

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Turning the Fast into a Feast

Scripture: Zechariah 8:1-23

Code: 2163

I'd like us to turn to the 8th Chapter of Zechariah for our time tonight; Zechariah Chapter 8. And the title that I've given to the chapter is When God Turns The Fast Into a Feast; When God Turns The Fast Into a Feast. This is a tremendous chapter. It's a continuation of Chapter 7, which we looked at last time as we'll see in just a moment. In the 13th Chapter of John in the 1st verse, there is a statement there that I think is very important because it gives us a great insight into the nature of God. It says that "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto perfection." "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto perfection."

God has always had a tremendous love for His people. In John 13 it is saying that Jesus loves His own unto perfection, unto the very limit, unto the extremity of the capacity of love. There is no diminishing of God's love to His children, to His people. It is unbounded. It is unlimited. And one of the great truths that Christians have through the years celebrated about the character of God is this aspect of God's love. In fact, if you were to ask the average Christian to name the number one and primary attribute of God, no doubt most of them would say His love. Perhaps quoting the words of John "For God is love." And it's true that we are the people of God and that we most excitedly think about the love of God insofar as we experience the wonderful grace that comes as a result of that love. And so we study the Bible and we find out that God has always overflowed with love to His people.

Whether it is the church of the New Testament or whether it is Israel of the Old Testament. God has always manifested boundless love to His children. And I think we are more aware of God's love for His church in the New Testament than we are of His love for Israel in the Old. And so I'd like us just briefly to examine the concept of God's love for His people Israel. And to begin with if you want to follow along, we'll start in Deuteronomy Chapter 7. And we're just going to mention a couple of things to kind of focus in on this thought. God's love for His people Israel.

We really don't question His love for the church, we who are Christians, we who study the New Testament, but perhaps we're not as clear about His love for Israel. In Deuteronomy 7:6 it says, "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God. The Lord thy God has chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself above all people who are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn to your fathers hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you out of

the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt."

So here you have a couple of mentions of the love that God had for Israel and the consequence of that love, the calling of Israel, and the deliverance of Israel from out of bondage in Egypt. In individualizing that love we could note 2 Samuel 12:24 and I'll just read this to you. It says, "And David comforted Bathsheba, his wife, and went in under her and lay with her and she bore a son and he called his name Solomon and the Lord loved him." Here then is the individual love that God has for the individual child, the individual person who is in His family.

In the Psalms there is a great expression of God's love for His people in many places. And we could look at many, many verses, but if we just would remind ourselves, say for example, of Psalm 91, it would be sufficient to assure us of the tremendous love of God. And it talks about what God is going to do to preserve the object of His love. "The one who dwells in the secret place of the most high." Then over in Isaiah Chapter 49, I told you we were going to go in a hurry. Isaiah 49, verse 14, one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible speaking of God's love. "But Zion said," and Zion refers to the children of Israel, "the Lord hath forsaken me and my Lord hath forgotten me." And then God answers, "Can a woman forget her nursing child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Ye, they may forget yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have engraved thee upon the palms of my hands."

God does not forget His children. His love is unending. There is also in Isaiah other...there are, I should say, in Isaiah other passages that speak of God's tremendous love for His people. But for the sake of time, let me show one in the minor prophets, and that would be Malachi, which is the last book of the minor prophets, Chapter 3, verse 16. This is one I've preached on many times in past years. "Then they that feared the Lord spoke often on to another and the Lord hearkened and heard it in a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and thought on his name. And they shall be mine says the Lord of hosts in the day when I make up my jewels, I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serveth him."

In other words, God says these are mine. And in the day that I make up my jewels, I will hold onto them. I will crown them as it were. They who were written in the book of remembrance. In the 11th Chapter of Hosea, another wonderful beautiful picture of God's love for Israel, in fact, the whole book, but in Hosea verse 1 of Chapter 11 it says, "When Israel was a child then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt. And then when they wouldn't come along and when they wouldn't obey," he says in verse 4, "I drew them with the cords of a man with bands of love." And verse 7, "And my people are bent to backsliding from me though they called them to the most high, none at all would exalt Him. How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel?"

In other words, even though you turn your back I can't let you go. I can't release you. I love you too much. In Jeremiah summing it all up, the 31st Chapter, the first three verses, God speaks. "The

same time says the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of the earth and they shall be my people. Thus saith the Lord, the people who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness, even Israel when I went to cause him to rest. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me saying yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee."

In other words, God again is reaffirming this tremendous love that He has for His people. But if we've learned anything in our study of love in the New Testament, we have learned that love is not just something you say, love is something you do, right? And we've learned from 1 John that John said, "my little children love not in word and tongue, but in," what, "in deed and in truth." So that if God really loves Israel, is it not only God saying He loves Israel, it is God manifesting that love in some great acts of love and that is what Zechariah 8 is about. It is all about what God has planned for those He loves in Israel. It is a tremendous statement about the love of God that manifests itself in the kingdom provisions that God has for the nation Israel. And it's as if in the 8th Chapter Zechariah opens the window in the house of Israel so every Jew can look out on the kingdom to see what God has prepared for them that love Him.

