

○ He'd heard the statement, "If its flooded forget it!" But naaaah, it's worth the risk, I'll be safe! She's noticed that the food's out of date in the pantry, but naaaah it'll be right – I'll be safe. So, you take the risk!

Judah too was prepared to take the risk. Israel, the northern kingdom had been overrun by the Assyrians, and the people taken into exile, but that would never happen to Judah – would it? Surely not! The people of Judah felt they were safe within God's protection because they lived near the Temple of the Lord. The temple that Solomon built; a glorious construction, this was God's house; His dwelling place. "We're safe here!"

As I mentioned last week, God was at tipping point in terms of imminent judgement. Even so, He still sought to give the people an opportunity to turn back to Him; to examine their hearts and live like Him – loving others. And so further warnings come in v,9. ○ **“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe” - safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.”** (9-11)

What about us? We might not steal and murder, and commit adultery or perjury, nor worship other foreign gods, but should we consider ourselves “safe?” ○ “We are safe” can be a good thing; an expression of one's confidence in God; that He will continue to care for us and provide for our protection. We are safe in the arms of our Saviour and Great and powerful God. Our faith in Jesus death paying the price for our sin gives us confidence that we are safe – in Christ.

But thinking that “we are safe” can also be a dangerous place to be. It can imply a sense of pride. That “we're OK because we consider that we're doing well and doing the things that God requires of us. Therefore, God will look after us.”

Thinking that “we are safe” may also convey a false sense of security that breeds complacency. “I'm safe because God is a God of love,” and so I don't see the need for self-examination; for a searching of the heart; for testing the motives.

○ The people of Judah thought they were safe because they lived nearby, and came to the temple every Sabbath. Coming to church or attending church programs does not necessarily guarantee your eternal safety.

Jesus used Jeremiah's words here when He too entered the temple on one occasion. He was furious with what He saw going on in the outer court of the gentiles, and turned over the tables of the money changers, and said to them, “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’” (Matt 21:13)

God is always watching, and warning, and pleading. ○ V.12, **“Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors. I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.”** (12-15)

In other words, ☉ “Don’t take my presence and my grace for granted. I destroyed Shiloh, and I will destroy this temple too, should you not reform your ways.” In 1 Sam 4 we read of the Philistines overpowering the army of Israel, and the ark of the covenant being taken from them. We read of Eli the priest and his two son’s death. Shiloh is no longer the place where God resides.

And in the following months of devastation for the Philistines – wherever they took the ark of the covenant, destruction followed, so much so that they returned the ark of the covenant to those who remained in Israel. Now, the ark was in Judah in the temple in Jerusalem, and the people felt secure. Jeremiah however, continues to warn them of impending doom.

It is a dangerous thing to take the presence and grace of God for granted. When the Lord speaks, do you listen? When you come under conviction of your sin, do you listen? When you sense the prompting of the Holy Spirit, do you respond?

God is very clear. He says, “If you will not listen to me, then I will not listen to you.” He says, “don’t bother praying to me with all of your petitions.” ☉ V.16, **“So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.”** Prayer is not a safety mechanism, whereby we’re in danger, or in case of emergency, we break the glass. ☉

Paul said, “pray without ceasing.” Did you ever think that God would say, “don’t pray to me?” Well, He does here! “You pray, and you plead, and you petition me, but you worship other gods, and you place me on the same level as them. You do not humble yourselves before me, nor denounce your other gods, or purify your ways. You live as the world lives and you love not one another. You have not reformed your ways, so don’t bother praying to me, because I’m not a Santa Clause.”

Prayer is meant to be a process of two-way communication. We bow in prayer before the One True God – powerful creator of all. We humbly bow before Him. We first seek that He speaks to us as we commune with Him and lead us into the changes that we need to make to become more like Christ every day, and then we leave our needs and requests at His feet – trusting Him, that His will and answers are best. “May your will be done.”

Unfortunately for most of us we don’t see the need for daily prayer, and we treat it more like a duty or as in the case of emergencies. We don’t see prayer as a two way conversation. We see it as a duty, and an opportunity to bring to God our shopping list. But He’s not a Santa Clause.

We don’t spend hours in prayer like our forefathers did; talking with and listening to our Father. As Philip Yancey notes, “George Müller began each day with several hours of prayer, imploring God to meet the practical needs of his orphanage. Bishop Lancelot Andrewes allotted five hours per day to prayer and Charles Simeon rose at 4:00 a.m. to begin his four-hour regimen. Susannah Wesley, a busy mother with no privacy, would sit in a rocking chair with an apron over her head praying for John and Charles and the rest of her brood.” (Prayer: Does it Make a Difference?)

