

Return ... to Me

I recently read through Jeremiah; a sobering read indeed. Jeremiah was deeply burdened about what he was seeing amongst his people in terms of their wilful sin and their attitude to being confronted about it. The prophet was passionate about getting Israel to turn back to God. In fact, he pleads with Israel on at least 40 occasions to return to a right relationship with God.

Jeremiah wanted Israel to see that if they continued down the path they were on, then disaster awaited them. Jeremiah 3v1 reads; "..... but you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to me, says the Lord."

Returning to the Lord infers that we have moved away from the Lord in some way or another. We need to firstly acknowledge we have left the Lord in the first place, and just as moving from the Lord involves a choice, so does returning to the Lord.

In Revelation 2:4 we read the church at Ephesus had left its first love: I hear people say, "lost their first love", which is not correct. Losing something is generally an accidental thing, whereas leaving something is a choice, a deliberate choice.

There was so much to commend the church at Ephesus. Externally everything looked the goods, but there was a potential terminal illness internally that ultimately led to the Ephesus church dying.

What God was wanting Israel, Ephesus, and us to do, is return to our first love relationship with Him. It is a returning to the joy, thrill, excitement and wonder of knowing God and walking in obedience with Him.

Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because he refused to accept the deliberate backsliding of Israel. His weeping was in a sense the outworking of the wounded heart of God, because of Israel's wilful and persistent sin. If we see similar problems in our churches today, what do we need to do?

Returning to God means we need to be honest with ourselves and God about where we are

Continued over



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For newspaper wrapping and packaging once a month (third Tuesday, about 4 hours) at our Perth office.
Contact Len 9453 3311
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PRAISE the Lord for:

- ★ The ongoing financial support we receive from people and organisations around the world assisting with various projects
- ★ The response and encouraging comments we have received from our Christmas 2018 edition of the paper
- ★ Those who have applied to come on our next Impact Africa mission trip. At this stage we have 15 confirmed and another 6 considering. We are looking at 24 in total
- ★ Another start to the year with our wonderful volunteers helping with the Australian distribution

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spiritually. Returning to God means we need to honestly acknowledge our sins. Israel had fallen into the sin of syncretism. They worshipped God with their lips but not with their heart. What made matters worse was their open syncretistic worship. Because they had slipped into ritual worship, not real worship, they lacked reality in their relationship with God, so they turned to worshipping idols of stone and wood.

Sin is so blinding because Israel didn't see a problem with this. Jeremiah proclaims they have played the harlot, they have been like an unfaithful wife, which deeply grieved God. Are we seeing this sort of dual worship in the church today? Yes!

Whilst the church may not be worshipping statues, it still has its fair share of idols. Obviously such idols rip at the very heart of what makes a church distinct from the world. What are some of

these idols that are so prevalent in the church? Materialism continues to be a major problem. We are seeing Christians over committed financially because of their desire for things. We have Christian couples working more and more which in turn impacts family life. Did you know the breakup of Christian marriages is about the same as the world? I believe such a shocking development is clear evidence of the impact of idol worship, or spiritual complacency. Other areas of idol worship come in the form of addictions such as pornography. Alcohol, I believe, is becoming an increasing problem in the Christian church. What sort of model is this for our children and for the non-Christian community?

Like the Israel of Jeremiah's day, Christians are content to remain in their sin, vainly thinking God will wink at their behaviour.

This has clear ramifications for those of us in leadership. How we model our Christianity and service has a profound impact on those we lead. It also has a devastating effect on the quality of our Christian service and the fruitfulness of it. Often the catch cry I hear from churches is that we need a new approach or a new program. However, what I believe we need most is a new work of God's Holy Spirit from the top down or we just become hay, wood and stubble, instead of gold, silver and precious stones.

{ CARL CARMODY
EDITOR CHALLENGE }

PRAYER needed for

- ★ Production team for Challenge. 60 different editions of the paper are scheduled for 2019. Pray for wisdom for content of each edition
- ★ Upcoming trip for Carl and Graeme Jacques (20th February – 5th March) to the UK for a number of strategic meetings with Goodnews Board and a few other organisations
- ★ An opportunity we have received from Word of Life in Spain to distribute our Spanish edition of the paper. We need the Lord's direction and a clear open door
- ★ Requests from Mexico, Nicaragua, Egypt, Nigeria to produce the Challenge newspaper. Again we need the Lord's clear direction in these matters and ongoing finances



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