Now remember in Zechariah's day and we'll run this by you quickly and then we'll just look at these principles as we go through the chapter, but remember in Zechariah's day the Jews had been in Babylon in captivity for 70 years. They were taken there when Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed the city and flattened the temple and wiped out everything. They were taken to Babylon for a 70 year period. This was to purge them once and for all from idolatry. They had come back to the land and under Haggai and Zechariah, they are beginning to finish the building of the temple and the wall and the city.

Many years have gone by and they are now really at the work, finally. And God had promised them through the words of Haggai and the words of Zechariah that the city will be rebuilt. That the temple will be restored. That the wall will be complete. That they will be restored to their land. But God has said all through the prophecy of Zechariah that that is only like a token or a preliminary to what God is going to do ultimately in the restoration of the nation in the millennial kingdom. For some of you who may not know what I mean by that, there is coming a time in human history according to the Bible when God is going to send Jesus Christ back to earth to reign on the earth for a thousand year period in a kingdom, a literal kingdom. And that kingdom will find its concentration and its center in the nation Israel. And there will be a throne set up in the city of Jerusalem and the throne will be occupied by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His resurrection body.

And in that thousand year period every promise ever given to the nation will be fulfilled. And so here all that Zechariah has been saying about the rebuilding of the restoration temple and the restoration city is only a preliminary or a token or only a down payment as it were on the ultimate inheritance that will come in the millennial kingdom. And so we see God's love here manifest in this marvelous thing that God is going to do for Israel. His love was seen in bringing them back from Babylon and His love

is seen in its most magnanimous manner by seeing what he will do in the millennial kingdom.

Now Chapter 8 also is a continuation of Chapter 7. Now you'll remember in Chapter 7 that there was a question asked and the question asked was is it necessary for us to keep having these ceremonial fasts that we've been having, because ever since the city had been destroyed and ever since the Babylonians had come in and wiped them out the Jews had established a whole series of fasts, which were times of mourning and times of sorrow and times of bitterness and in each of those fasts, they would go without food and they would weep and they would wail and they would go through certain things like that. Well, now that the city was being rebuilt, now that the temple was being restored, now that there was a new revival of life and everything looked great, a group of people came from the town of Bethel to the priest and the prophets and they said is it necessary to keep on having these fasts now that everything seems to be so rosy.

And so there is an answer to that question that comes in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. The answer in Chapter 7 is negative and the answer in Chapter 8 is positive. Now if you were here last time you'll understand what I mean. Because in Chapter 7 there is a negative response insofar as God says to these people who are asking the questions, look I never started the fast to begin with. Secondly, you've never observed the fasts as unto me anyway. It's just been pure ritual. Remember that? And the very fact that the way they stated the question at the end of verse 3 of Chapter 7, "Do we have to keep doing this as we have done so many years?" It's getting to be a real drag.

We're getting tired of this routine. And so He says to them in Chapter 7 in effect, you really have never done unto me at all. In fact, in verse 5 He said, "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month even those seventy years did you at all fast unto me even to me? And when you did eat and when you did drink, did you eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?" In other words, since when was any of that stuff ever for me anyway? It was nothing but ritual religion. And so He answers their question with an indictment of their ritualistic approach to religion.

And you remember last time we talked to you about the difference between ritual and reality, didn't we? And He says to them in effect in the rest of Chapter 7, you know, I don't like what I see in this ritual because you're going to fall into the same pattern that your fathers fell into and they turned their reality into a ritual and you know what happened? That's why they went into Babylon. Here you are coming out of Babylon falling into the same pattern that your fathers fell in and for that reason I had to punish them.

So Chapter 7 is a warning against a ritualistic approach to religion, which in fact was the very thing that brought the captivity they were fasting to commemorate. And the reason they fasted was so they would never forget the lessons. And here they have forgotten them already and turned to very fast which was to teach them not to forget into a ritual in itself. And so Chapter 7 is a call to repentance and a call to true worship. And to a solemn reminder that the sorrows that they showed in the fast

were not really directed toward God, rather they were ritualistic. And so we learn something about love. Sometimes love responds negatively, did you know that? You've been telling your kids that for years, bend over kid. I love you so much I've got to hit you, right?

Love reproveth and love rebukes and love chastens. "Whom the Lord He chastens," right, Hebrews Chapter 12. Every son He scourges. And so when Israel needed it then God had to put it that way. There must be a rebuke. Paul says to the Corinthians, I rebuke you because you are my beloved sons in 1 Corinthians 4:14. And so love warns and love rebukes and love admonishes and love chastens and love indicts and love convicts. And so God answers their questioning about fasts with an indictment of their improper motive reminiscent of their fathers and the very kind of religion that brought the captivity to start with.

God sure didn't want another generation of spiritual phonies so He warned them. But then in Chapter 8, He turns the corner and now He does the other thing that love does. He gives to them. Love warns and love gives. It's always been God's way. It's always been the way of anyone who loved. You prevent them from falling into that which harms and you give them that which blesses. And so in Chapter 8 comes the positive answer to the question about fasts. And God gives them great incomparable, unbelievable, incredible, magnanimous promises for the future.

