

MAKING A DIFFERENCE / Sunday, August 23, 2015

Unifying Topic: GOD DEMANDS JUSTICE

Lesson Text

I. God's Call For Justice (Zechariah 7:8-10)

II. They Refused To Listen (Zechariah 7:11-12a)

III. Wrath From The Lord (Zechariah 7:12b-14)

The Main Thought: Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother. And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.. (Zechariah 7:9-10, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Some people show not kindness, mercy, or justice to others. Who will protect the weak from their oppressors? Zechariah says that God requires kindness and mercy for the widows, orphans, aliens, and the poor.

Lesson Aim: To study the punishment meted out by God for those who reject God's commands.

Lesson Aim: To show kindness to the oppressed and the weak.

HISTORY:

Zechariah is the author of this book whose name means "*The Lord Remembers*." He writes to the Jews in Jerusalem who had returned from captivity in Babylon and to God's people everywhere.

7:1 And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu;— Two years had passed since God had spoken to Zechariah according to Zechariah 1:1 (second year); now it's the fourth year of king Darius. He allowed construction of the temple to resume. This is not a vision but a message to be related to His people through Zechariah. The precise date: the fourth year, the fourth day of the ninth month; chisleu overlaps with November /December (the Hebrew calendar). This was two years into the rebuilding of the Temple.

7:2 When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the Lord,— A delegation had been sent unto the house of God. Their Assyrian names were Sherezer (meaning "*Perfect of the treasury*") and Regemmelech (meaning "*the king's official or friend of the king*") came from Bethel in the north with their men to pray before the Lord. Two hundred and twenty-three of the exiles returning with Ezra and had settled in Bethel. They sent to Jehovah's house as their forefathers sent to old Bethel, not in the spirit of true obedience; they came to Jerusalem to seek the favor of the Lord or pacify Him.

7:3 And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?— As they prayed before the Lord, they were to speak to the priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts (*whose responsibility it was to give interpretation and make decisions concerning points pertaining to the Law*), and to the prophets (*Haggai and Zechariah*), because for the previous 70 years, the people had been holding a fast in August to remember the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, that the temple was being rebuilt, they came to the Temple where the priest and prophets were to ask if they had to continue this annual fast; should they weep in the fifth month to commemorate the burning and destruction of Jerusalem; and should they separate themselves from food as they had done these many years in the Babylonian exile. The fifth month was the month in which the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Weeping and abstaining from food and other luxuries were ritual acts of mourning aimed to demonstrate repentance and thereby change God's disposition toward the apologetic one. But, God never commanded them to do this fast. But, the question is raised by those of Bethel, but, the answer is applicable to all the land. Now that the Babylonian captivity had ended and the nation was on its way to recovery, the observance of the fast seemed pointless to them to continue to observe.

7:4 Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying,— The Lord of hosts —the Lord of the heavenly, angelic army reveals His Word to Zechariah again.

7:5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?— God directly spoke to Zechariah to speak to all the people of the land, and to the priests. The question put to them: When they fasted in the fifth and seventh month to commemorate those seventy years—the burning of Jerusalem, was it really a fast unto God or unto themselves? It's just like paying our tithes which is to be unto God, not unto the church to make us look good. This question calls for an investigation of their true motives, meaning whatever they did was to be to the glory of God! It makes me think, when we go to church, do we really want to be there? When we offer praise and worship unto God, is it sincere? When we fast and present our programs to God, does He get the glory because we prepared in prayer? Was any of it just out of repetition? I repent unto you Lord when it was not unto you!

7:6 And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?—This verse is a continuation of verse 5. Thus, the Lord has revealed that in neither their fasts nor their feasts has He been pleased, for their motives were wrong. God is never pleased with mere external formalities and conformities. The Israelites had lost their sincere desire for a loving relationship with God. Zechariah told them that they had been fasting without a proper attitude of repentance or worship. The Lord denounces the disobedience of the people who sent them and the hypocrisy of the hosts. Fasting had been carried out as a mere formality and not by an act of true repentance. It was just like when their eating and drinking had benefited them.

