

Deceitfulness of the human heart

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me now for a few moments to Jeremiah chapter 17, that is the chapter that we read. And I would like to share with you for a few moments thoughts on verses 9 and 10, bearing in mind that today is a day of humiliation and prayer, where it says, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart. I try the reins even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.

Now Jeremiah here, Jeremiah the prophet, was speaking to the people of Judah. And he was telling them that their sin was indelibly written.

In other words, it was written with a pen of iron and with a point of a diamond. It was indelibly imprinted by iron and with a point of a diamond.

He says that it is graven on their hearts. That is sin. That it was indelibly graven on their hearts and graven on their altars.

[1 : 14] Not only were they sinful in their minds and in their thoughts, but in their very religion, they were committing sin. Because God says through Jeremiah that their sin was graven even on the horns of their altars.

Yet we find in the chapter that God sets alternatives before them. Verses 5 and 8 tells us that if only the people would listen, judgment would be averted.

And we find this throughout the whole Bible, that God gives warnings. And he tells people what's going to happen. He lays it down absolutely clearly. But no matter how sinful they are, he always gives them a way out.

He tells them that there is an alternative to being destroyed. There is an alternative to facing the wrath of God. But he says if only the people would listen, judgment would be averted.

In this chapter there is picked especially the disregard for the Sabbath day. Disregard for the day of rest. But we know that that is only symptomatic of the nation's general disobedience.

[2 : 27] It is picked in this chapter as just an example of what the nation was doing. How it was just a sign of their general disobedience.

The Sabbath was God's institution. It was set up by God himself. It was set up at the time of creation. So that it was an ordinance that was laid upon man from the very, very beginning.

And that this disregard for the day of rest was a sign that the nation was really disobeying God in everything. And it is interesting that if we study it, how he took this disobedience regarding the Sabbath day as being symptomatic of the general disobedience of the nation, how we ourselves see today how the Sabbath is desecrated.

And how men, women and children don't even think that they are breaking the Sabbath when they steal hours from it, either at the beginning or at the end or throughout the day.

There are many, many churches who preach that if you go to church in the morning, then you're free to do what you like for the rest of the day. Well, that's only what the church says. Our review of the Bible says that God wants the 24 hours of the day.

[3 : 45] He's very lenient. He made seven days. He gave six to us. He wants one for himself. But he wants it from midnight to midnight. He wants the 24 hours. And we cannot find any justification whatsoever, no matter how much we would like to make people peaceful and say, oh, yes, it doesn't matter.

We cannot do it because the Bible says that he wants the Sabbath day for himself. And we find it interesting that our nation today, that it is hitting at the Sabbath.

And that it is just a general symptom of the malady that exists, where there is a general disobedience of the Word of God.

And where the Word of God is changed. There's lip service paid to it. And it's changed to being a 20th century doctrine. As if we have to update it and make it, as it were, to fit what happens today. Well, as regards obedience, John Newton again, I'm quoting a lot of him, but it just happens that I'm reading about him. He said, what thou wilt, when thou wilt, how thou wilt.

[4 : 55] That he would rather speak those words from his heart, in his mother tongue, than be master of all the languages in Europe.

What thou wilt, when thou wilt, how thou wilt. We find that this chapter here tells us that whatever the sin, the root cause is the condition of the heart.

That God says, yes, this breaking of the desecration of the Sabbath day is symptomatic of a general disobedience, but the root cause is that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

Now, we know that the heart wasn't always so. We know that Adam had a pure, clear, transparent heart. When he walked with God in the Garden of Eden, his heart was fixed on divine things.

And when God looked at Adam, he saw a man that was pure, a man that he had made himself, a man in his own image, a man who was pure and clean.

[6 : 08] There was no wickedness in Adam. There was no pride. There was no lust in his heart. And God could walk with him. Because he was the exact image of God, you can say.

He was speaking with reverence, just as pure as God, because God looked at him and said that he was very good. And when God makes something, it is very good.