In fact, He gives them the ultimate gift, the promises relative to the kingdom. And incidentally if you're an Old Testament student, you'll recognize that this is a very common pattern. We can probably trace it in dozens and dozens of passages where God commonly brings about a prophecy of chastisement and judgment on sin, unbelief, and obedience followed immediately by words of great comfort and great hope and great promise. That's God's pattern throughout much of the Old Testament. Now as we look at Chapter 8, we get this marvelous positive answer.

There are two basic divisions to the Chapter and I'll just call them to your attention. Here are a few little notes. Verse 1 gives us the key phrase. "And again the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying." Now look at verse 18, "And the word of the Lord of hosts came unto me saying." Now you have two words of the Lord here and divide...this divides the Chapter into its two parts. In the first one, verses 1-17, God gives them the promises of the kingdom. From verses 18-23, God tells them the results of that kingdom or the results of that fulfillment of the promise. So really you have two times here when the word of the Lord of hosts comes to the prophet Zechariah. Once to describe the kingdom and the second time to describe the results of such a thing.

And incidentally, that is the same authenticating formula that appeared in Chapter 7. If you look at Chapter 7, verse 4, "Then came the word of the Lord of hosts to me saying," verse 8, "and the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying." So in these two chapters four times there are four different messages. Two of them come on the negative wavelength, two of them come on the positive. Two of them are to rebuke and warn and two of them are to give and extend comfort and hope.

But in all cases there is a reiteration that this is from the Lord. This stuff is so fantastic and so thrilling and so wonderful that in the human mind it would be hard to conceive and so God continually repeats that this is from Him. And so we see that in these four formulas, but in addition to that even in Chapter 8 there is a constant repetition of the same phrase. Look at verse 2, Chapter 8, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts." Verse 3, "Thus saith the Lord." Verse 4, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts." Verse 6, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts." Verse 7, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts." Verse 9, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts." Verse 14, "For thus saith the Lord of hosts." Verse 19, same thing. Verse 20, same thing. Verse 23, same thing.

Now you get the idea that this Chapter is from the Lord, don't you? See, now that's just the point. The stuff in the Chapter is so fantastic and it is so marvelous and it is so inconceivable and it is so beyond anything they ever dreamed of that the prophet doesn't want them to have any doubt about it's genuineness so He continues to repeat that it's from the Lord because it's so marvelous. It may seem incredible from the natural. It may seem unbelievable from the human viewpoint, but these things will come to pass because it comes from the name of in the infinite, eternal, and faithful Jehovah God who is the Lord of armies. In other words, He's powerful enough to pull it off.

Nothing is too hard, nothing is impossible, and the name of the Lord stands as the pledge of the accomplishment. When people say to me well, I don't know if there ever will really be a kingdom for Israel. Zechariah Chapter 8 is a great place to take them, because the Lord ten times says "Thus says the Lord of hosts." I'm able to do it. There is no reason to stagger at the promises of God. Now notice that the phrase is used ten times. And I kind of like that. I don't want to make a big issue out of this, but if you notice the Bible, you'll notice that generally the number ten is a number of completeness. That's true in the sense of the most obvious. Human beings have ten fingers and ten toes and so consequently since the year one have always countered in increments of ten and so ten has always been representative of wholeness or fullness.

So what you have here is God presenting the fullness of His program in the millennium for Israel. It's the complete picture and incidentally the name Jehovah appears 22 times in the 8th Chapter. Boy you say what are you making all this stuff about? Why are you making such an issue? Because I want you to know this is God's message, no question. All right, let me go through the ten promises. We're not going to spend much time on them. I just want to draw them across your thinking. Here are the ten elements to God's program for Israel and the kingdom. And I want you to listen carefully folks, because you're going to be there if you're a Christian and you need really to know what to do when you get there.

So this is your directions. This is your mimeograph sheet for the kingdom. All right? Number one, the first thing we see is divine punishment, divine punishment. Verse 1, "And again the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, thus saith the Lord of hosts. I was jealous for Zion with great

jealousy and I was jealous for her with great fury." Now stop there. Now here we have the statement that God is jealous for Israel. That He is so jealous He has real fury about His jealousy. Now this is an indication of God's love for them. If you were to go back to the 1st Chapter of Zechariah and note verse 14 you would find almost an identical statement. "The angel that talked with me said to me cry thou saying thus saith the Lord of host, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very much displeased with the nations that are at ease for I was but a little displeased and they helped forward the affliction."

Now here you have the same statement again in Chapter 8 that God is jealous over Israel. And He is jealous of her with a fury. You say why is God so upset? Because God has a divine covenant with the people of His love and God has seen the nations, the nations pit at Israel and oppress Israel and go beyond the bounds that He had prescribed. And that's what He means in 1:15 when He says, I wanted them to have a little affliction, but you pushed it too far. And He says there's coming a time when my jealousy is going to result in judging your nations that overdid it with Israel.

