

James T. Jeremiah
My Biggest Problem
November 19, 1969

Transcript

James T. Jeremiah:

I want to make an explanation concerning the chapel speaker, Pastor Marvin Troyer is scheduled to be here, but he called yesterday saying that a nine year old boy in his congregation was taken to the hospital for surgery, had a brain tumor. And the young lad did not live. And he has a funeral tomorrow. You might pray for these people and for Mr. Troyer. He'll be here on Friday for chapel and tomorrow morning, the basketball team will have charge of chapel service. And I'm sure you'll want to be praying for them and, and be here to hear what they have to say.

James T. Jeremiah:

I guess you have to come anyway, don't you? Oh, that's good. So plan to be here. I think I talk like a preacher a little more than I do about the president of the chapel service. I'd like to talk to you this morning for a few moments about my biggest problem. Now that ought to get you interested. Now, the interesting thing about my biggest problem is that it's yours. And I want to start my comments by an illustration. A man one day in a dream had the feeling that he was being followed by a veiled figure. Wherever he went, this mysterious veiled figure would snatch away everything that seemed to be precious to him. Seemed as he dreamed on that, it robbed him of his future. It took away his peace of heart. Any joy he seemed to be reaching would be taken by this figure that followed him. He dreamed that when he sat down to the table and reached out to take his food, that this veiled mysterious figure would snatch away the food from the table.

James T. Jeremiah:

Coming to the end of the day, quite fatigued, he would retire to rest, but the veiled figure would be there and take away his sleep. His reputation was in danger because the veiled figure always haunted him and seemingly told stories about him that were not true. Every time there were opportunities or doors open for great futures, for a great opportunity to do something, it was closed. One day, he stood at the marriage altar and as he was about ready to say I do and take this lovely bride for his wife, this veiled figure stepped in and denied him this privilege. In disgust and in fear, he seized the veil from the figure that followed him. And lo and behold, as he looked at that figure, it was as though he were looking in a mirror. It was himself.

James T. Jeremiah:

The greatest problem any of us will ever have, can be spelled with the letters that spelled self. This is not a new one. This is as old as man himself. There are many illustrations of it in the scriptures. I suspect that one of the outstanding ones is found in the 12th chapter of Luke. And I'd like to read this for you, beginning with the 13th verse.

James T. Jeremiah:

"And one of the company said unto him, master speak to my brother. That he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, man, who made me a judge or a distributor or a divider over you. And he said unto them, take heed and beware of covetousness for a man's life consists of not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. He spake a parable unto them saying the ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself saying, what shall I do?

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Because I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, this will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night, thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Woe is he that layeth up treasure for himself is not rich toward God."

James T. Jeremiah:

And I hear some poverty-stricken souls this morning saying that doesn't mean me. I'm not a rich man. I'm not a rich woman. That has nothing to do with me, but the problem is really not the riches. It's something a lot deeper. And the sad and pathetic part of it is that the affliction that this man had is the same one that most of us have too frequently. It is the matter of self. This man was a rather near-sighted individual. He couldn't see very far.

James T. Jeremiah:

And I want to give you three or four things about his near-sightedness that I trust might be helpful to all of us. Begin with the man in the story. He could not see beyond himself. And this was a tragedy. You will notice the repetition of words in here, such as I, my, mine, all the way through. Someone was defining these words and in a college or in a high school. And instead of saying they were possessive pronouns, the students said they were aggressive pronouns. And I suspect that the student was correct. My, me, mine and so on.

James T. Jeremiah:

William Barkley tells of a woman by the name of Edith. He said that Edith lived in a small world. It was bounded east, north, south, and west by Edith. You ever meet anybody like that? Contrast that with a philosophy of a John Wesley, who said, and who practiced, the philosophy that he would save all he could and he would give all he could.

James T. Jeremiah:

And one of the problems that this man in the story had was that he couldn't see beyond himself. And when it's all said and done, the difficulties that come because of our rebellion as individuals, sometimes against God, because of our desire to have our own way and do what we want to not withstanding, it comes just because of this. We cannot see beyond ourselves. When we manifest poor manners, when we act as though we're the only people around, and when I die, as the psalmist said, wisdom will die with me. Everything seems to center in that little thing that lives in our bodies, that self. Can't see beyond ourselves. What a tragedy. Now, unless there might be some misunderstanding and someone would say, this doesn't mean me. It means every one of us. There's not a one of us here today who does not face this problem.