But then at the fall, Adam's heart was changed. Adam's heart became a different heart altogether. Just the same way as we read about Nebuchadnezzar's heart, when he changed to being the heart of a beast, we know that Adam's heart suddenly became deceitful, became full of folly, vexation, and vanity.

A natural man's heart has been the same ever since. And God tells us there that the heart is deceitful.

Above all things. Deceitful above all things. There are many, many things that are deceitful. The sailors who go to sea and fishermen who go to sea, they will tell you that the sea is very deceitful.

[7 : 24] That they can look round on the sea and it is as calm, just like glass. And they set sail. And within an hour or within a couple of hours, the sea is a raging torrent.

It's as if it had attracted them in. As if it had called them to come in, that everything was calm, that everything was fine, there'd be a good night's fishing or a good night's sailing. And as soon as they got far enough away from the shore, the sea, being deceitful, was roused and became a raging monster trying to suck them down into the depths.

We know that fire is a very good servant, but a very, very bad master. We know that fire is very deceitful. I know a little boy in Skye who set fire to a moorland and there were thousands of pounds worth of damage done to forest these trees.

And when he was asked about it, he said, I didn't light the big fire. I just lit a little fire. Just a small fire by the roadside. But that was it. It was the same fire. So that is the deceit of the fire.

That it begins very, very small way, but yet devours everything that is in front of it. And yet we read that the heart is deceitful above all things.

[8 : 39] It is deceitful above the sea and it is deceitful above the fire. Some animals are very deceitful like serpents. You can't see them sometimes. Some of them look just like a bootlace.

And yet they're deadly and they stay absolutely still and quiet until the prey comes within reach. And then it's too late for them to get away. So you would say that they were deceitful.

But they're not as deceitful as the heart. Because God sees that the heart is deceitful above all things. So therefore the heart must be deceitful to everything. The heart must be deceitful to itself.

And we see that. That the heart is deceitful to itself. And the natural man is not true to himself. Have you seen the alcoholic? Ask him.

He doesn't even know that he's an alcoholic. He kids himself on that he's not an alcoholic. He kids everybody else on as well. But he does kid himself on. For many, many years.

[9 : 37] That he is in control of the situation. And that he knows exactly what's going on. And that he can stop at any time. What is that? But a heart that is deceitful above all things.

And how about it being deceitful to other people? Every single one of us in here is a hypocrite. Because natural man is a hypocrite.

We are unable to throw off our cloak. That is our outward cloak. The cloak that we present to the people. To our friends and to our neighbours and to the minister and to the elders and to everybody else.

We have a smooth face for the outside world. Are we honest in all things? If you say that you're not a hypocrite.

Are we honest in all things? If you are honest in all things. You are the first natural man ever to be so. Because the natural man has things within his heart that he cannot reveal even to himself.

[10:37] There are things within his heart that he keeps hidden from his nearest and dearest. Because he is ashamed of the very thoughts that he has. He speaks with a smile to his face to his friends.

And yet if he was going to lay openly before men the things that he really thinks about them. There would be many so red face. And then God says that the heart is desperately wicked.

If you've got somebody you know in hospital and you phone up. And they say he's comfortable. Or he had a restless night. Or he's not so well. Or different things like that.

Then you are reassured. And you know that things are being done. And that the situation is under control. But if you phone up and somebody says he is desperately ill. Then there is reason to worry. Because you know that when somebody is desperately sick. That he is normally beyond human cure. That the doctors have done everything they can.

[11:40] And they are just waiting to see what's going to happen. It's beyond them as it were. It's the same as the woman with the issue of blood. Who went to many many doctors. And was no better.

Rather worse. So is the heart. The heart is not just wicked. It is not just bad. It is not just occasionally bad.

It is desperately wicked. And these are the words of God himself in the lips of Jeremiah.

Desperately wicked. Beyond human cure. It is beyond what the minister can do.