Way back in Genesis Chapter 12 the Bible says "that any nation that curses you shall be cursed," right? "And any nation that blesses you shall be blessed," In reference to the seed of Abraham, the nation Israel. And so God says here again, I was jealous. But I want you to notice something. That's only in the King James. The Hebrew says, "I will be jealous." And the word jealous, quinethe, an interesting word, it really means redness of face. When somebody gets strong emotion, their face gets red. And God is saying I burn to do this. God is saying I will some day literally burn with zeal for Israel. When I can no longer bear the estrangement from my people brought about by their sin. When I can no longer tolerate the efforts of Israel's enemy to destroy her and some day my jealousy will reach out in vengeance against those nations that have persecuted my people. And you know as well as I do that the day when the Lord sets up the kingdom is a day of terrible, fearful judgment on the nations of the world that are unbelieving, right?

When Jesus comes in His fury out of heaven and destroys the armies of Armageddon and gathers all of the Gentiles into the Valley of Jehoshaphat into the place of the judgment and He separates the sheep and the goats and He casts the goats into everlasting punishment. That's going to be a great day of judgment on ungodly nations. And that is essentially what He's saying here. I will be, write it in it's future tense in the Hebrew, I will be jealous for Zion with great jealousy. And I will be jealous for her with great fury.

Now when the Bible speaks of the jealousy of God, it doesn't mean envy, but it is the boundless zeal that comes from a God who loves holiness and hates sin, who loves His own people who are godly and hates the ungodly. It is the zeal of righteousness. It is the zeal of love, not envy. And because His love for Zion is so great He is jealous on her account and His love against those who oppress her, manifests itself in judgment. And so God will judge the enemy of His people. So we see to begin with then that the kingdom will start with the judgment. There was a sense in which this was a great

message for Israel, not that they were desirous that people be punished, but they were desirous that God be justified. And they were desirous that the godly people be honored and the ungodly be chastened. David prayed many times like that, didn't he, in the Psalms.

Many times he prayed oh God be vindicated. Oh God be honored and judge your enemies and judge those that are unrighteous in the world. And those who were in Revelation Chapter 6 under the altar crying out in the tribulation "Oh God how long will You be dishonored and the unrighteous people exalt. And how long until You avenge the blood of the martyrs?" And so the fervent, unchanging love of Jehovah for His people will manifest itself in one day a judgment against the enemies of God. The first element that He promises them is the divine punishment.

Look at the second. Divine presence, verse 3. Divine presence, "I am returned unto Zion." Oh that's great. "And I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain." You know, I could preach a whole series on that verse, because it really is talking about the Shekinah presence of God. So the Lord says this is the second thus saith the Lord, and each of these ten begins with a thus saith the Lord because they're so marvelous and so wonderful, the Jew has to be reaffirmed that they're really...this is really God speaking because it seems so wonderful.

"I am returned. I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." Listen, He says there's a day when I'm coming back. This is a fantastic promise. You can't believe how overwhelming this must have been to the people in Zechariah's time; mind boggling. Why? Because they had not known the presence of God. You say what do you mean by that? Listen, before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, God had withdrawn His presence from Israel. Did you remember that?

Where did God dwell in those days? He dwelt in his Shekinah glory between the wings of the cherubim, right, the ark of the covenant. This was the place of God's dwelling, in the holy of holies in the tabernacle; in the holy of holies in the temple. There was the arc of the covenant between the wings of cherubim did God dwell. In the Shekinah glory of His presence and this was a simple manifestation to say that I am with you. I'm in your midst. The glory of God is in Israel. And that is the only earthly dwelling place He ever had except the garden.

And when Adam fell that ended and His glory came back and dwelled in the tabernacle and in the temple. But do you remember what happened? Israel had fallen into terrible sin? It was a tragic day in Israel. The temple was scarred and marred and people in the temple were worshiping false gods and Ezekiel in his vision went into the temple and he saw people bowing down to the sun and worshipping the sun. And he saw all kinds of gods and creeping things and snakes painted all over the wall of the temple and people worshipping them. And he saw them worshipping Tammuz, which is another name for Baal. And he saw all these atrocities in the temple and then immediately He saw the glory of God depart. Remember that in Ezekiel Chapters 9,10, and 11 where Ezekiel watches the

glory of God leave.

And Ichabod is written over the nation. The glory has departed is what it means. And the Jews had never known the glory of God again because God had left them before they ever went into Babylon. And in Zechariah's time, the presence of God was nothing more than a memory, because Israel had long ago forfeited the presence of God. Hosea Chapter 5, verse 15, God says, "I will go and return to my place." What a great promise.

Hosea Chapter 6, verse 3, "Then shall we know if we follow to the know the Lord, His going forth, is prepared as the morning and He shall come unto us as the reign and the latter and the former reign unto the earth." And Hosea is saying some day people just what Zechariah's saying, some day He'll be back. Some day He'll return. Some day the Shekinah will come again. Ezekiel had a vision of it coming back. Ezekiel in 9-11 had a vision of it leaving and Ezekiel in Chapter 42 had a vision of the glory coming back.

