the stars that you've worshiped. That Valley of Hinnom will become a terrible place."*

Now, I want to finish by saying this. I know this is all a bit grim---it's part of the word of God. And I know that there are some people who have the feeling when one preaches like this, "Well, this is all Old Testament stuff, can't we have a bit of New Testament joy and comfort?" May I finish by saying that ***JESUS* himself was *NEARER* to *JEREMIAH* in outlook than to any other prophet.** Everything I've said this morning comes out in the teaching of Jesus. You can't set the Old Testament against the New like that---as if they have different gods. You can't do that. People have tried, but you can't do it.

***A Link With the New Testament***

Let's just take those ***THREE* THINGS**. **1) The Temple of the Lord**. What did Jesus do to that Temple? And it was being ***REBUILT*** in Jesus' day and ***RENOVATED*** in Jesus' day. And crowds were coming to it; and it was going to be even MORE magnificent: its size, its stones weighing up to a hundred tons were being put in place under Herod the Great's orders. And this Temple was rising again, more magnificent than ever. And Jesus came into it with a whip, and he said, ***"You've made my house a DEN OF ROBBERS."*** And he's using the exact words. What's he meaning? He's saying, *“You're using it as a place to escape to…religion as a cloak. This is the place where you behave ‘****nicely’****; but I can see what's going on in your* ***HEARTS****. You're more interested in* ***GETTING*** *money from the worshipers than in* ***OFFERING*** *that money to God. I can see it.”*

And ***2) that whole EMPHASIS.*** ***'TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE'***. Didn't Jesus constantly teach it? Didn't he say, *"You make null and void the word of God through the traditions of men?"* Didn't he also say, *"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is from me."* Didn't he make the same ***EMPHASIS***? In the shortest parable ever, did he not make this point? He said, *"There was a man who had two sons, and he told them, 'Go and work in my vineyard.' And one said, 'No,' but later he changed his mind and went; and the other said, 'Yes,' and changed his mind, and didn't go. Which of the two did his father's will?"* Isn't he saying there that ***OBEDIENCE*** is what the Lord is after---not offering, but obedience? After all, he was to finish the sacrificial system himself totally by **OFFERING *HIMSELF*** as the one perfect, full, sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No animals have ever been needed ever since. But what he did come to get was ***OBEDIENCE***.

And ***3) when it comes to the VALLEY OF GEHENNA*** (or the Valley of Hinnom, the Valley of Topheth), whenever Jesus talked about hell...and it was ***JESUS*** who gave us the doctrine of ***HELL***, Jeremiah didn't. None of the Old Testament prophets did. None of the apostles did. The ***ONLY*** person who really speaks of hell in the whole of the Bible is Jesus. And he said, *"If you want to know what* ***HELL*** *is like, it's the* ***VALLEY OF GEHENNA****. It's the valley of Hinnom, where the fire is not quenched, and the worm dies not."* It was the valley of which Jeremiah spoke so-near to the city of ***GOD***, yet so far. And when Jesus died, he died on a hill above the Temple, looking down on the Temple. The Hill of Calvary is here. Mount Moriah is here with the Temple. Zion is here. The valley of Hinnom is here.

And at the same day---the same 24 hours when Jesus died as a ***SACRIFICE*** to end all animal sacrifice, as the one true ***OFFERING*** which ends all offerings---as he died up there, another man---one of his own disciples---died down here in the Valley of Hinnom. And he was a man from Judah, and his name was **JUDAS**. And he tried to hang himself on one of the overhanging trees; and the rope broke, and he fell to the ground, and his bowels gushed out, and he lay there; and they called it 'the Field of Blood'. He'd been one of his own disciples who'd been involved for three years in all the ***RELIGIOUS*** side. And that's where he finished; and that's where the Valley of Hinnom is last mentioned in the Bible. And what Jeremiah talked about 600 years previously, finishes as *'the Field of Blood'*. And Jeremiah said*, "The Valley of Hinnom will be renamed* ***'the Field of Bloodshed'****"*; and it was *'the Valley of Bloodshed'*.

And I just tell you in the name of the Lord very simply that everyone who listens to me this morning will finish up with ***JESUS*** or with ***JUDAS***. There is no in-between. You finish up with Jesus or with Judah. If you try and ***REFORM*** your life, you'll finish up with Judas, for that's where Judas finished, in the Valley of Hinnom; but if we really ***REPENT*** and realize that God isn't interested in services of worship unless they are the expression of a life of ***OBEDIENCE***, then we finish up with Jesus and with Jeremiah.

Let us pray. *"Father, we're always more ready to put* ***SOCIETY*** *right than to put* ***OURSELVES*** *right. We're always more ready to respond to a call to do the things that we think you will like, than to do the things you've told us you like. Oh God, just have mercy on us: and may this nation respond to a call to* ***REPENTANCE****, and not just to* ***REFORM****. For your namesake. Amen."*