TITLE: What was or what is?

TEXT: Jere. 7:1-15; Ro. 2:19-23; Eccl. 5:1; Jn. 4:23-24; 2 Co. 3:1-3; Ps. 119:11; 2 Chr. 7:13-16

INTRODUCTION: We live in a nation that seems to be growing ever increasingly more hostile to God.

 Just the mention of His name seems to really set a lot of people off so they strive to remove even the mention of His name from society.

 In one generation we have removed God from our classrooms and many of our public places. Prayer is seen as something to make war against like it is a bad or terrible thing. One nation under God has become an offensive statement to many. Monuments and plaques that contain the Ten Commandments of God, they want removed from all of our public places and institutions.

 Why? I believe it is because the Ten Commandments represent an absolute standard of moral truth for righteous living in a world that wants to define its own standards for what is right and wrong.

 **You shall have no other gods before me** is an offensive statement to people who have many objects of worship in their life.

 **Do not make for yourself any graven image** is an offensive statement to people who have an insatiable appetite to possess more and more things.

 **Do not use Gods name in vain** is an offensive statement to those who have no respect for the God who paid the price of the cross to redeem them from their sin.

 **Keep the Sabbath Day holy** is an offensive statement to those who want to live their life their way, filling it with what their heart, or more accurately, their flesh desires.

 **Honor your Father and Mother** is an offensive statement to those whose primary focus in life is themselves.

 **Do not murder** is an offensive statement to those who want to gratify the sexually desires of their flesh without cost or consequence so they abort rather than to abstain..

**Do not commit adultery** is an offensive statement to those who don’t see their marriages as a covenant relationship where God is the mediator of that covenant.

 **Do not steal** is an offensive statement for those who see what they don’t have and desire to possess it regardless of how they get it.

**Do not Lie** is an offensive statement to those who have no regard for the truth. For those who think that lies are easier to live then the truth is.

 **Do not covet** is an offensive statement to those who are not content with their lot in life and spend their lives centered upon the acquiring of things that they see others have that they don’t. \*Our whole welfare structure is largely based upon covetousness…The poor wanting to get what the rich have.

 I ran across some very disturbing statistics one day that really got me thinking…

There was a survey done among those who claimed to be born again believers that revealed these statistics.

 In his particular survey only 32% of professing born again believing adults believe in moral absolutes. Only 32% of professing born again believing adults believe there are absolute truths where morality is concerned.

 Only 9% of professing born again teenagers believe in moral absolutes.

 What does that mean? It means that 68% of believing, professing born again adults don’t believe in moral absolutes. That 91 % of believing professing born again teens don’t believe in moral absolutes.

How can we expect the world in which we live to view the Ten Commandments of God as the moral standards for right living when so many that comprise the Church don’t even believe it..

 I was really challenged on something recently.

Let me ask you a question…

 Are the ongoing efforts to remove monuments displaying the Ten Commandments and the attempts to remove the Phrase “one nation under God” across our nation, a tragedy or a blessing? And who is really behind the effort to see them removed?

 Before you contemplate the answer turn with me to:

**Jer. 7:1 -15 (NIV) 1This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2“Stand at the gate of the LORD’S house and there proclaim this message:**

**“‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.**

**3This 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. 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!” 5If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, 6if you do not oppress the alien, 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, 7then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. 8But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.**

**9“‘Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, 10and 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? 11Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?**

What had happened here?

Ultimately the people were treating the temple, the house of God, as robbers do their dens. It was a temporary refuge till they went forth on another foray. Limestone caves in Palestine were used as robbers' dens; so Jeremiah's metaphor was clear to his hearers.

 Here was nothing less than corruption of the best and the holiest. The temple was, if you will, a monument to the Lord. The people would lie, cheat and steal during the week and then come to Gods temple to worship on the Sabbath.

 The Lord, having seen the situation, said that He would deal with them and it (the temple) accordingly.

**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. 13While 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.**

**14Therefore, 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 fathers. 15I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim.’**

 Shiloh was a town on the main highway between Jerusalem and Shechem. The Mosaic tabernacle was set up there after the conquest of Canaan .

 It was the abode of the ark and tabernacle during the era of the judges. In Saul's reign the tabernacle was at Nob. At Shiloh, Israel went into idolatry; so the ark was captured by the Philistines at the Battle of Ebenezer. The Bible gives no historical account of the destruction of Shiloh.

 Jeremiah's references to its destruction have been confirmed by excavations of the site, which revealed a city destroyed by the Philistines about 1050 B.C., probably after the Battle of Ebenezer. The dig was carried out by the Danish Palestine Expedition. Their finding’s confirmed Shiloh was to the judges what Jerusalem was to the kings. Jeremiah was a descendant of the Eli family; so the tragedy had personal implications for him. The destruction of Shiloh did not necessarily mean the demolition of the tabernacle, because it was still in existence at Gibeon in David's time, at the commencement of Solomon's reign. The sanctuary at Shiloh proved the falsity of the claim that the Lord was unalterably committed to an earthly temple and its preservation regardless of the moral state of the people.