James T. Jeremiah:

And many times when the problems that are otherwise in our lives come about, they come because of this one thing. We cannot see beyond ourselves. Another thing that bothers me about this man is that

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he could not see beyond his intellect. You notice the scripture said, he thought within himself. He thought within himself, whereas God said in verse 20 "Thou fool."

James T. Jeremiah:

Here was a man who felt he had all the answers. Now he's not the only man whoever lived that had that problem. There are some folks that you meet every once in a while who seem to think that they not only, they not only have the answers to the questions that have been asked, but they have answers to questions nobody ever thought about. And here was a man who said, I thought within myself, I'm going to plan my future. I'm going to take this into my own hands. I'm going to do what I want to do. I've had a good year on the farm this year. The barns are filled. Everything is occupied. I'm going to tear down the barns. I'm going to build bigger ones and I'm going to fill them. I am going to do what I want to do.

James T. Jeremiah:

I think that we see this too often, even among the saints of God. When the rich man thought himself very wise, God said, he's a fool. It reminds us of that verse we often quote in Romans 1:22, "Professing themselves to be wise or sophisticated, they became fools or morons." He didn't think beyond his intellect in two ways. He didn't consider God in his plans. You can read this for a long time and you'll never find this poor rich man ever trying does consult God and find out what God would have him to do. He didn't talk about it at all. He just said, I'll think within myself, that's enough. In Romans 10:4, it says, "The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts." Or as someone who said all his thoughts are there is no God.

James T. Jeremiah:

Young people. There are many, many folks in our generation who live as though God did not exist. There are Christians who would rise up in holy horror at the God is dead philosophy. But many times in our opposition to the theory that God is not alive, we act as though he is dead. And that's a tragedy. When you and I guide our lives by our thinking, by our direction, and our own intellects, and our little ways of doing things, and we leave God out of it, we're headed for trouble. You think back over your life and think of the problems you had when God was not in your thoughts. And you did as you pleased and what a tragedy it was. We all can look back and to think about this. Now, the tragic thing is here that in spite of the fact that God had blessed him and his fields brought forth plentifully, and he had an abundance because God gave it to him, he never even bothered to think about it.

James T. Jeremiah:

I hear people say once in a while, "Well, why should I be so grateful to God? I earned the money. I did the hard work. I'm the fellow that did this." But you know, young people, we need to stop and think once in a while that we wouldn't be able to earn the money. We wouldn't be able to be employed. We wouldn't be able to be in school. We wouldn't be able to do anything if God had not given us life and breath and all that pertains to life itself. We're coming to a Thanksgiving period pretty soon. And there will be a lot of folks who'll have Thanksgiving dinners. We all will, and we'll enjoy them. But it's possible to go through all of this without really realizing what God has done for us. And in spite of it, live our lives alone without God in them at all.

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Here was a man who did it. Not only did he do this, he did not consult others in his plans. It isn't a bad idea to have counsel. The word of God makes it very clear that in the multitude of counselors there is safety. It reminds us also that without counsel purposes are disappointed. I found it necessary frequently, and always do find it necessary, to counsel with others.

James T. Jeremiah:

And it isn't a bad idea for Christians who're facing problems and difficulties to sit down with other Christians and say, "I'm facing a problem. Will you pray with me? Will you help me?" And you'll find that people will bear your burdens because the word of God says we are to bear one another's burdens. And it also says we're to bear our own. Do not live your life like this man who could not see beyond his own intelligence, his own intellect, who said, in essence, "I'll think what I'll do. I'll plan my future. I'll take care of my crops. I'll get what I want. God, take the last place, if any place at all." He was near-sighted. He couldn't see beyond his intellect.

James T. Jeremiah:

And you may be a 4.0 student, or a 2.0 student, who may think you're a 4.0 student. And you think you have all the answers. But I want to say to you, young people, none of us have them. And that if we don't get the answers out of this book and from the God who authored it, and from the God who gives wisdom to every man who asketh him and gives liberally and upbraids not. If we don't get it there, we're not smart enough to guide our lives and come out on the right side. You know, there's some of you here this morning, who 25 years from now, God's son not coming before then, 25 years from now, if you're not careful, will have ruined useless, wasted lives.