7:7 Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?— This was a time when Jerusalem and the cities around them were inhabited in prosperity; even men filled the southern suburbs out along the plain. Zechariah asks "*Do you not know the words the Lord proclaimed?*"; "*Should ye not obey the words?*" cried by the former prophets. It had been a common cry of the prophets from earlier times that men must not put their trust in the observance of outward ceremonies, but attend to the cultivation of moral obedience and purity. If they had listened to the words of the Lord, the temple would never have been destroyed, and there would be no occasion to institute these fasts to commemorate its destruction. The important matter of this message was not rituals, but obedience.

LESSON:

Zechariah 7:8-10 God's Call For Justice

7:8 And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying,— As the Word of the Lord came to many former prophets (v.7), so it came to Zechariah. God does not have a new message to proclaim to the people. His standards of righteousness and justice have not changed. He is calling for justice; fairness; righteousness and equality again.

7:9 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:— Again "*the Lord of the heavenly armies*" speaks to Zechariah. Here, God tells Zachariah what He expects of His people. He says that they are to execute true judgment; judge them in truth. They are to show mercy and compassion in their daily lives; be honest and fair; be merciful and kind to each man's brother (to every one that needs them).

7:10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. One cannot be right with God and have wrong relationships with the people in his life. To do so is to exercise an unrighteous judgment which the Lord hates, for it is inconsistent with His character, for He is the righteous Judge of all the earth. Zechariah was to tell them to stop oppressing the

widows and orphans, foreigners and poor people and to stop plotting evil against each other in their heart.

Zechariah 7:11-12a They Refused To Listen

7:11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Who are "they"? This was to remind the people of the nation's response in the past. "They" are the forefathers. Their forefathers heard the Word through the former prophets, but they refused to listen. They turned a stubborn shoulder. This is the action of an ox that refuses to accept the yoke upon its neck. They even stopped up their ears so they couldn't hear.

7:12a Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone,—Yes, they made their hearts hard as a diamond-like stone. Zechariah explained to the people that their ancestors brought God's great wrath on themselves by hardening their hearts. Any sin seems more natural the second time. That means, as we become hardened, each repetition is easier. Ignoring or refusing God's warning hardens you each time you do wrong. Zechariah compared the resulting attitudes to the hardest substance the Jews knew.

Zechariah 7:12b-14 Wrath From The Lord

7:12b ...lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Each time the Lord of the heavenly army sent His angelic being to speak a Word in the prophet's spirit, they spoke truth by the Spirit of God. Because they didn't want to hear; willfully rejecting (willful disobedience) to the law and the words, God's great wrath came upon the people. The people thereby, harden their hearts as an adamant stone; making their heart hard as a diamond-like stone. They brought this wrath upon themselves.

7:13 Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts:— These next two verses remind the people of the results that the nation's ancestors experience because of disobedience. They refused to hear the Word of the Lord when He cried unto them, thus, the Lord refused to hear them when they cried unto Him as His judgment overtook them. Wow!

7:14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate. Since they didn't hear, the Lord's judgment scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they knew not of. And the land became desolate as they left it behind. No man passed through nor returned to it. The scattering was a reference to their captivity to both Assyria and Babylon. The sin of these people was the cause of the devastation visited upon the land by the Lord of hosts. They turned a land of delights into a desert. Thus the point to Zechariah's second message is that willful disobedience leads to severe judgment.

SUMMARY:

The Word of the Lord came unto Zechariah to execute true judgment. They were to be honest and fair; take no bribes; and to be merciful to everyone. They were to stop oppressing the widows and orphans, foreigners and the poor; and stop plotting evil against each other (vv.8-10).

He tells them that their forefathers wouldn't listen to this same message. They turned a deaf ear and harden their hearts (vv.11-12a).

They were afraid to hear the words and the law that Almighty God commanded the earlier prophets to speak by the Spirit. That's why the Lord of host sent such a great wrath down upon them. God says He called and cried unto them through the prophets, but they refused to listen, so when they called and cried unto Him He turned away. He scattered them as a whirlwind would to far-away nations. And their land became desolate; no one traveled through it, causing a once inhabited prosperous land to be an uninhabited desert (vv.12b-14).

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