

From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Zechariah)

ch.5:5 - 8:13

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the danger of Babylon in the church, highlighting the importance of sacrifice and giving over personal gain and profit.

Duration: 59:41

Scripture: Isaiah 1:11-14, Zechariah 7:1, Zechariah 8:2-3, Zechariah 8:13, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:10, Ephesians 4:3

Topics: "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the four spirits of heaven mentioned in Revelation 7. These spirits are sent forth by God to execute tasks of judgment. The preacher emphasizes the importance of not engaging in empty rituals and instead focusing on building the body of Christ. The sermon also highlights God's special care for the widow, orphan, stranger, and poor, warning against mistreating them. Additionally, the preacher mentions the visions in the book of Zechariah, including the protection of God's people, the defeat of powers seeking to destroy the church, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

In the book of Zechariah chapter 5, Zechariah chapter 5, the conclusion of our last study we were looking at chapter 5 verses 5 to 11, which is the seventh vision that Zechariah had. And this is a very important vision because here he sees, as we saw in verse 6, the margin of bushel measure. We considered the words of Jesus in Luke chapter 11 where he said that your light should not be concealed in a bushel measure.

The light speaks of the life of God, in him was life, Jesus was life, that life was the light of men. And the bushel measure speaks of the God of this world, Mammon. And when Jesus said that your light should not be in the bushel measure, he was saying essentially that your life should not be hidden and corrupted by the power of Mammon.

And that is always a danger in the church, that the light of God can be darkened by the power of Mammon. And this is a danger that is always present to every one of us because we are dealing with money every day, buying and selling, and dealing with money. And Jesus spoke about the deceitfulness of riches.

He spoke about Mammon as being unrighteous Mammon. There are two things Jesus said about money, that it was dirty and it was deceitful. And I have to remember when I handle money that it's dirty, it's deceitful.

And particularly to see that that does not corrupt my Christian testimony. And when we read about Jerusalem and Babylon, we have considered many things about Babylon, but one thing we see about Babylon from Revelation 17 and particularly chapter 18, is that it is an economic system, a system built by Mammon. But it has got a religious appearance about it.

It is religion being used to further one's own ends. And Paul speaks about that in 1 Timothy chapter 6, very important in this connection. He says about those who think of religion as a means of making money, 1 Timothy 6 verse 5. Godliness is a means of great spiritual gain when it is accompanied by contentment.

And there he goes on to speak about the love of money in the rest of that chapter. But this godliness becoming a means of gain. And the clearest example of that in the New Testament would be the money changers in the temple, who were doing a service for the people, in the sense that they were exchanging the people's Roman coins for the Hebrew shekel, which they had to put in the sanctuary.

There were people who were selling doves and sheep in order to help these people who had come from distant places to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Why did Jesus turn them all out of the temple? Because they were making money out of this. But you say, can't you make a profit selling doves and sheep? Yes, you can make a profit provided you do it in the marketplace, but you can't make a profit in the temple.

In the temple, you are not permitted to sell doves and sheep for profit. And that's a principle we have to see, how much, even though it is there in scripture, yet how much of it has penetrated Christianity today. So many things done in the name of Jesus Christ, and the whole aim is to make profit.

A lot of Christian bookshops, good Christian books, but profit-making is the motive. Tapes, Christian tapes, and profit-making is the motive. Christian stickers, Christian t-shirts.

It's amazing, the spread of Babylon all over. Can't we sell t-shirts and tapes and books? Yes, but not in the name of Jesus Christ, and make profit out of it. Because the fundamental principle of Jerusalem is sacrifice.

That I spend my own energy and time and money to serve the Lord. Whereas the fundamental principle of Babylon is profit. And there we can see how much of all these Christian organizations has been penetrated by the spirit of Babylon.

And that's what we see here in Zechariah chapter 5, that there was this bushel measure, and it looked just like an ordinary bushel measure on the outside, but there was a lead cover on it that says in verse 7, inside was this woman, and this woman was Babylon. We read in verse 11 that they were taking this bushel measure to the land of Shinar. If you turn to Genesis chapter 10 and verse 10, you read about Shinar there.