James T. Jeremiah:

You know why? Not because God doesn't want to bless you. Not because there aren't people who want to help you. But because like this poor, rich man, you think within yourself and you leave God out of your planning.

James T. Jeremiah:

You said, "I want to be a teacher." Fine, if God wants you to be.

James T. Jeremiah:

"I want to be a chemist." Great, if God wants you to be.

James T. Jeremiah:

"I want to be a missionary." That's fine too, if God wants you to be. But you'd better find that answer and not think within yourself to make your own plan. It's disastrous.

James T. Jeremiah:

The third thing about this man in his nearsightedness is that he never saw beyond his possessions. He must've had the hay and the corn and the oats piled a mile high, all around the walls of his house. He couldn't see beyond them. This was all he could see. He had a good year. There are a lot of people who follow his train. We hear a lot about the now generation. Here was a man who lived in the now

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generation, the here and now. And his position among men was determined, like it always is, by the things he possessed.

James T. Jeremiah:

He didn't remember that God, the son, would say, "A man's life consisteth not in the things he possesses."

James T. Jeremiah:

Some of you were here preparing for work. You're preparing for a job. You want to go out and make a name for yourself. You're going to earn a great deal of money, and there's nobody in the place more interested in you earning a lot of money, more than the director of development and the president. Let me tell you. We hope you become rich, and become benevolent, and you become sacrificial, and you become a lot of things. But let's not get the idea in mind that this is the reason why we ought to do this, just that we might have position. There was a man who had much goods and he thought that life consisted of the things he had. He thought he had security for the future. He had stored it up for many years. This was it.

James T. Jeremiah:

He not only believed in social security, he almost had a feeling of eternal security. He was getting it all fixed up so that when the time came and he could retire, he could live on it and he would live many years ahead. He wanted security. I'm not against security for the future. Certainly, we ought to plan on this, but my friend, it's a tragedy when people plan on security for the body, which will go to dust, and they have little time with the soul, which lives forever.

James T. Jeremiah:

Did you ever stop to think about these people who come to meetings, where they have healing for their body and everybody gets healed, and they go away. There'll be crowds that will come for healing for the body, but a small minority of you come to be concerned about the soul. This old body of yours and mine, will, someday God's son not coming, go to dust. And someday, maybe they'll find a skeleton in a box, and that's all there'll be, dust and bones. But while that's going on, my friend, your soul and mine lives on. And when we spend all that we have for the here and now like this man did, we are spending it and thinking about planning for it without considering the more valuable things in life.

James T. Jeremiah:

And all these other reasons for being concerned about his possessions was because it spelled pleasure for the present. He said to his soul, "Take ease, take thine ease, be merry, relax, enjoy yourself, have a good time." This was all he thought about, all serious thinking at all about eternity and about the future, provided satisfaction for his body, eat, drink. He said, "This is what it's all about. This is it." You know why there's so many people, many teenagers, and college students, and older folks as well, who are giving up everything and just living for the here and now, because this is all they know anything about. Some of the philosophies of the days gone by, as well as the philosophies of today, of men have made people believe that you can't know anything for certain that you can't see, feel, and hear. And so are all of our emphasis, all of our direction is given to the things that we obtain, and the things we can possess, and the things that we can earn, and all the rest.

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James T. Jeremiah:

One last thing. This man never saw beyond his day. When I first thought of this chapter again, sometime ago, I thought of the verse that said, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." But you'll notice in that scripture, this man didn't say that. He didn't say, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." It's found in Ecclesiastes, it's found in first Corinthians, but it's not found here.

James T. Jeremiah:

Why not? Very simple reason. He didn't intend to die. He didn't expect to die. He wasn't looking beyond his day at all. He expected to live for a long time. Oh, tomorrow, here. And I'll guarantee you that there are most of us in this place this morning don't intend to die either. We expect somebody else will. We think about our friends and our relatives. We expect they will. But young people, did you ever stop to think that we might today, be ushered into eternity?

James T. Jeremiah:

My wife and I were traveling the other day and we were talking about the opportunities of service, and the blessings that we've had in our lives through the years in serving the Lord. And I said to her, "I wonder what we would do. If we were certain we only had one year to live." Do you ever think of that? Oh, you'll say, "Preacher, I don't like to come to chapel and be told about that." You'd better face it. Young people, we can't live for just today. He expected to live for a long time, but he really didn't.