It is beyond what anybody here can do. Oh yes we can try the human cure. We can say yes stop drinking. Stop committing adultery. Don't murder. Stop swearing. Stop blaspheming.

All of those things we can say. But these are only human cures. That will not in any way. Alter the desperately wicked heart. No my friends.

[12:38] The desperately wicked heart needs the master physician. Who gives you a new heart. He doesn't just cure the old one. And he gives you a completely new heart. The master physician.

The Lord Jesus Christ. And then God goes on talking about the heart. And he says. Who can know it? Who can know it? Do you think you know your own heart?

No one can know. The depravity. Of the human heart. In man's heart. There is the seed of every sin. And the fact.

That we haven't fallen foul of these sins. That we haven't been tempted by some of them. And that we haven't given in to temptation. Is the grace of God holding us back. And not letting the seed grow.

And take charge of us. But within every single heart. No matter how prim and proper we sit in church. Every heart contains. The seed.

[13:37] Of every sin. What if the youngsters here were shown. The sins. That they will commit.

If they don't turn to Christ at an early age. If they are not protected by his loving arms. And they were shown just now. The sins that they will commit.

I'm sure they wouldn't believe you. And yet 2nd Kings. Chapter 8. Tells us. About a story about Elisha. When.

The king Ben-Hadad. King of Syria. Was very ill. And he sent his servant Haziel. To him. And asked. If he would recover.

And when Elisha told him. Yes that he would recover. But he gave him. A message. Haziel saw that Elisha was weeping. And Haziel asked Elisha.

[14:34] Why are you weeping? And Elisha said. As he looked. Directly at Haziel. Because I know the evil. That thou will do. Unto the children of Israel.

And this was a respectable member. Of the court of Ben-Hadad. The king of Syria. And Elisha was crying. And he says. Because I know the evil. That thou will do.

Unto the children of Israel. Their strongholds. Wilt thou set on fire. And their young men. Wilt thou slay with a sword. And will dash their children. And rip up their women.

With child. And Haziël sprang back. And he said. What is your servant? A dog. That you should accuse him. Of doing that. He was honestly shocked. That Elisha would accuse. Him of doing that. And yet. When we read on. He did. That very thing. Awakened sinners. People who are newly converted.

[15:32] People who are. Under a struggle. When they see their own sin. They tell us. Of the tremendous difficulties. They have. When they see. Their own sin.

But my friends. They only see. A very. Very. Very. Very. Very. Small. Fraction. Of. Their real state. God.

In his mercy. Only reveals. Just a small bit. Of the fathomless. And the bottomless pit. That is our hearts. And then God goes on.

As if to answer. When he says. Who can know it. That we do not understand it. We can only read. And see. That we don't understand it. Because the Lord. In his mercy. Doesn't let us see it.

Who can know it. But he answers. I. The Lord. Search the heart. And try the reins. Notice. First of all. The tense. That is used there. It is an ongoing work.

[16:33] It's not. I did look at your hearts. Or I will examine your hearts. I'll do it now and again. No. It's an ongoing work. I. The Lord. Search the heart.

I do search it. I search it yesterday. Search it today. I'll search it tomorrow. I search it from the moment. You enter this world. Till the moment. You leave this world. I am searching the heart. And I try the reins. Which is a biblical way of doing. Dealing with all the emotions. And all the sense. That we have. Every moment. From childhood.

To old age. Yes. And we can hide our thoughts. We can hide our inmost secrets. From our friends. And from our neighbors. From our loved ones. From the minister. From the church.

But we cannot hide it from God. Because he says. I the Lord. Search the heart. And try the reins. We may think. That we do things. That are unknown to him.

[17:29] That we do things. In the darkness. Maybe. That nobody knows about. But the psalmist says. To thee. The darkness. And the light. Are both alike.

All way. But there's a purpose. For this searching. The Lord. Searches. The hearts. And tries. The reins. To give every man.