Genesis 10 and verse 10, we read there about Nimrod, who was the first type of the Antichrist in the Old Testament. Nimrod, verse 9, a mighty hunter before the Lord, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, or Babylon as the margin says. This is where the Tower of Babel was built in chapter 11, and Iraq, and Akkad and Kelna in the land of Shinar.

So from that verse, we know that Shinar is actually just another name for Babylon. And when you turn to Daniel chapter 1 and verses 1 and 2, Daniel chapter 1 verses 1 and 2, we read that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem, and the Lord gave Jehoiakim to Judah into his hand, and he brought them to the land of Shinar. So there again, we find that Shinar is just another name for Babylon.

And so we see here in Zechariah 5.11, to build a temple for her in the land of means to build a temple for her in the land of Babylon, to build a house. And that is the false church. And that is being built for this woman, it's being built for her.

And she sits inside this bushel. Here is making money in the name of religion, personal gain in the name of religion, God and mammon mixed up together. I always say this, if you get a salary for what you do, what you are doing is not Christian work.

Because in Christian work, there is no salary. It's quite all right to get a salary for our work. But we must remember that where you get a salary, that is secular work.

100% secular work. In Christian work, there is no salary. Jesus never promised a salary to his disciples.

And then we can see which Christian organization is there in this country, which does not pay a salary to its workers. None. That is why I say that is not, those are not Christian organizations.

They are secular organizations. There's nothing wrong in working in them. They're secular organizations.

But it's blasphemy to say that it is doing the Lord's work. No, far from it. God and mammon cannot mix like oil and water cannot mix.

When you mix oil and water, it's not fit for drinking, it's not fit for putting into your scooter either. If you keep them separate, they are good. And that's the problem when people try to mix God and mammon, what it eventually becomes the kingdom of mammon and not the kingdom of God.

But the thing is, there is a deception about it. This woman doesn't manifest herself. She's concealed with a lead cover.

The whole thing is hidden. And there we can see that there can be outward appearance of religion. And inside the motivation of it is personal gain, which God alone can see.

That's where God has lifted the lead cover, given us revelation to see the humbug and the hollowness of so much of Christianity that goes by the name of Jesus Christ. And yet the motivation in it all is not sacrifice, but personal gain. And once we think in terms of personal gain, we have started building Babylon, whether it's personal honor or money or position.

And we have to build a church on the opposite of that, sacrifice. We are not to draw people here by any other means than the word of God and the word of the cross, the principle of sacrifice, not the principle of Babylon, which is gain. There are people who have come to us at different times who have probably heard from different places that there are generous people here who help those who are in financial need.

And there are people who have come and tried to become members of our church because they thought this is a good place to be in, because when I'm in financial need, the other brothers and sisters will help me. We have to be very careful about such people, because if we give room to them, we can end up adding a lot of people who have got actually the spirit of Babylon there. I can sit there appearing to be very

religious, but if you lift up the lead cover inside, it is this woman thinking of what can I gain by coming here.

What can I gain, not spiritually, materially or honor or position, something of the earth. To gain spiritually is a good thing, but to gain materially, that is essentially of Babylon. I have to think in terms of what can I give, not what can I gain.

Then I am qualified to be a part of Jerusalem, which is a city of sacrifice. And it's not just a matter of criticizing and condemning a whole lot of Christian organizations. I don't believe we have the right to criticize and condemn them if we have not first of all seen that this spirit of Babylon first of all dwells in our own flesh.

And if we have not got light on this woman sitting inside, hidden by a lead cover inside our own flesh, and if we have not driven her out from there, if we have not driven her out in our own life, then we've got no right to point out that error in someone else. But if I have seen this spirit of seeking my own gain and my own honor and my own profit in my own flesh first of all, and put it to death and crucified it and said no to it and driven it out, then we have the right to speak to other people, speak about this in other people. And this is the reason why so few people have the authority to speak about it, because they haven't put it to death in their own flesh first.

This woman dwells in our own flesh, but it says here finally, there were two other women who came with wings like a stork. And we saw in Leviticus 11 and verse 19 that a stork is one of the unclean birds. And Jesus spoke of the birds of the air coming and taking the seed as the agents of Satan.

And here is one of those unclean birds. Babylon has become the nest of every unclean bird we read in Revelation chapter 18. And here is one of those unclean birds, the stork, that's come to take Babylon.

