

Pentwater Bible Church

Zechariah

Message 15 God's Realistic Righteousness

August 11, 2013



King David Kneeling Before God From The Bible of Matthias Corvinus, 1490

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The Book of Zechariah
Message Fifteen
God's Required Righteousness
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Painting by Sharlene Lindskog-Osorio

PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Zechariah 7:8-14

⁸And the word of Jehovah came unto Zechariah, saying, ⁹Thus hath Jehovah of hosts spoken, saying, Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother; ¹⁰and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the sojourner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart. ¹¹But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear. ¹²Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore there came great wrath from Jehovah of hosts. ¹³And it is come to pass that, as he cried, and they would not hear, so they shall cry, and I will

not hear, said Jehovah of hosts; ¹⁴but I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations, which they have not known. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate (ASV 1901).

TRUE JUDGMENT

Zechariah 7:8-10

⁸And the word of Jehovah came unto Zechariah, saying, ⁹Thus hath Jehovah of hosts spoken, saying, Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother, ¹⁰and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the sojourner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart (ASV 1901).

Once more the Word of God came directly to Zechariah bypassing his natural eyes and ears. God spoke directly to his soul imparting an important message for the nation Israel. We as the Church are beneficiaries as well (I Corinthians 10:11). Interestingly he takes himself out of the action and as an observer sees what is taking place. Instead of him saying I received the Word of God he says Zechariah received it! This technique has the extra emphasis to the hearers as including Zechariah in this prophecy as well as them. In other words he is identifying with them and *not speaking down to them*. This message is focused upon the conduct of the pre-exilic Israelites coupled with and admonition of “not to do the same things as them.” This section, which emphasizes the negative, will be followed by a positive upbeat message in the next chapter. God offers a complete prophecy, which is one, that ends with an optimistic conclusion. The prophetic cycle starts with God warning but always ending by expressing goodness and renewed life. Consider the book of Amos, which has mostly negative prophecies. It ends with a positive note for the nation Israel.

Amos 9:13-15

¹³Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. ¹⁴And I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. ¹⁵And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God (ASV 1901).

After all they have been through with their persecutions by the Gentile nations God did exactly as promised, He brought them back to the Land. They never lost the sovereignty of Israel that He gave them. They came back on May 15, 1948 and will be there from now on. This knowledge and adherence to God’s Word provided comfort to many Jews when

they were out of the country in exile. It also provides evidence to those there now that God always does what He says He will do.

God is now telling them exactly what He wants them to do. If they are going to obey His Word they must hear it very clearly and not have any doubt regarding its inspiration and divine authority. He wants them to *“Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother.”* He is stressing the man-to-man horizontal responsibilities to each other. This presupposes a correct relationship with God also known as the vertical relationship. The correct outcome of following God’s Word is a positive relationship between each other. This directive is for people in the Israelite community and not outside of it. It has a similar connotation to the word neighbor. Generally, the various Hebrew forms refer to someone that is extremely close. The Jewish usage of the term neighbor always means any member of the Hebrew nation and commonwealth. That is, another Israelite. It can refer to a brother, lover, companion, friend, or husband. In this instance God is making the relationship extremely close by using the term brother, another Jew.

In the New Testament we are commanded to love our neighbors. Perhaps the verses which exemplifies its usage the most is Matthew 23:38-39. In this section of Scripture the Lord is responding to a challenging question from one of the lawyers trying to trap Him in a theological issue related to the Law.

Matthew 23:38-39

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ‘This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. ‘All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (KJV)

Christ in His teaching here is referring them back to the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18 where the neighbor is narrowly defined as another Jew.

Leviticus 19:18

“ Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD (KJV).

The New Testament was written by and first given to the Jews. In fact Christ made the declaration early in His ministry that He had come only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). Paul tells us that the Gospel is to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16). It is important to consider the Jewish roots of Christianity in order to properly understand the Biblical text. We must consider the context also of Christ’s commandment to love one another as related in John’s gospel.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (KJV).

As Christians we are commanded to have a love for one another. This is consistent with Christ's usage of loving our neighbors in Matthew 22:39. Here He narrowly defines the love we are to have for others is to be first directly to others in the Body of Christ. Others being those outside the Christian community will see our special relationship to God. The apostle John captures this subject in his first epistle. He demonstrates that a true believer loves the brethren (other believers) otherwise stated as our neighbors.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren (KJV).

The proper interpretation of and action to brothers like neighbors is to first love and care for other believers. We are not commanded to hate those that harm us or do not believe. After directing our love and attention to our brethren we are to extend our love to the unbelieving community. We would like them become children of God as we have become. All people are made in the image of God and a have worth. We should treat them with respect and concern. The love Christians have for each other is unique and a special living testimony to our connection to the Lord Jesus and the salvation that He has given to us. Our first love must be for God then to other believers. The terms brother and neighbor are *narrowly defined though as other believers*.

As God directs Zechariah to tell the nation Israel how to relate to others in their nation He has reminded them not to make the same mistake their pre-exilic brethren made. They ignored God's Word. The prophet in verses 4-7 asserted that this community was beginning to do the same thing. Now they are being given a clear commandment to demonstrate their adherence to His Word by demonstrating godly relationships with each other. These took the form of four very specific and strong commandments give in the imperative.

1. Judge! Make proper judicial decisions based upon truth only.
2. Practice! Kindness and compassion and compassion in general conduct.
3. Do Not! Oppress the widow or the orphan, the transient or the poor.
4. Let None of You! Devise evil against his brother in your heart.