Almost a similar description. Ezekiel 42, "He brought me to the outer court, the way toward the north. He brought me to the chamber that was opposite the separate place which is before the building toward the north, before the length of a cubits was the north door and the breadth was 50 cubits. Facing the 20 cubits which were in the inner court and opposite the pavement which was for the outer court was gallery against gallery and three stories." Now he sees some fantastic facility, huge temple. And as he begins to look and he begins to see what's going on and he goes through all of this he sees this marvelous millennial temple. And then in Chapter 43, verse 2, "And behold the glory of the God of Israel came." See?

In the future, there's going to be another temple in the millennium and the glory will come back and Ezekiel saw it leave in his vision and later he saw it coming back and this was a great, great hope for Israel. That the Shekinah of God would come back to His temple. You want to know something? When Jesus came into the world that's what that was. Did you know that? John 1:14, it said and "the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His," what, "His glory." And where did Jesus go first when He began His ministry? He went to the temple because the text said "And He shall come suddenly to His," what, "temple."

And the sad part is the glory did come back and the glory went to the temple and Jesus the glory of God in a body offered Israel a kingdom, but instead of wanting a kingdom, they were part and parcel of executing the king and so God had to postpone it, didn't He. And we're still waiting. Some day Jesus is going to come back and dwell with His people. The tragedy of the story is that the glory came once and God's people turned their back on it. And Jesus said in Matthew 23:39, "You shall not see me anymore till you shall say Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." The next time you see me it'll be in the second-coming.

Now I go back to Zechariah and this is essentially what Zechariah is saying. The Lord is going to come back and the word return and dwell are so wonderful. The word dwell means to abide or reside or settle down. He's going to come back and He's going to transform Jerusalem into a city of truth. Boy won't that be something. You know the names for Jerusalem in the Bible aren't very complimentary. Did you know that? Did you know that in Lamentations Chapter 1, Jerusalem is called the unclean city? Did you know in Isaiah 1:21, Jerusalem is called a harlot and a murderer? Did you know that in Revelation Chapter 11 Jerusalem is called Sodom and Egypt?

But there's coming a day when Jerusalem will be called a city of truth. You know why? Because the God of truth will reside there. And it is also called, look at the next line, the mountain of the Lord of hosts. What does that mean? That's headquarters for the army in the kingdom by which He will rule with a rod of iron. It's also called the holy mountain. Why? Because it is the residence of the holy God. In other words, God is going to come back and he's going to live in Jerusalem in the kingdom. You can't believe what ecstasy this could bring to a Jew in Zechariah's time, think of it. God's going to come back. Divine punishment, divine presence.

Thirdly, divine peace. Divine peace in verse 4. This is one of the most beautiful pictures of the kingdom you'll ever find. Just watch. Here's thus saith the Lord. It always introduces each of the ten. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem. And every man with his staff in his hand for old age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets of it. You say what is this? The streets are all...why don't some of those folks go home? The streets are all full of old people and kids. What's the deal?

Well, beloved the deal is it's a picture of millennial peace. You know in our society today we wonder whether we ought to be in the streets, right? We talk about that, especially in the cities. But here the streets are going to be loaded with little kids playing and old people tottering around hanging onto staffs and canes because they're so old. You say well, what's the point? The point is this, do you realize that the millennial kingdom is going to be populated with gobs and gobs of really old people. You say why? Because there will be no wars and there will be no calamities and the Bible says if somebody dies at 100, they die a baby. Everybody's going to live so long because of the peaceful conditions that the whole population is going to be staggering around the city with canes.

Oh that's somewhat metaphorical, but you understand don't you? No longer calamities that depopulate. No longer scenes like the Babylonian destruction and the Roman destruction. And you read Lamentations Chapter 2 and you read how that when the Babylonians came in they slaughtered the children and massacred the children. And you read in the Roman conquest in 70 A.D. how that some of the people even ate their own children and how there was a wholesale slaughter of old people. And what is said here by the prophet is not any of that is going to happen in the kingdom.

Everybody's going to get old in the kingdom. The streets are going to be loaded with old people and children playing without any fear. No muggings, you see, Christ will rule with a rod of iron. No one person will ever commit two crimes. Everybody's going to get old. You want to know something. Did you ever read in the Old Testament how many times God promised long life? How you ever read that? It says in Exodus Chapter 20, "If you obey your parents that your days will be long on the earth." Did you ever wonder how that was fulfilled? Did you ever read Deuteronomy for example, there are so many I don't want to take too much time, but it's really a great thought. Deuteronomy 4, I think it's verse 40, "Thou shalt keep therefore His statutes and His commandments which I command thee this day that it may go well with thee and with thy children after thee and that thou mayest prolong thy days on the earth which the Lord thy God gives thee forever."

Did you get that? He says if you obey my standards, you will live long on the earth. What earth? The earth that the Lord gives you forever. The forever earth. You answer this, which is the forever earth? Is this forever earth? No, no. The forever earth is the millennial earth that will be the new earth. That will be the restored earth and then it'll flow right into the new heaven and the new earth and the eternal state. And I believe that the fulfillment of these promises is primarily kingdom.

It's the forever earth that we inherit. You know, people say well in Ephesians it says if you obey your parents your days will be long on the earth. Listen, I know some obedient people and they didn't live too long and I know some really disobedient ones who are old and cranky and useless. But you know one place where the good people will prolong their days? In God's millennial earth, in His glorious eternal kingdom, which the Lord will give forever.

