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“Tipping Point” – Jeremiah 7:1-8

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It is generally accepted that Mum sets the mood of the home each day. If Mum seems happy, then the rest of the family seems more peaceful and calm. If Mum's grumpy, then the rest soon become difficult to be around. We've probably all heard the old quip, "Happy wife, happy life." And that's true to some degree. But this doesn't just apply to Mum. There's no need for Mums to feel guilty.

As someone rightly pointed out, "Happy spouse, happy house." No matter who we are, our disposition, our attitude rubs off onto others. If we're happy and peaceful, and display that, then those around us may begin to lift their spirits too; whether at home, at work, sport or even church.

But, like any stay-at-home Mum with a bunch of little ones around her, there can be a limit as to how much she can handle. There can be a tipping point at which she either explodes or has a meltdown. Mum – like everyone else has her limits. So, don't expect to be perfect, Mum.

Which brings us to today's reading. God has reached "tipping point." His patience does know a limit. And here in Jeremiah 7 we see that His patience weighs in the balance and may go either way. Like the kettle of boiling water about to spill out and cause great pain, or remain held within the bounds of the kettle. Teetering on tipping point!

In the previous chapters Jeremiah has very clearly stated that due to the sin of Judah a day of reckoning is coming. Jeremiah has told them that an army is coming from the north that will spare them no mercy.

He says, "A lion has come out of his lair; a destroyer of nations has set out. He has left his place to lay waste your land. (4:7) A lion from the forest will attack you, a wolf from the desert will ravage you, a leopard will lie in wait near your towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, (5:6)

"Look, an army is coming from the land of the north; a great nation is being stirred up from the ends of the earth. They are armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as they ride on their horses; they come like men in battle formation to attack you, Daughter Zion." (6:22-23)

Their quivers are like an open grave; all of them are mighty warriors. They will devour your harvests and food, devour your sons and daughters; they will devour your flocks and herds, devour your vines and fig trees. With the sword they will destroy the fortified cities in which you trust. (5:15-17)

Although it sounds like judgement and destruction is inevitable, such devastation may be turned back. But Oh, how the rebellious child ignores the threat. Many a parent threatens their child for their own good and their safety. How many of us heard our parents' advice; ignored it and then realised the consequences? How many of us watched a brother or sister punished, and then turned around and did the very same thing that they had done?

The people of Judah had watched the result of their sister Israel's idolatry – to which God referred as "adultery." The people of Israel, the Northern kingdom, were taken away into captivity by Assyria. And it seems Judah was not about to learn from her mistakes, but intentionally head down the same track.

And so once again the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and he was asked to stand at the entrance to the Temple grounds and speak the message of the Lord.

○ V.2, **“Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. 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. 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!” (2-4)**

It seems that the people of Judah were trying to get the best from both worlds. In their idolatry, in chasing after other gods and worshipping in the high places, and making sacrifices to other god’s and attending their temples and following their rituals, they also came to the Temple of the Lord and attempted to appease Him and fulfil their religious requirements.

God says, *“all you people of Judah who come through these gates to “worship Me,” don’t be deceived by your words when you say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord! Religion won’t cut it!”*

We can’t be sure of the timing, but it is likely that these words from Jeremiah come following Josiah’s reforms. He had found the book of the law in the Temple and this prompted him to attempt to bring the people back to faithful worship of the Lord.

And thus, the Hebrew people were doing what God had asked them to do – they were coming into the beautiful temple grounds and were making their sacrifices to Him. They were not leaving God out of the picture; they included Him in their activities for the week. However, their hearts were not, set apart for the Lord only, and they were not living their lives in God’s ways. ○ Worship of God was a religious activity, along with their attempts to appease all of their other gods too.

We need to watch the motivation of our hearts; and be careful that we’re not “doing Christian stuff” because that’s what we’ve always done. Do we pray out of duty? Are we involved in an area of ministry; leading or helping others; or serving the church because we think it the right thing to do, and hopefully keep God happy? Do we attend church because that should appease God by showing Him that we do honour Him to some degree? Do we come through the gates to worship Him, and say “this is the temple of the Lord” – all the while forgetting that our hearts are the temple of the Holy Spirit?