According to his ways. And according to the fruit. Of his doings. There's a purpose. A reason. For doing all this. And the reason is. That he's the judge.

He's got to know all the evidence. He's examining all the evidence. Because you have to appear. In front of him. And he's got to know everything. About because he's a just judge. He's not just going to.

When you appear in front of him. Say who's this. Can you give me some facts. About this man. He has been studying. Your heart. From the moment. That you were born. To the moment. That you left this world.

[18:24] He is the judge. He does the weighing. In the balance. So he must have. All the evidence. And the evidence is. Not only the sins of commission. The things that you did.

And the sins of omission. The things that you didn't do. But he examines the heart. He knows the motive. He knows why you did it. So that the very maybe. The arms giving.

That you did. When you gave something. For a show of kindness. As it were. The very thing. That you think before men. Is good. Will rise up against you. At the day of judgment.

Why? Because the thing was bad. No. Because your motive was wrong. You did it for selfish reasons. You didn't do it. For the glory of God. Because any single thing.

That you do. That is not to the glory of God. Will speak against you. It may be good. In the eyes of man. But it must. The motive must be. The love for Christ.

[19:18] It must be. That it's for the glory of God. Man's chief end. Is to glorify God. To glorify God. If you do anything. That doesn't glorify God. If your thoughts aren't towards him.

Then it's of no use. These things. Are good for nothing. If they are not. For the glory of God. Because that is man's chief end.

My friend. If you haven't got Christ. Are you confident. To appear before him. Knowing that he has searched your heart.

From the moment that you were born. To the moment that you left the world. Are you confident. To stand on your own merits. And to stand boldly before him. There is no camouflage.

There is no hiding. What you did. Or what you thought. It is all there before him. Because he has searched your heart. He knows exactly. Every single thing.

[20 : 14] Oh my friend. You must see. That you must flee to him now. That you must make a friend. Of the judge now. While it is still time. Because if you are going to stand.

On your own merits. Before Christ. Then there is only one place for you. Depart from me. For I know you not. But if you come. Knowing him.

If you come. Having made friends with him. If you come. Having answered his call. In this world. Then he will know you. And when he looks at you. He will say.

Come ye blessed of my father. To the place. That I have reserved for you. But the wonder. And the marvel of grace. What we mean.

About saying. About the loveliness of Christ. We often use that term. And what we mean by it. Is the grace. The free grace.

[21 : 11] That he has poured down upon us. When he searched our hearts. When he tried our reins. When we saw what we were. He died. And yet.

He died for us. He knew us. He is under no illusion about us. Yet he wanted us. He loved us. While we were still enemies of his. That is what we mean by the loveliness of Christ. It is not the physical loveliness. It is not the loveliness that we talk about the world. It is the sacrifice.

That he made. While he knew us intimately. He knew us as enemies. He knew our hearts. That were desperately wicked.

And being desperately wicked. They were more than repulsive. To a pure God. And yet he said. Yes. I will go. I will die on the cross at Calvary.

[22 : 08] In order that these poor sinners. Who know not what to do. And that is the way he referred to us. Will have access to heaven. It is the wonder.

And the marvel of grace. When he saw our heart. And he still died for us. And that he still waits. And that he still wants us. Even although he is examining our hearts.

Each day. Now notice today. That nations. Whole nations. Are rejecting. This saviour.

All nations. Rejecting. And not only rejecting. But tearing down. Everything that belongs to him. Every law.

Every instruction. Every guidance. Every single thing. That Christ. Has done. Is under attack. By not just people.

[23 : 06] By nations. And it is very strange. To Christians. That men and women in authority. Expecting obedience.

To their own commands. But living. In habitual defiance. Of the commands of God. Members of Parliament.

Judges. Kings. And queens. Men in authority. Write down. To the local council. And when they make an order. They expect people to abate. They have the full backing of the law.

Behind them. And yet the commands of God. They are in complete defiance. Defiance of them. They don't matter. They are the bosses.