The evil spirits in the heavenly places have come to take her to her own base, it says in verse 11, to the place where she belongs. We read a similar verse in Acts of the Apostles chapter 1 and verse 25 about Judas. Judas was called to be an apostle, and we read in Revelation 21 that the apostles' names are on the foundation stones of the walls of the New Jerusalem.

Just think, Judas Iscariot's name could have been on one of the foundation stones of the walls of the New Jerusalem. But it says here, instead of this ministry and apostleship, Acts 125, which Judas should have got, he turned aside from this calling to be in the foundation stone of the walls of the New Jerusalem, to go where? To go to his own place. That was Babylon.

That was Judas Iscariot, making money in the name of religion. In the name of religion, he helped the high priests, and he got money for it, and he went to his own place. And a person who has this spirit will go to his own place.

There is a foundation being laid there, a pedestal being put, a house being built for those who have this spirit. Brothers and sisters, this is what we are to fear, lest we become a part of. This system that has corrupted Christianity, making money and gain and profit for oneself, position and honor and money and all types of gain in the name of religion, with a lead cover hiding it all.

Oh, to see it in our own flesh and put it to death and crucify it and be ruthless with it and say, Lord, let me never, never find that spirit in me. Always let me think in terms of sacrifice and giving and never in terms of getting. That's how we build a church, and we have to preserve the church here in that purity.

Otherwise, Babylon can enter even here. Now we come to chapter six, and we see here the eighth and last vision that Zachariah got. I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains, and the mountains were bronze mountains.

Now, what are these chariots? We can compare scripture with scripture. It's always best to compare scripture with scripture, and we read in Psalm 68 and verse 17, Psalm 68 and verse 17, the chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands, and the Lord is among them. And in another translation, it says thousands and thousands of angels.

These are the chariots of God. And so it speaks here about the chariots of angels, thousands and thousands and thousands of them, the thousands of chariots that came to take Elijah up without dying, that protected Elijah when the army came to attack him. We read here that they came forth from the mountains, and the mountains were bronze mountains.

Again, if we compare scripture with scripture, Zachariah 6.1, in the Old Testament, we read that bronze was used for the altar where the animals were sacrificed in the tabernacle, and it speaks of judgment on those animals. And here it speaks, therefore, in Zachariah 6.1, about these agents of God who are going forth to execute God's judgment. The first chariot were red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth strong dappled horses.

And I spoke and said to the angel who was speaking with me, what are these, my Lord? And the angel answered and said, these are the four spirits of heaven. You remember when we studied Revelation 7, we saw these four spirits holding back the winds of judgment from coming upon the earth till the 144,000 were sealed on their foreheads. The four spirits of heaven going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth.

In other words, these are spirits who stand before the Lord, and then they are sent forth to execute a particular task of judgment. And with one of which, the black horses are going forth to the north country, the white ones go forth after them, and the dappled ones go forth to the south country. Now, we don't want to speculate as to what the black and the white and the dappled are.

There are many people who are interested in getting all types of fancy interpretations for that. I want to say this, brothers and sisters, where we find a clear scripture that interprets another, we can give an interpretation to it. Where there is no clear scripture, we say we don't know.

And I don't know what all those colors symbolize, but we know that these are the agents of God. And when the strong ones went out, they were eager to patrol the earth, to walk about through the earth. And he said, go walk about through the earth.

So they patrolled the earth. And then he cried out to me and spoke to me, saying, See, those who are going to the land of the north have appeased my wrath in the land of the north. Even now the judgments of God fall upon the earth.

For we know, for example, in Sodom and Gomorrah, judgment fell long before the final judgment. And there are various times we read when, in the book of Amos chapter four, we read that God judged various places by not sending rain and judging certain other people with volcanoes and floods and various ways with wild beasts and war and sword and pestilence and famine, the various ways by which the judgments of God are already falling upon the earth. The poisonous serpents that bit the Israelites in the wilderness,

they were part of God's judgment.

And so there are little bits of God's judgment go forth even now, where sin increases, where sin overflows beyond a certain level, like it did in Sodom and Gomorrah. God comes down in judgment, and that judgment has appeased God's wrath in a particular land, it says here. And so we see that these horses are, as it were, the movements of God's providence, the circumstances and situations that happen around in the world.

