Jeremiah 7:9-11 Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and swear falsely? Will you offer sacrifices to Baal and follow other gods you do not know? 10Will you come and stand before me in this temple that bears my Name, and say, “We are safe,” the whole time you do all these detestable things? 11This house bears my Name! Have you made it a den of robbers? Watch out! I myself have been watching, declares the Lord.

 As is often the case, in order to best understand an Old Testament text it is best to know the history of the Old Testament text. So let’s review for ourselves some of the history surrounding Jeremiah, prophet of the Lord.

 Jeremiah is a prophet of the Lord from about 627 B.C. to 580 B.C. He would have served under the last 5 kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. Please remember that in 722 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel, was conquered and taken away by the Assyrian Empire. Ten Jewish tribes, captured, taken away and note, they will disappear as a people forever. So it is now 100 years later and Jeremiah is the prophet of God for the southern kingdom. A kingdom that has by and large, turned away from, abandoned and despised the Lord in every way it could for the last 100 years.

 This godlessness exists despite the fact that they had been told that Israel was carried away because of godlessness. They didn’t seem to care. Okay, not exactly true. They felt they had nothing to worry about. Their attitude is: We are God’s people. We are holy and good, upright and just, an example for all the world of faithful, wonderful children of God. They felt that God would not, could not bring them any harm because after all, as God’s chosen, wonderful, holy people they were absolutely speciat and they had the Temple of God among them as proof. The problem is, they were wrong.

 For the past 100 years God had been telling them they were wrong. God has sent his prophets to speak to his people and to call them to repent and come back to the true faith. They didn’t listen. They didn’t listen because of the false priests, because of religious rulers, the vast majority of them, who told them how wonderful and upright they were. The false prophets are the ones who told them that since they had the Temple nothing would happen because God would protect them and fight for them because of the Temple. By the way, in the fuller Old Testament reading there was that verse that said, **“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.”** That line is there to distinctly point out the absolute falsehood these people had.

 The Temple (or church or church membership) is not some sort of cystal ball, some sort of magic omen that will protect and watch over you. The Temple is valid and good only insofar as it upholds and stands upon the truths and realities of God. If a Temple or a church no longer actually teaches the truth of the Word of God, then you can be assured by the Lord himself that such a place is no longer his house or his church. A Church is of God, the Temple is of God only when it serves, believes and follows God.

 Why is such a history here before us today? Well, as is typical of our church year, as we approach the various seasons our readings will begin to prepare us for those seasons. Ever notice that the last Sundays of Pentecost actually prepare for the season of Advent. That Advent prepares for Christmas, that leads to Epiphany that eventually prepares for Lent which prepares for the Resurrection which leads to Ascension then Pentecost and back we go to the start again.

 So in truth, the readings chosen for this Sunday are readings that are preparing us for Lent. Lent is about Jesus’ passion, about Jesus suffering and dying for our sins in order to be our Savior. Did you notice how all of our texts were about sin, were about staying strong in the faith and in Jesus? Our theme for today will be: **WATCH OUT! THE LORD IS WATCHING!**

 Now I realize that as we read some of these Old Testament texts that most of us have a tendency to think that there is nothing here that pertains to us. And yet there is. It is an interesting thing to note how history has a tendency to repeat itself, especially if you don’t learn from history. Well, so it is in the Church. The Jewish people of Jeremiah’s day were not so much religious as they were superstitious and work righteous. Dear people, that is something we had better pay attention to!

 Take what is said about the Temple and the attitude of the people. Instead of treating the Temple of the Lord as the Lord’s Temple it was anything but that. The majority of the people didn’t go to the Temple but rather to the high places, the shrines and false areas of worship found all throughout the land. It is true, they went to these places in the name of God, but when God’s truth is not found at these places, don’t you think that someone should have taken notice and said, “Uh, people, this isn’t right!” Worse yet, how people were living and what people were doing were clearly contrary to Godliness and no one seems to notice!

 So in truth, the Jewish people worshiped falsely, worshiped false gods, engaged in heathen practices and by and large the Temple of the Lord was nothing more than some sort of lucky charm, their proof that God was with them even though in heart and mind they were not with God. I don’t know, I think that simple truth of God should be clear. If God, as God says He is, is no longer the god you hear about, no longer the god you are guided by and no longer a god whose word means a thing, do you really have God? I think that answer is as clear as could be, but as you look at history, evidently it is not.

 Just listen to the opening words of our text. **“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and swear falsely? Will you offer sacrifices to Baal and follow other god you do not know? Will you come and stand before me in this temple that bears my Name, and say, “We are safe,” the whole time you do all these detestable things?”** I think if you just let those words of the Lord himself sink in you will see that what I have told you is correct. And God makes it clear. You cannot live falsely, worship falsely, act falsely, be false, believe false and still claim to be of God.

 But you might ask, how does this apply to us? Because in truth, many of the things, the godless things that God reveals here are found among us. Now when I say “among us” I mean among us as the good old USA and among us members of the Holy Christian Church.