In Isaiah Chapter 65, verse 20, "There shall," this is the kingdom, listen to this. "There shall be no more in an infant of days." In other words, no baby's going to die in infancy. "Nor an old man that hasn't filled his days. For the child shall die a hundred years old." If you die a hundred you're still a child. "But the sinner being a hundred years old shall be cursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them, plant vineyards, eat fruit," so forth.

It says in 22, "They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat for like the days of a tree are the days of my people and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." You know the kingdom is so wonderful, God says I want you to just stick around for the whole thing. It's a thousand years long. That's terrific. You're going to be as old as a tree. Maybe a redwood, really old. Maybe you'll need a redwood to lean on. So this is kingdom stuff. Delightful tranquility of the kingdom. Can you imagine what that must have meant to the Jews who were constantly being clobbered and oppressed?

A fourth, back to Zechariah. A fourth promise in the kingdom, divine punishment, divine presence, divine peace, and divine power. Verse 6, here comes another, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, if it be

marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days," is the proper Hebrew, "in those days," looking at the future kingdom. And that's not just a theological interpolation. That is the literal Hebrew, those days. "Shall it also be marvelous in my eyes says the Lord of hosts?" Now this is a terrific verse. This is just...you can see where God...where somebody can kind of get God's goat in a way. That's a funny phrase to use, but God gets upset at one particular thing. And that is when people don't believe that he can really do something, see?

He really gets upset about that. And the word marvelous in the Hebrew really means difficult or impossible. And so He says if it is impossible in the eyes of the remnant of the people in those days does that mean it's impossible in my eyes? I mean, just because they think it's too tough, is it too tough? The point is what is incredible and what is unbelievable to the remnant in the last days isn't necessarily tough on me. In fact, if you read Genesis 18:14 and Jeremiah 22:17 and 23, you will see the very same word that is used here in the verb form and what the verb says is, is anything too, what, hard for me?

And what's the answer? No. What a truth. Have you learned that lesson? Divine power. He says look, this whole thing is easy for me and because it may be incredible to the remnant in that day, can you imagine what the Jew is going to think of in the midst of the tribulation? He's going to say oh, will it ever change? God will never get us out of this mess. Here we are running through the desert, heading for Edom, the anti-Christ's army chasing us. How are we going to be delivered? The battle of Armageddon, blood deep as the horses' bridles for 200 miles and it's impossible to get us out of this and they'll say that. And the Lord says just because say that is it? No.

Boy I tell you I have no reason not to believe God. So God promises divine punishment, divine peace, divine power, and He even promises another on that begins with P. Divine populating, verse 7. I had to strain a little on that one. Verse 7, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, behold I will save my people from the east country and from the west country and I'll bring them and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and they shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and righteousness." You know what's going to happen in the kingdom? He's going to regather the Jews from everywhere.

And right now there are approximately 14 million of them scattered all over the world and when the Lord comes back and sets up the kingdom, He's just going to pull them all together and bring them into Israel. And I want you to see something interesting, this could not...people say well this is just referring to the gathering from the Babylonian captivity. No way. Because nobody from Babylon was gathered from the west. Right? Babylon was directly east. And I'll show you something interesting. You know what the Hebrew literally says here? It says this, "I will save my people from the land of the rising of the sun and from the land of the going down of the sun." From one end of the globe to the other is what he's saying. I will regather Israel from the world and the same phrase is used in Psalm 50, verse 1, in Psalm 113, verse 3, and in Malachi, Chapter 1 and verse 11. Same thing "from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, my name shall be great."

Now is God's name to be great only in Babylon? No, in the entire earth and He goes in Malachi 1:11 to say among all nations. So it's another way of saying the whole earth and the whole world. And God is saying in the millennium I will regather my people from the face of the earth, everywhere and bring them back and bring them to Jerusalem. And you know how much Jews love Jerusalem. Did you know that many of them in America and other parts of the world that are buried are buried with a little jar of Jerusalem dirt because of the love they have for their land?

Some day they'll be gathered. In Isaiah 43:5 and the similar prophecy of the kingdom, God says through the prophet, "I will bring thy seed from the east and gather thee from the west and I will say to the north give up and to the south keep not back, bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth. For everyone who was called by name, for I have created him for my glory." Get them all back where they belong in my place. What a wonderful promise. You know, it's kind of exciting to be alive today and I think we're getting a little kind of a preview on it don't you, as Jews are being regathered into the land.

In Jeremiah 32, verse 38, I've got to go back there. I've been away too long. Maybe we'll get a group of people and go pretty soon. I'm not Jewish. I just like to go there. But I am going to be there in the kingdom so I'd like to pick out my spot. Jeremiah 32:38, "And they shall be my people and I will be their God and I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for the good of them and of their children after them and I will make an everlasting covenant with them and I'll not turn away from doing them good. But I'll put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them in doing them good and I'll plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Don't you love that?

