

*Let us pray: Heavenly Father, in many ways we have strayed from You. We pray, Lord, that You would continue to seek us out and once found you would keep us in Your fold that we may perform all good works You have set before us. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah the seventh chapter beginning at the first verse:

***The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!'" <sup>3</sup> Thus says the***

***LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. <sup>4</sup> "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' <sup>5</sup> "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, <sup>6</sup> "if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, <sup>7</sup> "then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.***

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

I wonder in how many times and in what ways you hurt yourself on a daily basis. It doesn't have to be a physical hurt, but how many times do you call yourself "dumb" throughout the day? It doesn't have to be emotional, but how many times do you take aggression out on yourselves (after all we have seen a surge recently of people who would go so far as to cut themselves) or even put yourself at risk with drugs and other harmful things? Or maybe you hurt yourself in a way that is more damaging than any emotional or physical damage you could do... maybe you walk away from God.

How easy is it for you to decide that friends and family are more important than God's Word? How easy is it for you to decide that work and play are more important than worship? How easy is it for you to hurt yourself by turning away from the One and Only True Good in this world?

Dear friends in Christ, I pray that we can hear God's word today and truly take it to heart. I hope that we can stop turning away from God and hurting ourselves; and, rather, we can heed God's call and ***Go after God!***

Being honest with ourselves, I think that we can all agree that we are a rather self-destructive and self-hurting people. Think of how many self-destructive behaviors that we engage in on a daily basis. We are not happy with a simple abundance of food, we must continue to eat until we have enough weight to support a second person. We are not happy with reality so we use and abuse drugs and alcohol in order for this world to be that much easier to live in. We are not happy with ourselves so we take drastic measures to alter our appearance through surgery and other non-safe measures. And while we are destructive towards ourselves and our bodies, we are especially destructive towards our God.

God has given us everything and done everything for us and still we take His Word and His presence and treat it like garbage. Think again about what God tells us in our text, ***“if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt.”*** Thus we can see that we are damaging ourselves and we are damaging our relationship with our God when we engage in these behaviors. When we oppress others and shed innocent blood.

But pastor, I don't oppress people, I'm not oppressive and I certainly have not killed anyone... so, you see, I'm pretty good. But we do, and you have. We oppress people every day of our lives when we are not willing to help and befriend our neighbors and strangers. When we look at a stranger and immediately think the worst about them; when we see someone new in our

neighborhood or at our school and we make sure to ignore them; when we treat our neighbor and our 'brothers' as common criminals; when we see that neighborhood of people and read about them in the paper and so further demonize them... we are oppressing them. We are not helping them, we are hurting them. We are not loving them, we are actually doing them harm.

And as for shedding blood, while we may not have done so in a very physical way to another person, we have indeed hated and hurt many people in our lives. Our family, our friends, our children, our co-workers, our bosses. We have oppressed and we have shed blood... and when we do so, we walk after other gods that hurt us.

When we give in to the devices and desires of our hearts, when we give in to our sinful nature, we are no longer following God but we are following satan and his desires for us.

And as we continue to follow satan and go more and more down his path, we are walking away from our God. When we sin, we are turning our backs on God and heading down that road that leads to hell. When we chase after the god of pleasure, of hypocrisy, of theft, of lying... we are hurting ourselves, we are hurting our neighbors, and, most of all, we are hurting our relationship with God.

As Gerhard states, *“The greatest pain for the damned will surely be awareness of how the Lord God so ardently called them to repentance and betterment in this life, and how Christ sought their salvation with tears - and how they would not be moved to repent and, thus, on Judgment Day, have heaped God’s wrath upon themselves.”*

Instead of knowing God and all that He has done for us, we turn from Him and chase after the evil and wicked things of this

world. And in so doing we are harming our relationship with God... He is not harming it, we are. God is not pushing us away; rather, we are following other gods that can only lead us to our harm.

And still God sends you messengers who continue to call out to you. As God says to those messengers, *“Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!’”* God has given you His Word and His messengers to call you back to the right way. He sends people to call back His lost sheep, who have roamed away, that they may hear the voice of God and come running back to Him.

And amongst all of these messengers that He sent, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. Jesus who came into this world to seek all of the lost sheep and to call back to

repentance all of God's children, brought a message of love and peace. Jesus loved all people, even those who would crucify Him. Jesus lived and died for all people, living a perfect life and dying an innocent death in the place of all of us.

Perfectly fulfilling God's commands, Jesus never oppressed another person; rather, He reached out in love and compassion to all. Jesus never shed blood or hated; rather, He used all of His life and death to be perfect for all people so that He might redeem them all. Jesus never walked after other gods; rather, He focused on the one true God all His days. Jesus is the perfect Son of God and He was for you.

And now through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ you have salvation. Through faith in all that Christ has done for you, you now know that heaven is waiting when this life is over. And through faith in

our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we can now live a more sanctified life towards God.

In this life, you will not be perfect; yet for your sake Jesus Christ was. This does not give you a pass to not strive to be perfect, of course. As God says, ***“Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place” and “For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, <sup>6</sup> “if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, <sup>7</sup> “then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.”***

God does not give us the okay to sin and to continue in our sinful ways; rather, He calls us back to Himself, knowing that when we hear His voice we will come running to Him

and follow His laws. When, through faith, we trust in Jesus we can begin to follow God's laws as He would have us. When we hear His voice, we can amend our ways and our doings, we can no longer oppress, we can stop shedding innocent blood, we can stop chasing after other gods... we can be God's children, who listen to Him, and who focus on His Word.

Dear friends in Christ, when we do not heed God's Word and chase after other gods we are inflicting pain upon ourselves that does not need to be done. When we chase after the cares and desires of this world, we are hurting ourselves, our neighbors, and, ultimately, we are hurting our relationship with God. However, when we hear His word, when we give ear to His messengers, when we repent... then Christ willingly accepts us back. When, through faith, we know that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for ME, then I know that heaven is waiting.

Thanks be to God that though I often run after other gods, He continues to seek me. Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ came into this world to live, die, and rise again for my salvation. And thanks be to God that when He calls out for me He then allows me to go after Him.

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.