**13-15** Because they had committed the sins mentioned in v. 9, **“‘Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, 10and 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?**

 Because they had committed these sins the Lord had earnestly and continuously entreated the people through his prophets to repent and turn back to Him, but without response.

 With a strong statement of words, Jeremiah portrays the Lord as "rising up early and speaking" (lit. Heb.; NIV, "I spoke to you again and again").

 Jeremiah makes it plain that the people trusted in the temple of God instead of the God of the temple.

**14Therefore, 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 fathers.**

What did God do to Shiloh? He destroyed it! And now He says he is about to do to the house that bears His name, the temple, what He did to Shiloh..

 Why? Because the people’s trust was in the Temple and not in the God of the Temple!

 They had made the temple, a building made with human hands, as an object of worship…

God is never dependent on any particular place of worship. For Jeremiah's hearers, this was unheard of heresy.

 The outcome of Judah's ways would soon be exile, as it had been for Ephraim (Israel), the northern kingdom, in 722 B.C..

 It wasn’t the Palestinian army that destroyed Shiloh and displaced the temple of God… But God used the Palestinian army to destroy Shiloh and displace the temple of God as a means of punishment for an apostate people.

 When the people started to worship the temple of God instead of the God of the temple, God removed the object of their worship.

 God hates graven images and the vein use of His name. He hates lying and false witnesses. He despises hypocrisy, especially regarding sacred and holy things.

 God made it clear to His people; He would personally destroy places of sacred memorials made by human hands if they no longer reflected what was in human hearts…

 So, let me ask you the question again?

 Are the ongoing efforts to remove monuments displaying the Ten Commandments and the attempts to remove the Phrase “one nation under God” across our nation a tragedy or a blessing? And who is really behind the effort?

 Could it be that God is using a secular world to remove memorials to Him that His Church has failed to live by?

 Just what is our objection to memorials with the Ten Commandments of God on them being removed from our public places?

 Is it merely because we view it as another attack upon Christianity or because we see it as an attack on our God?

 Or is it because the commandments we have applied to our life, we strive with all of our heart, mind and soul to live by them and want them displayed to memorialize the relationship that we personally have with God? Because they are but a reflection of what is in our hearts!

 Paul, speaking to the Church, has this to say in:

**Rom. 2:19 -23 (NIV)
19if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—21you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?**

 **You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?**

 Many within the Church have risen up in righteous indignation about monuments and plaques with the Ten Commandments on them being removed from our public places yet the statistics show that 68% of professing adult born again believer and 91% of teenage professing born again believers don’t even believe in the absolute moral truth that the Ten Commandments represent!

 Many within the Church cry out not to remove the phrase “One Nation under God’ from our pledge of allegiance even though that is a false statement!

 We are no longer one nation under God! At least that is not how the majority of Americans are living their lives! Including many with the Church!

 Instead of worshiping all these memorials to our God maybe we need to once again start to worship the God of our memorials!

**Eccl. 5:1 (NIV) 1Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.**

Jesus had this to say in:

 **John 4:23 -24 (NIV) 23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”**

We can’t come into the house of the Lord to worship Him on Sunday and then go out and cheat our neighbor or our boss on Monday and expect that our worship on Sunday was genuine!

We can’t come into the house of the Lord to worship Him on Sunday and then go throughout the next week living sexual immoral lives and expect that our worship on Sunday was real worship!

We can’t come into the house of the Lord to worship Him on Sunday and then go out and collect idols for ourselves all week long and expect that our worship on Sunday had any meaning to Him!

We can’t say we worship God on Sunday and then go about living our lives apart from His absolute standards of righteous living that memorials such as His Ten Commandments reveal to us and expect that we are really worshipping God!

 We can wallpaper our homes with the ten commandments of God, we can wear T-shirts with the Ten Commandments of God plastered all over them but if we don’t see them as absolute moral truth and then live our lives by them then we haven’t done anything but set up another graven image to worship made by man’s hands…..

**2 Cor. 3:1 -3 (NIV) 1Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.**

**3You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

I don’t believeGod gives a whoop if the Ten Commandments are posted in our courthouses or on our school walls or anywhere else within our nation **if** they are not first written on the tablets of our hearts!

 The word monument has two distinct applications.

 One is a tombstone identifying or symbolizing death. The other is a testimonial depicting legacy or life.

 My fear is that the monuments of the Ten Commandments removed from the courthouses and other public places across our nation actually symbolize the historical truth of what once was more then it depicts the reality of what is today---Not only for our nation, but as a general rule, in our Church’s as well..

 Let me ask another question this morning.

 Which do you suppose would glorify God the most? A public outrage by Christians over the removal of a monument displaying what is generally untrue even within the Church? Or a more honest display of public and humble confession by God’s people of the top Ten most grievous sins committed by Christians today that are revealed to us in the Ten Commandments?