God says I just want to do them good. God even says that anger is my strange work, my normal work is to do good to the people who are my people. And I'll do it with my whole heart and my whole soul. And believe me when God does that, He does it well. So a nation to be saved and a nation to be regathered. Verse 8 says "and they shall be my people. I'll be their God in truth and righteousness." He isn't just gathering them politically, He isn't just gathering economically, He's gathering them for conversion. The nation is going to come to Christ as Romans 11 says, "So all Israel shall be saved."

So divine punishment, divine presence, divine power, divine populating and another promise of the kingdom, divine prosperity. Look at verse 9. Now we're going to go by this fast so hang on. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, let your hands be strong." In other words be of good courage. That's a Hebrew idiom for be of good courage. "Strengthen yourself, ye that here in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, you that are listening to Haggai and Zechariah, who were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid that the temple might be built and that's just giving you a date and an identification for Haggai and Zechariah."

"You that are hearing these prophets be of good courage for before these days there was no higher for man nor any higher for beasts, neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction. For I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor, but now I will not be under the residue of this people as in the former days says the Lord of hosts." Now He says you people that have been alive in Zechariah's time and you people that have been alive in Haggai's time let me remind you of how tough it's been. There wasn't any money to pay men. There wasn't any money to provide for animals. There wasn't any peace. There was all kinds of conflict and affliction and people set against their neighbor. You know what He's describing? He's describing the hassles of them trying to rebuild that city. The first group came back with Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest and they immediately put up the altar. And they began to do the sacrifices.

But you know what happened? They got the foundation laid, but then everything went bad. They had outside enemies, the Samaritans, remember Sanballat and Tobiah and the Samaritans were hassling them and telling the Persians that they were pulling political power plays and all this kind of stuff and they were having all kinds of problems with politics and then they had inside enemies, because you know they got back in the land and they decided why should we waste our time building the Lord's house when we're living in a rubble. Well, let's build our own house. And Haggai says they wanted to live in sealed or paneled houses and so they stopped building God's house and they started building their own houses, fancy ones with paneled ceilings.

And they neglected the work and they began to fight and argue and hassle. And there wasn't any prosperity. Things went downhill. But then in the second year of Darius a new commitment began in Israel and they began to work again. And they began to work again and then Zechariah wrote his prophecy just as they began the new work and encouraged them and comforted them. And now God adds to that by saying hey this is only the beginning have I got plans for you. Fabulous. Verse 11, "I will not be unto the residue of this people," that is the future people, "as I have been in the former. For the seed that is your progeny, your children, your seed shall be prosperous. The vine will give its fruit. The ground will give its increase. The heavens will give their due. I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things and it'll come to pass that as you were a curse among the nations oh house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a," what, "blessing."

Don't be afraid. Be of good courage, strength in your hands. What is He promising? That you've had hard times, Israel. You've had a lot of hard times. Hard times are going to be over and you're going to be blessed. Boy have I got prosperity in store for you. So God promises divine punishment, presence, peace, power, popularity and prosperity. And one more, divine preference. Verse 14, here comes another. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, as I thought to punish you when your fathers provoked me to wrath saith the Lord of hosts and I repented not."

In other words, when I said I was going to punish you, what? I did. I didn't change. Now let me tell you something else, so again, "I thought in these days to do good to Jerusalem and the house of Judah. Fear not." You know, this is terrific. He says, you know how you can know that I'm going to do what I say about the blessing? Remember what I did when I promised about the punishment? Same thing. God says, I'm going to open the fountains of blessing. I'm going to bless you so much and you're going to sit there and say well, I don't know. I wonder if the Lord will really do it. Just remember this, when I promise to punish you did I do it? Oh yes, Lord.

Well, now when I promise to bless you, remember that I kept the promise to punish you. And on the basis of that integrity you can have confidence that I'll bless you. That one of the great...He says one of the great things that you learn from my punishment is that I keep my word and that stands good for my blessings. And so God says I prefer you and to do good to you is my great joy. God is a God of goodness. What does it say in Acts 10:38? "Jesus of Nazareth went about doing," what, "good." He was God in human flesh.

God is good. So the very sorrows of the past become divine pledges for the promise of the future. What does the kingdom hold for God's people? A divine punishment of the enemies which brings about vengeance and a righting of the ship as it were. Divine presence, God will be there. Divine peace, marvelous tranquility. Divine power, God will be able to do anything and everything He promises. Divine prosperity, everything will flourish. Divine populating, He'll regather the whole nation. And divine preference, and He will do good to them because He loves them.

And then Zechariah closes the chapter by saying, and there are three things that are like results of all of that. Number one is pleasure, verse 19. Here's another one, "Thus saith the Lord, the fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness and cheerful feasts." You can stop there. He says I'm going to turn your fast into a what? Feast.

You see the fast of the fourth month was the fast that remembered the taking of Jerusalem and the flight of the royal seed. The fast of the fifth month was the fast that remembered the destruction of the temple. The fast of the seventh month was the one that remembered the murder of Gedaliah who was the governor. And the fast of the tenth month was the one that remembered the mourning for the day that the seeds began. And they had all these fasts and all this weeping and all this mourning. And God says, some day I'm going to take the whole bunch of them and I'm going to turn them into joy and gladness and a feast. No more fasts, no more fasts.