The problem is, our lifestyle is not conducive to prayer, and perhaps for many of us we need to reform our ways. ☉ Due to prosperity few of us have real needs every day – we live an affluent lifestyle and we fail to see our need for the Lord’s intervention and action. And so we don’t pray for our needs, because we have so few.

☉ Science and technology has reduced the need for prayer. We look to the health system; to scans and doctor’s advice, prior to prayer; we look to the weather bureau and long term forecasts and plan accordingly, rather than seek the Lord and His direction.

We also live and breathe in a  world of scepticism that wonders what's the use of prayer against the power of a nuclear threat, terrorism, evil, cyclones, fire and flood. And in a world of increasing  time pressures and the brevity of communication; we text and email, and reduce communication to its minimum – then we are conditioned in so many ways away from prayer and spending quality time with God. Our lifestyle is not conducive to prayer.

Do we need to repent, and return to God in prayer – daily prayer – real communication with God whereby He speaks with us and we hear His voice? Do we take God's presence and grace for granted? Are we fostering a real relationship with God of two-way communication? Is God speaking to us today through V.16,  **“So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.”** “You don't listen to me, so I won't listen to you.”

In our text, God then returns to spell out the sins of the people, and how their efforts to appease or provoke other gods (god's that don't exist) only provokes Him to anger. And then in v.21, He says, as you come to this temple,  **“Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! 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, 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.”** (21-23)

“Obey me. Walk in obedience. I'll be your God; you'll be my people; all will go well with you.” You see, sacrifice doesn't equal obedience. The people were making their sacrifices in the temple; they came and they prayed. But their heart was not in it; they didn't do it to worship God, they did it because they thought they should, so as not to attract His wrath. Ironically it was just this that did attract His wrath.

When we think of the word sacrifice, we think it involves the reluctant “giving up” of something important to us in order that we gain something else. For example: To succeed in business requires a lot of work and sacrifice; sacrifice time and family and the business might succeed. However, “giving up” something out of duty or obligation is not the concept behind a Biblical sacrifice.

We think we give up legitimate hopes and dreams, plans and ambitions in order to get involved in a specific ministry. Is that a “giving up” or an “offering?” We think we give up our sinfulness; our pride, our insistence on autonomy, our selfishness, our anger; our greed, our fickleness, all of our shortcomings. But isn't that the offering of ourselves to God and allowing Him to rule over every area of our lives and transform us?

You see,  the Greek word for sacrifice is defined by “the action of offering.” God is looking for our offering of something because we love Him and we wish to worship Him by doing so. It is not something that we give up, but rather offer willingly. And so we come to church; we read God's word; we pray, and we give of our money; willingly and happily because we love God and want to honour Him in these ways. We offer Him our good deeds; our time, resources, gifts and abilities in service, by serving others.

I wonder as Jesus went to the Cross did He consider His death as a reluctant giving up of His life out of duty or obligation? Or did He willingly take the nails; offering Himself out of worship because He loved His Father? I think He offered Himself out of love. Eph 5:2 tells us that Jesus death was a like a sweet smelling offering before the Father.

King David wrote, **“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”** (Ps 51:16-17) God will always listen to the prayer of the contrite heart.

And so as we come back to v.21-23, ○ “Obey me. Walk in obedience. I’ll be your God; you’ll be my people; and all will go well with you.” How do we become people of God? How do we walk in obedience? How do we get to know His heart? I believe God wants us to know Him and His heart and follow accordingly, and we do that through prayer and reading His Word.

And so, prayer keeps us connected with God. ○ Rather than see prayer as a sacrifice, giving up our time, do we need to see it now as the appropriate offering of our time back to Him as we commune with Him and allow Him to lead us. The time that we spend in prayer is our appropriate offering in worship to our God because we love Him. And through prayer we become the people of God; we walk in obedience, and we get to know God’s heart.

If we listen to God, then He will listen to us. “Draw near to Me and I will draw near to you.” Let us not take the presence and grace of the Lord for granted by speaking with Him so infrequently. Let us not view prayer as a duty, but as our appropriate offering of our time spent with our God and Saviour.

Song: TN157 Secret Place

Prayer time this arvo at 4pm