James T. Jeremiah:

It is said that Gladstone went to a young man who was preparing for the law. This young student was a good student and was doing well. This great attorney said to him, "What do you plan to do when you finish?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"I plan to enter the service of the bar."

James T. Jeremiah:

"What do you expect to do when you're a lawyer?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"I expect a pay in a good practice."

James T. Jeremiah:

"When you have a good practice, what then?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"Then I intend to build a beautiful home, a beautiful residential area."

James T. Jeremiah:

"What then?"

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James T. Jeremiah:

"Well," he said, "I suppose I'll live a full life, have a good practice."

James T. Jeremiah:

"What then?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"Then I'll retire."

James T. Jeremiah:

"What then?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"Well," he said, "then I'll die."

James T. Jeremiah:

And this man who asked the question said, "What then?" "And this man in our story didn't really ask that question. He wasn't concerned about it. You can almost picture in that night, as he was working over his table, over his desk, with his bags of money and his ledgers, figuring out how he could make the almighty dollar without having any concern for the almighty God.

James T. Jeremiah:

And God says, "Tonight, thy soul shall be required of thee." The possessions were of no value to him then. Now as certainly as I'm here this morning, some of you students are going to say, "What does that message have to do with me?" The principle of this message has a lot to do with all of us. Probably all of us here saved. I hope so. If you're not, you ought to be. And young people, as surely as we're here, some of us are going to sell out our testimony, and our lives, and our cause for Christ, for the same principle that this man sold out back in the days of Jesus.

James T. Jeremiah:

Self got in the way of God's leading, and we made the wrong decision, because we didn't properly evaluate beyond today. We're like the crane, that ugly bird, that stood with its long legs in a marshy swamp gathering snails. And then the swan appeared. And the crane, as the parable goes, looked at the swan and said, "My you're a beautiful creature, you white, beautiful bird. Where did you come from?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"I came from heaven," said the Swan.

James T. Jeremiah:

"What is heaven? What's it like?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"It's a place of beauty. It's a place of rest. It's a place of peace. The streets are paved with gold."

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James T. Jeremiah:

And so the story goes to describe heaven, and this ugly snail-eating crane said, "Are there any snails there?"

James T. Jeremiah:

"No snails," said the swan, "No snails there."

James T. Jeremiah:

And like a lot of folks with the same ambitions, the crane said, "If there are no snails there, you can take your heaven."

James T. Jeremiah:

Some of you are teachers, I remember hearing a teacher a number of years ago, say "No teacher can be worth anything in his profession without dedication." Some of you are going to have the opportunities to teach in Christian day schools. And you're going to turn it down because you can get more money someplace else. Now that may be well, if it's God's will for you. Some of you are going to say I'm going into the ministry. And when I get through with my college and seminary training, I expect to have a church that's going to provide a great living for me.

James T. Jeremiah:

You may be disillusioned. And if that's all you have in your life as a Christian to think about, the possessions that pass away, and if that's the only reason you're in school, to prepare with a degree, to do something, may God help you to see that first of all, your life belongs to him. And if he blesses in that direction and sends you in that direction, well and good, but don't you cut any corners to get it. You take God into your planning, take men and women into your counsel and see beyond your day. See beyond your intellect, see beyond your possession, see beyond yourself.

James T. Jeremiah:

Shall we pray. Before we pray this morning, before you start putting on your coats, I want us to think a minute. We come to the end of chapel. Sometimes there seems to be a rush to see how quickly we can get away from an atmosphere, when the spirit of God has been speaking to hearts. I wonder this morning, where you stand before the Lord and these matters pertaining to self that so often stands in the way of God's blessing.

James T. Jeremiah:

Don't be near-sighted. Look away beyond today a little while, see a few years ahead, contemplate what God may want you to do and make your decision on the basis of what God says in his word and what God tells you as you pray. And you'll not be mistaken. You'll be right. And you won't come to an end of the day like this man did. Tragedy it is, and tragedy it will be for those who follow in this train.

James T. Jeremiah:

Father, we pray that thou will bless thy word to our hearts. Help us to remember that we are not living for just now, but there is a future to be considered. And there is a life to be lived. Help us to recognize the crucifixion of self that He might have preeminence. And we may in turn do the thing that will please

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Him. We thank thee for these young people. We pray to bless their lives today and in the days which come in the future, in Jesus's name. Amen.