

January 2, 2011 (Morning Sermon)

"Are We Pleasing God?"

Zechariah 7

When the people sent Sherezer and Regem-Melech and his men to the house of God, to pray about whether they should continue their tradition of fasting in certain months, what ultimately they were asking, was "is what we are doing pleasing God?"

This was a good question! It still is a good question today!

God tells them what they were doing, was NOT pleasing, why?

I. It was man-centered and not God centered –
... did you really fast for Me-- for Me? (Zechariah 7:5c NKJ)

When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? (Zechariah 7:6 NKJ)

1 Corinthians 10:31 tells why and how we are supposed to eat, fast or do anything - Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 NKJ)

It is not eating and drinking and fasting, God is condemning, REALLY He is condemning SELF FOCUSED RELIGION! This is the same thing Jesus does in the beginning of Matthew 6 ---

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.² "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.³ "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ "that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.⁵ "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.⁶ "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.⁷ "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen

do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.⁸ "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. (Matthew 6:1-8 NKJ)

If you know chapter six of Matthew, you know verses :9-13 are our Lord's prayer – That prayer starts with a Focus on God, His Kingdom, His will being done!

Later in verse the Kingdom focused, God first life is summarized –

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33 NKJ)

Yet, self-centeredness was not the only problem, if looking at themselves they would have condemned themselves ...

II. Their fasting and mourning was about the consequences of sin, and not the sin itself –

"Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months ... (Zechariah 7:5a NKJ)

1. Mourning is not a bad thing –

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4 NKJ)

2. Fasting if done right brings the mercy of God –

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.⁶ Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?¹⁰ Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. (Jonah 3:5-10 NKJ)

Notice the people of Nineveh knew they were sinners!

3. Yet in the fifth month and the seventh month they were fasting for the burning of the temple and city (Jerusalem) and the murder of the Governor Gedaliah -

⁸ And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹ He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. (2Ki 25:8-9 NKJ)

But it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck and killed Gedaliah, the Jews, as well as the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. (2 Kings 25:25 NKJ)

These were terrible events in Israel's history, yet the Lord brought these about to punish Israel's sin – Daniel 1:1-2

III. *These fasts became long term religious TRADITION –*
...: `When you fasted and mourned ... during those seventy years, (Zechariah 7:5b NKJ) *Going through the motions!*

What we should do -

IV. *Obey God's real commands –*

Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, ⁹ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: `Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. ¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.' (Zechariah 7:8-10 NKJ)

He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8 NKJ)

- *The New Geneva Study Bible - "true justice meant applying God's word to the problems, both personal and social, confronting the restoration community. They must deliver the oppressed and punish the oppressor."*
- *True Christianity begins with hearing God's word –*

"Therefore it happened, *that* just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts. (Zechariah 7:13 NKJ)

- *It continues with our being doers of the word –*

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:22-27 NKJ)

V. *If we do not obey, God has power to deal with us ---*

"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate." (Zechariah 7:14 NKJ)

1. *Notice these verses were dealing with a nation, a community!*
2. *Notice these verses were dealing with Israel!*

VI. *Application –*

1. *Live for God first – "this condemns all hypocritical religion, of course, but it also ennobles everything we do that is truly for God." Richard Phillips*
2. *Recognize your sin and REPENT!*
3. *Reconsider tradition / old habits, why do we do what we do?*
4. *Obey God, condemn sin, show mercy to the needy!*
5. *Realize God can and will judge sin both in believers and non-believers.*