So my friends. Can we not see. How ludicrous. This situation is. When the commands of God. Are under attack.

[24 : 04] And not only under attack. But are flaunted. In the way. That they are breached. And cast aside. And trampled underfoot.

As if they didn't matter. We are constantly amazed. As we read the Bible. And as we understand. More and more. About the way that man.

Is so depraved. In his disobedience. We are more and more amazed. At God's long suffering. Patience.

And thoughtfulness. Towards sinful man. Because despite all that we have. In all the depravity. In all the things that are told to us. About how evil we are. There is a message of hope. Given to us. Through the Lord Jesus.

[25 : 04] We are constantly told. That if we do what is right. Then everything will be forgotten. And we will be able. To come to him.

And be taken in. To his own. House. In spite of being enemies. In spite of being black. In spite of being. Utterly depraved.

He still looks for us. And there is still a way. A way for us. To come to him. If we read the last chapter of Jonah. We can finish off on that. And read.

Jonah chapter 3. And the word of the Lord. Came unto Jonah. The second time. Saying. Arise. Go unto Nineveh. That great city. And preach unto it.

The preaching. That I. That I told thee. So Jonah arose. And went unto Nineveh. According to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh. Was an exceeding great city.

[26 : 04] Of three days journey. That was. It took three days. To go. Either through it. Directly. Or else round it. And Jonah. Began to enter into the city. A day's journey. And he cried.

And said. Yet forty days. And Nineveh. Shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh. Believed the law. Believed God. And proclaimed a fast. And put on sackcloth.

From the greatest of them. Even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh. And he arose from his throne. And he laid his robe from him. And covered him with sackcloth.

And sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed. And published through Nineveh. By the decree of the king. And his noble saying. Let neither man nor beast.

Herd nor flock. Taste anything. Let them not feed. Nor drink water. But let man and beast. Be covered with sackcloth. And cry mightily. And to God. Yea.

[26 : 57] Let them turn everyone. From his evil way. And from the violence. That is in their hands. Who can tell. If God will turn. And repent. And turn away.

From his fierce anger. That we perish not. And God saw their works. That they turned. From their evil way. And God repented. Of the evil. That he had said. That he would do unto them.

And he did it not. Centuries of sin. Within 40 days. Of total destruction. The people turned to God. And God relented. My friends.

At the end of this day. Of humiliation and prayer. All we can say is. What a great God. We have. Amen. Let us pray. O Lord of heaven and earth.

Who dwellest in the heavens. And yet gives respect. To the prayers of thine own people. Down here. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. We praise thy name.

[27 : 57] That thou art God. And not man. We cannot understand. How bountiful thy mercies are. We cannot understand. Why thou didst seek us out. Yet we can only praise thy name.

And say how great thou art. Bless all that was done. In thy name today. Hear the prayers of thy people. Accept them in sincerity. We pray. For we offer them.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember our people. Throughout the whole land. We remember. All the sins. That are committed. We remember.

The millions of unborn children. We remember. The thousands upon thousands. Of people that are killed. Throughout the world. Through man's inhumanity.

We remember. The materialism. Which is so rife. In the western world. Just now. When a bottle of wine. Is sold. For a hundred and five thousand pounds.

[28 : 56] O Lord God. We cannot understand. And yet we read. In thine own word. That thou didst know. Long before we were born. That man's heart.

Is utterly depraved. O Lord God. As we see. And understand this. Help us then. To seek a remedy. With thee. Help us not to blame. Our fellow man.

But help us. More and more. To be energetic. In pursuing the cure. That is. Bringing them. To the throne of grace. We pray for a powerful gospel.

Amongst us. Preached powerfully. Because of its faithfulness. To bring men. Women and children. To thee. We pray for our own church. We pray for other churches.

We pray for all denominations. Asking that the voice of the Lord. Will be heard. Throughout the land. Remember us now. We ask of thee. Be with us all.

[29 : 53] For Christ's sake. Amen.