And so He says, that's my promise. And so there will be in the kingdom pleasure. Secondly or ninthly, in the ten, prayer, verse 20. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, it shall yet come to pass that there shall come peoples and inhabitation of many cities and the inhabitation of one city shall go to another

saying let us go speedily to pray before the Lord to seek the Lord of hosts. I will go also. You know what's going to happen? People all over the world are going to be getting together to go to Jesus. Isn't that terrific? He's going to be on the throne. This is going to be the new center of attention of the world. The pilgrimages are going to come every corner of the globe.

The world is going to seek the Lord. The world conversion is what He's talking about. Millions of people around the world migrating to Jerusalem to see the glorified Christ and to be converted. So the first result of the seven characteristics of the kingdom is pleasure and the second is prayer and that is that they will pray to the Lord to see Him and be converted. Can't you see it? Delegations from London and Paris and Berlin and New York and Buenos Aires all coming to Jesus Christ?

And then number ten, the sum of it all the thing which Israel had always known God had promised I call it prominence; prominence. Three elements pleasure, prayer, prayers of the nations for conversion and prominence. Verse 23, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts," the tenth time it's said, "in those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of Him that is a Jew saying we will go with you but we have heard that God is with you." Isn't that terrific?

The world is going to take one look at the Jews and say they are the people. Let's grab their coattails and get in on this deal. They'll get the special favor. And the ten again represents all. The whole world is going to grab the Jews who are going to be God's emissaries and God's ambassadors. Isn't that exciting? Wow. This is what it's going to be beloved in the day when the Lord fulfills His covenant. You say, hey John, I don't know how to tell you this, but you left out two verses. I knew you'd say that. Verses 16 and 17, right? Well, I want to come back to them and close with it.

"These are the things that you shall do." Did you hear that? You know all of this is very wonderful and it's all from God, but there are some conditions, aren't there? There are some conditions. "Speak every man the truth to his neighbor. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates. Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against His neighbor and love no false oath for all these are things that I hate says the Lord." And then the end of verse 19, "Therefore love the truth and peace." God says look, all of this is yours, but there's a condition and the condition is a very simple one, honesty, and He names these four things; honesty, justice, love, and trust. And beloved, all of those are manifestations of true righteousness.

When your lives are right and they manifest honesty and justice and love and trust, these are the things which you shall do and when you do these things and at the end of verse 19, "when you love what I love, then it'll come to pass." So God blesses in response to obedience, His people Israel. And the day that they turn as Zechariah says and look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son and the day the stony heart of their flesh is taken out as Ezekiel said and they are given a heart of flesh is the day they are born again and when they are born anew it is then that the

kingdom will come.

You say well, how do we get that to happen? That my friend is a work of God which He will do. You say, well, John, this is all wonderful. I happen to be a Gentile. What does this have to do with an Irish-American or an Italian? I mean, it's nice. I'll tell you what. You want to know what it has to do? The kingdom that belongs to them is our kingdom too isn't it? It's ours. If it wasn't, if it was just for their sake I could get excited. Do you know why? Because it teaches me something of the nature of God and the way that God keeps His covenants with His people and if God is such a faithful, covenant, keeping, loving God with Israel and He's also my God and Savior that's the same way He's going to be toward His covenant with me.

But beyond that beloved, we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His son haven't we? We're children of the kingdom also. The kingdom is our kingdom and we can also say that "eye has not seen nor has ear heard" like Paul said to the Corinthians. "The things that God has prepared for them that love Him." One thing more, what makes it all possible? How could God do this? How could God bypass the sin of Israel? How could God forgive? How could God restore? How could God give this to me? How could He make me a part of such blessing? It all goes back to one thing right there. The cross, doesn't it?

Did you know that Jesus died on the cross to save the Jews who had lived before He was even born? That's right. Did you know that everybody who's ever been saved has been saved by virtue of the act of Jesus Christ on the cross even if they lived before it or after it? It's the cross. It's the cross that is everything. And so as we think about the love of God for His people Israel, and as we think about the fact that we too share the kingdom, that we too will rule in the kingdom, that we too will reign in the kingdom, that we too will be a part of every good thing God has prepared, that we too according to Ephesians 1:3 are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlylys in Christ. We have to go back and say one thing made it possible, the cross of Jesus Christ. And the beloved is why we meet at this table, isn't it? That's why.

Let's bow in prayer. Father, as we gather about the table we pray that You would help us to recall clearly that all the wonders of Your grace, all the blessings of Your love come to us because Jesus Christ took all the punishment. Jesus Christ bore all the justice and the judgment and the vengeance that the blessing might be ours. Help us to come to the foot of the cross to remember His death for us with hearts truly thankful. May we recall the words that Jack sang to us and may we not be thankless for one who gave His life and who has yet to pour out unto us an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, laid away in heaven that we can't even dream of.

May the wonders of His grace and blessing yet to come fill our hearts with such gratitude for the work He has already done. That this becomes for us a gathering at His table that is transformed into an act of deep and true worship. And we'll praise you in Jesus' name, Amen.

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