

God Remembered
Zechariah 7:1-14
Chapter 11
“What The LORD Requires”

Disobedience and Fasting

In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev. Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer, Regem-melech, and their men to plead for the Lord’s favor by asking the priests who were at the house of the Lord of Armies as well as the prophets, “Should we mourn and fast in the fifth month as we have done these many years?”

Then the word of the Lord of Armies came to me: “Ask all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and in the seventh months for these seventy years, did you really fast for me? When you eat and drink, don’t you eat and drink simply for yourselves? Aren’t these the words that the Lord proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem was inhabited and secure, along with its surrounding cities, and when the southern region and the Judean foothills were inhabited?”

The word of the Lord came to Zechariah: “The Lord of Armies says this: ‘Make fair decisions. Show faithful love and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the resident alien or the poor, and do not plot evil in your hearts against one another.’ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder; they closed their ears so they could not hear. They made their hearts like a rock so as not to obey the law or the words that the Lord of Armies had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. Therefore intense anger came from the Lord of Armies. Just as he had called, and they would not listen, so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord of Armies. I scattered them with a windstorm over all the nations that had not known them, and the land was left desolate behind them, with no one coming or going. They turned a pleasant land into a desolation.”
Zechariah 7

In *The New Testament*, there is a word that you will see repeatedly, especially in the writings of Peter and Paul. The word is “*eusebeia*” in the Greek, and it is most commonly translated as “*godliness*”. Over time, I have tried (and failed) to come up with a perfectly accurate description of exactly what is meant by that term. Strong’s Concordance describes the meaning as “*piety towards God*”. But even that seems to fall short.

As Believers, we are supposed to be genuine in our faith, which means there can be no room for hypocrisy. Did you know that you can do all the right things for all the wrong reasons? Its true. And believe it or not, it happens a lot more than one would imagine. What comes to mind for me when I think of people doing things for show, are politicians. Many of them (not all I’m sure) are far more concerned with appearances than actually serving the people they have been elevated to serve. Oh, they may do the right thing occasionally, and it may actually have done some good, but was it done as a service to others or simply out of self-service in order to stay in power? The skeptic in me tends to believe the latter most of the time.

Religion can be, and often times ends up being, much the same way. People appear to be serving Christ, but if the truth were told, they are merely edifying themselves. They may even do a few good deeds along the way, but the motivation is to elevate self and not others. And once again, it happens a lot more that one might imagine. So what is “*godliness*” (*eusebeia*) exactly? Well, I think we can actually see a perfect explanation in the *Seventh Chapter of Zechariah*. God shows us through His prophet exactly what the word means. And the best definition that I can offer is this: *Godliness is doing*

the right thing, with the right attitude, and the right motivation. Anything less... is simply fake religiosity. And while we may be able to fool many others with our actions, God can most certainly tell the difference. So simply "serving" isn't all there is to it. After all, even Judas was a church treasurer!

Two full years after all his visions in the night, the Prophet Zechariah tells us of a delegation of men from Bethel, who traveled to Jerusalem to inquire of The LORD through the prophets (namely Zechariah and Haggai) and the temple priests. They wanted to know The LORD'S opinion of a fasting tradition that had begun at the time of the Babylonian captivity. The whole thing had to do with a scheduled fasting day that had been observed each year for the past seventy plus years to mourn the destruction of the temple.

The reasoning behind the men's question was now that things were going good and the temple was being rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, was it still necessary to continue fasting over the destruction of Solomon's temple? It doesn't take a genius to figure out that they were hoping to eliminate this particular day of mourning. So they asked the priests and prophets to inquire of The LORD on their behalf.

Zechariah came back with The LORD'S reply and it was telling. One sentence in particular really stands out from the rest:

When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months for these seventy years, did you really fast for Me? Zechariah 7:5b

The people of Israel had fasted annually in the fifth and seventh months of the year. The fifth month was to mourn the destruction of the temple (**2 Kings 25:8-21**), and in the seventh month, they memorialized one of their leaders (namely Gedaliah **2 Kings 25:22-26, Jeremiah 39:1**), who was assassinated shortly after the Babylonian invasion.

These fast days were established to mourn over the hard times the people had endured. But where was the mourning for losing their closeness with God? It is one thing to be sorry for our sins because they finally caught up to us, but it is quite another to mourn because we have rebelled against The One who created us in His own image. It's called "repentance". I've known many people who were "sorry they got caught", but how many are truly sorry that they wandered away from God in the first place? As The Scriptures have said:

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

Once again, its about doing the right thing, with the right attitude, and the right motivation.

After God rebuked the people for their empty fasts that had everything to do with them, and nothing to do with Him, He commanded the people to serve Him by loving their neighbors as themselves. For one can tell that you truly love God by the way that you love others. Listen to the words of Christ:

I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34-35

Now listen to what John the Apostle had to say on the subject:

If anyone says, "I love God," and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 1 John 4:20

Once more: Godliness is doing the right thing, with the right attitude, and the right motivation.

God reveals to us much about His character in this passage in Zechariah. Rather than vain rituals and empty worship, He would prefer that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is genuine *eusebeia* (godliness). And to live in this manner is to truly have a worshipful life. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian, any more than sleeping in your garage will make you a car. To be a true Believer is to believe in Christ and allow Him to live and reign *in you!*

So why do you do what you do? We should each examine our own hearts in the light of God's commands. First, are we even doing the right thing? And if so, are we doing it begrudgingly or with the right heart attitude? And finally, what is the motive behind what we do? Do we long to be pleasing to God, or are we simply doing what is right so that others will notice? Are we motivated by guilt or by love? What would the church be like, if we truly were all *living sacrifices*?

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

Romans 12:1

As opposed to:

This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands.

Matthew 15:8-9

One day, all who profess the Name of Jesus will stand before the judgment seat of Christ in order to give an account for what we have done with all that we have been given. God knows our hearts, and our God... *Remembers.*

With what shall I come before The LORD, and bow myself before The High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will The LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 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 6:6-8 (NKJV)