But for the people of Judah too, they acknowledged that this was the temple where God resides. The glorious temple; the holy of holies; the ark of the covenant – “This is the temple of God. Surely, God is here and He would not leave this place – His temple! We are safe!” And so they maintained a false sense of security because Jerusalem was where God’s temple was – but their hearts were not set apart for the Lord only.

Neither were their hearts set upon living in God’s ways. You see, included in all of the requirements of the law was the call to carefully guard your heart; that it be driven by love. ○ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love God and love one another. Religion can be heartless – performed out of duty; ticking all the right boxes.

But as James said, “pure religion is this...” religion that is pure in heart is **“to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”** (James 1:27) You don’t do those things unless you’re motivated by love.

○ **“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.”**

Now, if you carry anger and bitterness and resentment into your workplace, and you really don't want to be there, and you try to cover it over with a “I'll try to be happy today” attitude, that won't last very long because your heart is not really in it. We need to deal with the heart first, and then the rest will follow. ○ A change of heart leads to a change in attitude, that leads to a change in behaviour. So it is with us and God. God is not interested in our religious activity, but rather our heart's position.

A change of heart leads to a change in attitude, that leads to a change in behaviour. Let your actions show that you love others; that you care for the down and out; the refugee; the homeless; the hungry; the poor; the sick. They're the ones who need your help, and they're the ones who can't pay you back. “Love” demonstrated for other people as God loves us.

Twice in this passage God asks them to reflect on how easily they have deceived themselves. ○ V.4 and v.8, “You are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.” Saying the right words; singing the right words; praying the right words can lead us to a point where we deceive ourselves into thinking that we're right with God. But do our words, thoughts and prayers effect the way we live?

It reminds me of the story of twin girls, Emily and Sarah who were opening their gifts one Christmas morning. ○ They heard a knock at the door and went to find young Tommy Hayes. He was in their grade at school, and he was that mean boy who got in fights and made fun of people. Standing at the door he had two presents, neatly wrapped in beautiful paper. He didn't say a word – just handed the gifts to the girls and left.

They were stunned. They returned to the living room and told their mother what had just happened. She prompted them to open their gifts. With excitement they ripped off the paper, and both found a box. They opened them at the same time, to find....nothing.

Disappointed, both girls began to cry. Why would Tommy Hayes, that mean boy, take the time to wrap presents, and bring them to their house, and put nothing in them, just to be mean. Their hearts were broken.

Many people in this world do the same with God. They give God a wrapped present with nothing inside. They wrap it with worship, service and even sacrifice, but from an empty heart inside. Their religious activity, does not impact their lives, affecting the way they live for others during the week; and does not sacrifice for those who cannot pay back.

○ And so, at this point we may be thinking – can we ever please God? Our hearts are deceptive, and we often do things from impure motives. We fail; we sin; we reach tipping point and we explode; we let God down; we are easily deceived by Satan and may go pursuing other things before the Lord. Are we without hope?

Our Father however, loves us and does not look for perfection from us; He freely forgives; and although He's not looking for perfection, He is looking for faithfulness.

○ And there is power in the one who is faithful. Let me take you back to beginning of chapter 5.

God says to Jeremiah, **“Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.”**

Jeremiah searches and he cannot find one. How sad! But how amazing – that God would forgive a city of unfaithful people if there was just one who was faithful. The power of just one who was faithful could have turned back impending judgement.

Surely this should encourage us to remain faithful. A faithful Dad. A faithful Mum. A faithful child. A faithful brother or sister. A Faithful workmate or neighbour can save a family. One faithful, prayerful child of God, who loves Him and loves those around them may withhold calamity; and may also bring them through into the light of God’s salvation.

Once again we are being called and challenged to be a faithful one for Him.

TN203 You are my King