 Would God be honored more by our outrage for monuments of the Ten Commandments being removed from our public places or would He be honored more if people, particularly we, His Church, would start to live our lives by those commandments? Live our lives as though they are the absolute standard of His moral truth?

**3You show that you are a letter from Christ--- written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

This is what King David meant when he wrote in the Psalms…

**Psa. 119:11 (KJV) 11Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**

Thy Word have I hid in my heart….

Hid = Hebrew Sapan= treasured a treasure stored.

Nsab Thy word have I treasured in my heart…

If we would truly hide, treasure Gods Word in our hearts, if we would embrace them as Gods absolute moral and ethical truth, His absolute standard for right living--Then it really wouldn’t make much difference what happened to memorials of stone and plastic-- memorials made by human hands.

 Memorials made by human hands can be re-moved and even destroyed.

 But not memorials that have been written on tablets of flesh, written on human hearts..

***Mark Twain*** *A businessman known for his ruthlessness, arrogance, and religiosity told Mark Twain that before he died he intended to visit the Holy Land, climb Mount Sinai, and read the Ten Commandments aloud. ‘I have a better idea,’ Twain replied. ‘Just stay here in Boston and keep them!’*

*We’d rather ponder on what we don’t know, than act on what we know we need to do.*

 King David didn’t trust in or worship the memorials to his God---He trusted in and worshiped the God of the memorials..

 God’s word was so precious, so valuable to David because he saw it, all of it, as Gods absolute standard of rightness and the best way, the safest way, to preserve it was to hide it in his heart where he could draw upon it at a moment’s notice, live his life by it day by day, moment by moment..

 **11Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**

A memorial needs to reflect reality.

 Monuments are not built to promote what one wishes were true! Rather, they are erected as a reflection of what is true.

 The biblical inscriptions on numerous monuments in our nation’s capital depict the truth of their day. Revival had swept the colonies and early America. Both the First and Second Great Awakenings spawned a God-consciousness and allegiance that is not only recorded in the annals of history, but on many of our monuments. Those monuments merely reflect what was going on in the hearts of our citizens of that day!

 To us, I believe they represent what once was more than they do what now is, from a national perspective anyway.

 My prayer is that God will allow the monuments of the Ten Commandments that have been removed from our courthouses and public places to return. But I pray that they will return not only as a public portrayal of God’s moral law but as a result of a nation that is aflame in revival!

 They return because they are a true reflection of what is a reality in the hearts and minds of our people.

 That our monuments would be a reflection of what is now and not just what once was..

 How will that ever happen? Is it even possible?

 God offers us this hope today….

**2 Chr. 7:13 -15 (NIV) 13“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.**

Church, we are the temple of the living God! He resides, not in buildings made with human hands, but He dwells within human hearts that have invited Him in.

 And revival has to first start here, within these temples, before it spreads anywhere else.

 God has said: **16I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.**

 And until we recognize that it is our life that is the primary monument and memorial to God that the world we live in will ever see, and then strive to live our lives accordingly, national revival will never come.

 God’s first call to repentance and revival comes to you and I, His Church…

**14if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**

Our land needs the healing touch of God upon it today!

 Our monuments need to be a reflection of the reality of what is not what once was…

 The hope for our nation lies at the door of the Church.

 The hope for our nation lies with you and me.

 Let me ask one final question this morning….

 If you had a monument of the Ten Commandments in your front yard, maybe you have one of those plastic yard signs with “Bring back the Ten Commandments” on it and then the Commandments are listed. If you had such a monument displayed, would it be a reflection of the reality of what is in your life today, or a reflection of a reality of something that once was in your life?

 What is the priorities of your life today?

The pastor J. Ellsworth Kalas begins his discussion of the first Commandment by discussing priorities, which of course, is at the heart of the first commandment: **You shall have no other God before Me..**

The biggest issue in life is priorities.

You don’t have to be religious to know that. We all acknowledge it every day, dozens of times a day. It is the essence of life for us list-makers; we draw up the list of the things we plan to do, then start numbering them in order of priority. Those whose budget is stretched to the limits stack up their bills according to the priority rule, “Which creditor will be most heartless?” For some it gets no more than how we observe a box of chocolates: Do I eat the creams first. Or the caramels?

Most of us manage our priorities reasonably well at these levels. Interestingly enough, we also do pretty well at the frightening extremities of life.

If our house catches fire, for instance, we’ll probably decide quickly and incisively about what to carry out and what to leave behind. But life itself is a more complicated call. Renowned preacher and author George Buttrick came one day upon a farmer who had just retrieved a lost sheep. When Buttrick asked how sheep wander away, the farmer answered, ‘They just nibble themselves lost,” They go, he explained, from one tuft of grass to another, until at last they’ve lost their way. And that, of course, is what happens with life. Unless we purposely establish a structure of priorities, we will nibble away at each inconsequential tuft of decision until life is gone, and we have little idea of what has happened to it.

So, what priority have we given God in our life?

Gods call to you and I, His Church, this morning…

**14if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**