The first command is literally to make proper judgments based upon truth. Use objective evidence with complete impartiality, without dishonesty and lies. The second command is to do or work kindness, graciousness and compassion with one another. It is interesting that the Hebrew word used here for compassion is *rahamin*. It is a word derived from the same root letters of the Hebrew word for womb, which is *rehkem*. This refers to the “brotherly feeling of closeness” of those born of the same womb (Genesis 43:14; I Kings 8:50; Amos 1:1; Proverbs 12:10). This has the same dynamics as Jesus’ commandment to love one another (John 13:34).

The third commandment was given in the negative of “Do Not!” The Jews were commanded to not harm the most helpless in society. Those who do so clearly expose themselves as godless members of society. If they are declaring a relationship to God and persecuting or even taking advantage of the most helpless in society they are exposing themselves as hypocrites to those who know God and His commands. In modern society nothing is a stronger example of this than those who claim the name of Christ but nevertheless endorse aborting the most helpless members of our society.

The last injunction is a recapitulation of the others but identifying the source of the Jew’s ills and those of all societies as well. The fundamental sin that lies hidden but contributes to all others is *evil formed within the heart of one against another*. This one goes deeper and causes the most harm because the evil heart is hidden and mostly indiscernible to those who are close to us. We can easily become victims of the evil of someone close to us if they decide to take advantage of us. Our trust is higher with them and therefore we are more vulnerable. The proverb warns us against the same thing. The Lord is very emphatic about this as He placed this in the fourth summary position of these commands and frequently presents it elsewhere in Scripture. The discussion of evil appears 613 times in 569 verses. God is serious about this.

Proverbs 3:29

Devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee (KJV).

RESISTANCE TO GOD’S WORD

Zechariah 7:11-12

¹¹But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear. ¹²Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore there came great wrath from Jehovah of hosts (ASV 1901).

God is now telling the Jews through the prophet Zechariah to not be as the pre-exilic Jews who turned away from Him. God now sharply defines the steps of one pulling away from God and His Word. This is true of any people of God if they stray.

1. Refused to Hearken or pay attention. This is where it starts. First there is a disinterest of the things of God because of the pull of the world or the flesh fuelled by Satan and our own sinful self which is still living within us as the Old Man. Here, however, the process of Israel's self-hardening and disobedience, which resulted in their expulsion from the land and the scattering of the people, is expanded into intermediate steps.
2. Stubbornly Refusing to turn Back. The characterization of this emanates from one who has gotten away from God for so long that "self" is all that matters. Zechariah provides the word picture of one pulling away their shoulder in rebellion as an ox refusing to be placed in a yoke or a donkey refusing to be led by a bridle placed on it. The imagery is one of the subjects refusing any authority being placed upon it. So too is the reaction of one distanced from God and His Word (Jeremiah 7:26; 17:23; etc.)
3. Deliberately Refuse to Listen. One can easily see the next stage after refusing to turn back. Next is no desire to hear God's Word entering through the ear gate, which is primary communication channel for receiving His Word. The ears become heavy so to speak, as they are dull to the admonition and straightforward judicial judgments of God. The auditory sense becomes unresponsive and will not hear as it becomes hardened (Isaiah 6:10 etc.).
4. Causing Ones Heart to Harden. Now the inner receptors of the Word of God are caused to be as hard as a stone so as to not receive any softening from God's Word to change attitude and behavior. The heart or inner being becomes impenetrable and impossible to soften with words. The Bible uses the term heart to describe man's will, mind, soul, or affections (Deuteronomy 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; Joshua 22:5 etc.). One passage in Ezekiel describes this situation as harder than flint. (Ezekiel 3:9). This verse describes a substance (flint), which is so hard it would cut rocks and would not be engraved upon to receive the characteristics of God.

This is the inevitable and terrible moral consequence of people turning away from *doing* the will of God. Interestingly the more they hear, the duller their perceptions become. In the end, they can't see what they have done. The final stage of this process of rebellious self-hardening is a heart that is as hard as stone. The only way God can soften it is through physical persecution. He judged Israel and had the Babylonians carry them into exile. Now He warns them not to be like their forefathers. And the process of apostasy here described by Zechariah continued even after the partial restoration of the Second Temple Period. The ultimate rejection after the hardening was reached after much disobedience to His Word. Israel as a nation rejected their Messiah Who was

not only the greatest of the prophets, but was Himself “the living Word of God” Jesus.

JEHOVAH PROVIDES CORRECTION

Zechariah 7:13-14

¹³And it is come to pass that, as he cried, and they would not hear, so they shall cry, and I will not hear, said Jehovah of hosts; ¹⁴but I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations, which they have not known. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate (ASV 1901).

This is a reference to the fact that since they would not respond to God’s warnings but chose to lapse into a progressive spiritual deterioration they will suffer the consequences. It was true for the pre-exilic Jews as well as applying to the people returning after the captivity and today. God calls us to love Him and live wholesome lives in communion with Him. We have Israel as an example of how God corrects. He scattered the Jews, which were then called the Diaspora into nations they didn’t know, and the land was left desolate. The pleasant land (Israel), which should have been fruitful, was turned into a desert.

These are the awful consequences of the “great wrath” which came from God. He said “*But I will scatter them*” רםעואם (*ve’esa-areim*—“*as with a whirlwind,*” or, “*I will toss them*”) “*among all the nations which they have not known*”; who will therefore have no pity or compassion upon them. In fact they persecuted them. It did not begin with the destruction of the First Temple and the seventy years’ captivity in Babylon. But it will end when they finally make a profession of faith corporately in their Messiah and He returns to the earth to establish His Kingdom

NEXT WEEK: GOD RESTORES HIS FAVOR

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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