



LOCKINGCASTLECHURCH

Life Group Notes – 31st October 2021

Coming back to the heart: Justice for all. Zechariah 7

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Zechariah 7: Justice and mercy, not fasting

7 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. ²The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melek, together with their men, to entreat the LORD ³by 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?' ⁴Then 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?' ⁶And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?' ⁷Are 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?'"

⁸And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: ⁹'This is what the LORD Almighty said: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other."

¹¹'But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. ¹²They 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 they left behind them was so desolate that no one travelled through it. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate."

Note this is the NIV2011 version of the text. It would be helpful to compare it with other translations.

Comment:

It's 2 years since Zechariah's night of visions full of hope and promise. 2 years more to go of this final phase of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. A delegation of Jews from Bethel went to the temple to ask 'Is it worth us continuing the fast, as we have done for so many Years?'

The exiles had been fasting for all they had lost, on anniversaries of past calamities. This fast in the 5th month marks the destruction of the temple 70 years ago. Was their fasting really motivated by love for God or was it all about self? Were they fasting because they were sorry for themselves, rather than sorry for the sins that had brought the tragedy upon them?

They should have started fasting and repenting while Jerusalem was still standing, 'at peace and still prosperous'. Think of Jonah's message to Nineveh – they fasted and repented and avoided the penalty.

Jesus warned us against fasting to show how religious we are. All our religious rituals, come down to the attitude of our hearts. Any holy ritual is to be done prayerfully, to God, looking to His word, and for His glory. Humbling ourselves, seeking the Lord with sincere hearts.

Justice and mercy aren't optional extras to add to our faith, or to earn salvation. Justice and mercy are an Integral part of our walk with God. Zechariah 7 v9,10 these words of God calling us to action are the actions of God himself towards us, Deuteronomy 10 v 17,18

The return from exile is a picture of God calling us home to His heart and asking us to act upon those things which break his heart, as well as share in those things which give him joy. Also, as we have received from him, to share from out of his abundance his beautiful justice compassion mercy grace and love to others.

Questions:

- 1) How can we guard our hearts from legalism and ritualism? Do we trust in our relationship with God, or in religious rituals? Can 'religion' take us away from genuine engagement with God?
- 2) Who is on the throne of your heart? Are there times when we find either ourselves or other things sharing the throne?
- 3) Why did Jesus say 'when you fast do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, put on oil on your head and wash your face.' (Matt 6:16,17).
- 4) 'Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.' 1 Corinthians 10: 31b. What God prizes in us is when we act justly for Him, without the need for recognition from people. How is prioritising how we appear to others, like putting on a spiritual blindfold?
- 5) In light of this passage what sort of church is the Lord wanting us to become over the next year?