 Do you have any idea of how many Christian churches today stand convicted by these words of God. There are Christian churches that don’t care, actually bless godlessness in the name of Jesus. These churches are going to be subject to the words of the Lord found in Matthew 7? In Matthew 7, a parallel section to our Gospel reading for today, Jesus makes a further comment on **“by their fruit you will know them.”** In Luke we only hear, **“Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?”** Matthew lays out the further truth: **“Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and drive out demons in your name and perform many miracles in your name?” Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.”**

 You can have majestic churches filled with all kinds of people. You can seem to be a church alive and well and really, really serving the Lord. Why, Jesus even makes it clear that you can seem to do wonders and signs and miracles just like Jesus and yet, JESUS DOESN’T KNOW YOU! Why? Because you have abandoned the truth and purpose of Jesus. You are about looking good, feeling good, being strong and being purposeful but you are not serving the Lord.

 Or what warning do we hear in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 **“For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”**

 So if you have a church that does not believe that the Bible is God’s Word from beginning to end and in every point and revelation is that serving God? If you have a church that allows and promotes sins all in the name of God’s love, but clearly sins that God’s Word condemns is that serving God? If your church, in order to gain members or become famous or just survive is willing and ready to deny God’s truths, ignore the point of the Gospel and cave into “people’s needs” as the people see it rather than as God sees it is that serving God? Go back and review carefully the two passages I shared with you and read them again because you will find I am making a point on them and on what our text says.

Listen again to the heart of what Jeremiah is told to tell this people. And please note this is not the word of Jeremiah but we are told point blank this is the pronouncement of the Lord. The Lord says: **“Reform your ways and your actions, and I will establish you in this place. 4Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.” 5Sincerely reform your ways and your actions. Carry out justice between a man and his neighbor. 6Do not oppress the alien who lives in your land, the fatherless, or the widow. Do not shed innocent blood in this place. Do not follow after other gods to your own harm. If you avoid these things, 7I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your fathers forever and ever. 8Take warning. You are trusting in deceptive words that cannot help you. 9Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and swear falsely? Will you offer sacrifices to Baal and follow other gods you do not know? 10Will you come and stand before me in this temple that bears my Name, and say, “We are safe,” the whole time you do all these detestable things?”**

Now Dear people, apply these words to your personal life. Do you honestly think you can ignore and disobey the Lord, persistently do that, and still be a saved child of God? Do you think you can live in and unjust and prejudicial way, that you can be damning and snooty, well, really, that you can live in ways clearly contrary to God’s Word and still think you are his child?

So ask: Do I worship and praise God as he commands? Now, if you cannot make church, do you still give worship and praise to God by taking time to listen or read sermons? Do you expose yourself to the workings of the Holy Spirit as God wants by making sure God’s Word is a regular part of your life? If you don’t, then really, you a just like the Jewish people who faith has become nothing more than superstition and feel good works righteousness.

Do you rob and steal from God? This is really the issue of offerings to the Lord isn’t it? Do you give freely to the Lord as God has freely given to you? Is that offering of yours truly a reflection of fact that God has given you the treasure of Jesus or is your offering more a “this week you can have the left-overs Jesus” type thing. God says such an attitude is robbing and stealing from him. In Malachi, God even points out that when the Law says bring the spotless lamb for offering and you bring the lame and crippled to God, that is robbing Him because you do not honor him with the best. So yeah, where is God in your budget. Top line item or bottom line item? Do we honor God in this way?

Do our lives reflect the wonder of Jesus? I remember the Star Trek series. I always marveled because in that series, all of them, everything everybody did was always recorded and you could go back and see everything, at least that’s what was portrayed. I often wondered how we would fare if everything of our lives was recorded and could be reviewed by anybody. Would I see Jesus? Would your language reflect Jesus? Seriously, I ask that only because you need to grasp what God has told us. He is watching. He does know everything. Do you think you will fool him?

Here is the cool part. God says, simple call: **“Reform your ways and your actions.”** That is the call to repent. To repent means to recognize your sin, be sorry for that sin, desire to stop that sin and then see that in Jesus there is forgiveness for sin. Live to Jesus and you can never go wrong.

Why? Because God acted and moved in the Old Testament and in the New to bring us a Savior, the Savior Jesus. We live at a time when we get to hear of Jesus, we get to experience his grace and love and know his offer to forgive and be saved. It all starts when the wonder of Jesus becomes ours.

The wonder is this. God’s Son paid the price for your sins. He died on the cross, there suffering the wrath and anger of the Father for all the sins of all the world for all of time. That includes you and me. And then Jesus rose from the dead to show us his victory and to let us know that His victory is ours. Here is the simple way to view it. Jesus died for our sins, are we then not also called to die to sin? That we don’t let sin reign in our lives, but rather Jesus reigns in our lives. Simply put, that’s what happens when God grants us the gift of faith in Jesus. We become different. We become His. We become forgiven and we become children who simply desire to please our Lord. We hear and follow his Word. Again, we may be bad at it, but that is our drive and desire.

Sadly, this wonder of God’s love directing lives is what the Old Testament people missed. It is what many people miss when their church or faith is not focused on Jesus and his saving Gospel message. My prayer for you is simple. I pray that when you say, “Lord, Lord,” that Jesus responds, “Yes, my child, I hear and I will help.” That’s where it all starts and where it all stands. On Jesus and his love. Amen.