

**What God Expects of Us**  
**Zechariah 7**

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*7:1 In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. 2 The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the LORD 3 by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"*

*4 Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: 5 "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? 6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? 7 Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'"*

*8 And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: 9 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.'*

*11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.*

*13 "'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the LORD Almighty. 14 'I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.'"*

The Book of Zechariah is an apocalyptic writing of the Old Testament. As you may already know, apocalyptic literature is a very specific type of writing style. It is cool and probably not by accident that the people who laid out our Bible reading schedule have Zechariah and Revelation being read together. They are both apocalyptic style writings. The difference is that Revelation was written in Greek by John during the New Testament time frame while Zechariah was written in Hebrew during the Old Testament time frame. John was writing an apocalyptic book in a time and culture where that genre of literature was already obsolete and the language didn't lend itself to the task.

The writing of Zechariah and Revelation include many visions and symbols. The key to this style is to recognize that the meaning of the symbol is in the symbol. We should not fall victim to the temptation to speculate what the visions equate to in our modern timeframe. Find the meaning of the symbol in the period of the audience culture and you will find the meaning for us today. God never changes. It means the same now as it meant then. The symbols are a means to the intent God has for them and us. I can't stress that enough. I get really upset at all the speculative interpretation out there about the End Times, etc.

I would like to look at our text for today in kind of a reverse order to make what I think is the Holy Spirit's point to us today. To set the stage, I would like to establish that Zechariah is a contemporary of other prophets of the O.T. You have to remember that the books of the O.T. are not arranged chronologically, but more in size order (especially when we get to the books of the prophets). Therefore, Zechariah is near the end of the O.T. in size order, but more in the time frame of Haggai, and Ezra. The book's main theme is the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after the complete ruination of Jerusalem by Babylon seventy years earlier. This is followed by the theme that a new King would come for Israel, the Messiah, who would be slain for the sins of the people of God. The book was most likely written in the early 400's BC.

So what does God expect of us? What can we do to please Him? Is God glad with your life plan and actions? How can you make Him glad with you?

I love to think of God in the role of a Father, just like Jesus tried to show us. As a father, don't you always love your children? Sometimes they may bring you joy, but sometimes they may bring you grief. Don't you still love them? I think God is like that in some aspects. He loves us always. Sometimes we may disappoint Him, and He loves us in the pain of disappointment, but sometimes we bring Him joy and He loves us with a glad heart. He is our Dad – our Father – who loves us no matter what, but we make wrong choices many times that brings Him disappointment. Don't disappoint the Lord.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS:**

*11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.*

*13 "'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the LORD Almighty. 14'I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.'"*

Like I said, I would like to look at this chapter in a type of reverse order. The people of God disobeyed Him and paid dearly. Look at how this came about. ***"They refused to pay attention..."*** Isn't that what disobedience is? Isn't when you know what to do, but refuse to do it? God had instructed them about what to do, how to live, and how to please God and be rewarded, but they wouldn't listen. They didn't heed the words of the Law

or the Prophets. *“Stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears.”* Can you get a mental image of this symbolism? Have you ever had a child do that to you when you try to advise them of what’s best for them? I can remember Brian getting so upset that he would hold his hands over his ears and start yelling so he didn’t have to hear what we were trying to tell him. He’s 28 now and getting married in a few weeks, so he hasn’t done anything like that for a few months now 😊

Look at the consequences of their actions and decisions. It says that God allowed them to be defeated. He allowed the enemies to destroy their land, and they were scattered. Disobedience to God’s Word brings His anger, wrath, and judgment. He cannot look the other way and allow it. We are either pleasing God by how we live or we are bringing judgment against ourselves. He desires us to obey and please Him. **Ps. 81:13 – *Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!*** Our greatest joy as parents is when our children obey because they realize we are giving true and sound advice that is best for them. Our greatest disappointments are when they disobey and do not consider the consequences of their bad decision to ignore us. I think God feels the same way with us. **3 John 4 – *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.***

Do you ever feel that your prayers are not being heard or answered? These people felt the same way when they were defeated even though they asked God for help. Look at verse 13 – *‘When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,’ says the LORD Almighty.*

**There are consequences to our actions.**

#### **FOUR WAYS TO PLEASE GOD**

Let’s look at a few ways God says we can bring Him joy in what we do and how we live. Let’s look again at verses 9&10 of our text. ***“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.’***

God gives us four examples of how to live in a way that pleases Him. Two things we are to do and two things we are not to do. This is what God expects of us...

***Administer true justice*** – Be just as God is just, but also be merciful as God is merciful. True justice holds others accountable without holding it over their head in arrogance. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah as he speaks about the type of justice Messiah will bring to the earth. This is the kind of justice God wants us to uphold and promote.

**Isa 42:1-4 – *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.***

Strength with compassion and mercy – Jesus is just and kind. He gives every opportunity for us to come back humbly to God.

**Show mercy and compassion to one another -** We are to make sure true justice is served, but at the same time, be merciful and compassionate to those who have repented for their wrong-doing just as God is merciful and compassionate to every sinner who repents.

**Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor – (those in need)**  
(either by action or by neglect)

**Isa 1:17 - learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.**

**Matt. 25:31-46** - Jesus teaches us to minister to the needs of the unfortunate and needy because by serving them you are serving Jesus. How you treat them is how you are treating Jesus. God takes the way we treat those in need very personally. Because of His love and compassion for the needy, we are offending Him if we do not minister to their needs and neglect the helpless.

<Susan's Story for Daniel> My Dad said that fire drill was our angel from heaven!  
PRAISE THE LORD for He is our wonderful provider ... especially for the fatherless child ...

God still desires us to help the widow and the fatherless, the needy and the poor. It makes Him happy with us when we have a heart for the helpless.

**In your hearts do not think evil of each other-** Don't scheme and plan against those who have hurt you or even mistreated you. Don't hold onto bitterness and anger for past offenses among the Christian community. Forgive as God has forgiven you and move on so you can be blessed and please your Father in Heaven.

Each of these areas deals with how we treat others, but Zechariah tells us that this is what God expects of us, and this is how we can please God and be blessed. We can make God glad or sad by how we act toward Him and toward others. When our relationship with Him is right, then our relationship with others will be right as well. We can truly love our neighbor as ourselves and fulfill the highest commandment of God.

Whenever God says things more than once, we should really pay close attention to that directive, word of caution, or instruction. God repeats almost exactly in the next chapter the same actions that will bring Him joy. He again mentions two things to do and two things not to do (because He hates them). Pretty strong words for God to use.

**Zech 8:14-17**

**14 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you and showed no pity when your fathers angered me," says the LORD Almighty, 15 "so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do**

*not be afraid. 16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD.*

## **THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS A MATTER OF THE HEART**

*1 In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. 2 The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the LORD 3 by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" 4 Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: 5 "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? 6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? 7 Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'"*

The people had been fasting since the destruction of the temple seventy years earlier. Now that they are rebuilding the temple, they want to know from God if they have to keep on fasting about that. The Jews in Jerusalem were about half way finished building the Temple at this point when the town of Bethel (house of God) sends representation 12 miles to Jerusalem to inquire of God if they can stop fasting now. They have had enough punishment and just want to stop. For seventy years they would fast and mourn because the temple and Jerusalem was destroyed. Bethel – a past disobedient city riddled with idol worship now has turned back to God and wants to be blessed. Beth-El – house of God became the house of many gods by their disobedience and sin. “We have suffered for so many years, fasting and mourning – oh poor us. Look at God’s response to their request... Who were you really doing all that for anyway? Was it really for Me? They really weren’t sorry for what they had done that caused their grief to begin with; they just wanted the punishment to stop. They had been fasting and mourning with the wrong motives of the heart. They had it all wrong, but they religiously kept it going.

Do you fast and pray? Why do you do it? Do you announce it to others so they will know you are fasting? We have Christian ways of doing that... Brother, pray for me while I am fasting about this or that. You know.

Why are you here today? Why did you come to church? Why do you do what you do for God? Why do you pray? Why do you read and study the Bible? Why do you serve in the church ministries? Why are you here?

If it is so you can feel better, or that you can have your needs met by God, or because you need to have fellowship with other believers, or any other reason that revolves around you and your needs, then you have missed it too. The only motive of the heart that we should ever have is to worship God, to love Him more, to know Him better, and to please

the Lord and make Him smile. That's a pure motive for doing anything for God. That's what He desires and expects of us. **It's all about Him!** Put Him First In Everything. Pastors too – we can get so caught up in reading the Bible to find a sermon, that we neglect our own time of just worshipping God through what He has said to us. **You see the heart of the matter really is a matter of the heart.**

<**Illustration: Micah 6:8** – Chuck Swindoll's Sermon Illustrations, p. 330>

The ancient prophet Micah isn't exactly a household word. Too bad! Though obscure, the man had his stuff together. Eclipsed by the much more famous Isaiah, who ministered to the elite, Micah took God's message to the streets...

Micah states exactly what many, to this day, wonder about pleasing God. Teachers and preachers have made it so sacrificial, so complicated, and so extremely difficult. To them, God is virtually impossible to please. Therefore, religion has become a series of long, drawn-out, deeply painful acts designed to appease this peeved Deity in the sky who takes delight in watching us squirm.

Micah erases the things on the entire list, replacing the complicated possibilities with one of the finest definitions of simple faith:

**Mic 6:8 - He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**

God does not look for the big-time, external display... What is required? Slow down and read the list aloud: **To do justice ... To love kindness... To walk humbly with your God. Period! The END.**

This kind of sums up the whole message for today. We have to get our motives right with God and pure in His sight. Our goal in life must be to simply please God in everything we do. When we get that right, we will better minister to the needs of others from a truly compassionate and loving heart. We will not have to suffer the consequences of our self-centered actions or wrong decisions. Like most things, it comes down to this...

**Love God and then love others they way He loves you.** If we could get that down, we would have reached Christian perfection as Wesley would put it, but it is a process and should be our Christian goal. The entire Hebrew Law and the entire N.T. revolves around this truth... If we could humble ourselves before God and walk in His ways, we would also treat others the way He intends us to. This is what God expects of us.

How do you measure up?