And when we look at them, we can look, they can look as though the circumstances and events that are happening in the world around us even today, some of it may look like wild, uncontrolled, uncontrollable horses. They really look like wild, uncontrollable horses, running here, running there, various things happening, the judgments of God in various ways, the judgments of God upon idolatrous lands, and various things like that. And we can think that these are all wild, uncontrollable horses.

But here in this vision, we see that they stand before the Lord of all the earth and go only after getting His permission. And so that's the consolation that we get in this, that there is a sovereign God who is controlling all these apparently wild, uncontrollable horses. God's got the reins in His hand, and He's controlling the reins of all these events that are taking place all over.

And so we see here that God gave Zachariah eight visions. And if you remember, the first vision was also a vision of horses. And here were these, if you turn back to Zachariah chapter one, we remember we studied about the myrtle trees, and that spoke about the new creation we saw in that low, despised place.

And there were these horses, a red sorrel white, described in verse eight, whom the Lord had sent to patrol the earth, verse ten. And they came back and reported to the Lord, we have patrolled the earth, and the earth is complacent about its condition. And now we see in the final vision, these horses going forth and executing judgment, because the Lord was angry, it says in Zachariah 115, with these nations who were complacent about their sinful condition.

And there was a judgment to wake them up from their spiritual sleep. And all these eight visions were meant to encourage these depressed, discouraged Jews to stir them up to build the house of the Lord. And the purpose with which God gives them to us also is the same, that we might be encouraged to build the body of Christ.

The visions that Zachariah had began with a vision of God's sovereignty in the first vision, and ends with a vision of God's sovereignty. And this was the great theme that Zachariah proclaimed, the sovereignty of God. God's sovereign control over all nations, over all circumstances, so that his people need not think that all these things are happening through blind chance.

God is in control of everything. So just briefly, to review the eight visions, the first one we saw in Zachariah 1 was about God's people despised and in that low place, and the sovereignty of God protecting them. The second one, in Zachariah 1 18, the horns, the powers that sought to destroy and scatter the church, and the overcomers, verse 20, the craftsmen who were going to drive the devil's power out so that the church would be built.

The third vision was about Jerusalem, chapter 2, surrounded by a wall of fire, having no membership list, but God himself being a sort of a wall of fire through which people had to pass if they wanted to become members of this church, and God himself protecting Jerusalem. Zachariah 2 8 is the apple of his eye. The

fourth vision was of the Son of God as our intercessor and standing against Satan, our accuser, protecting us from the accusations of Satan, chapter 3. The fifth vision was in chapter 4 about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who seeks to pour himself through us and give us a ministry where we are crushed like olive oil to be poured out so that the lampstand can burn.

The power of the Holy Spirit and the crushing of the olives so that oil can be supplied for the lampstand to burn, not for our crushing so that I gain something. That can be selfish. That I can be crushed so that the church gains something.

That's really something. To be so unselfish that my crushing is not because I want to be in the Bride of Christ or I want some personal glory in the final day, but so that the church can burn. That is true unselfishness with Christ at the center.

And then the sixth vision was about the judgment of God in the Flying Scroll, chapter 5, particularly on those who steal and tell lies and bringing a curse upon their house. God's judgment catching up with the sinners. The seventh one was what we just considered about Babylon concealed.

And the eighth one is again of the sovereignty of God. And all these visions were meant to encourage people to press on with building the superstructure. And now we come to verse 9. The word of the Lord also came to me saying, take an offering from the exiles, from Heldi to Abijah and Jediah.

And you go the same day and enter the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah, where they have arrived from Babylon. And take silver and gold and make an ornate crown and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehoshaddak, the high priest. And say to him, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold a man whose name is Branch, for he will branch out from where he is, and he will build the temple of the Lord.

And Joshua was to be a type of Jesus Christ, because Joshua was the high priest, and he was there to be a type of Jesus, our high priest. And they were to make a crown for this high priest. A very beautiful picture here, that the people who left Babylon, it says these people in verse 10, who have arrived from Babylon, were to give an offering.

And Zechariah was to take this offering and take the silver and gold, not from all these Babylonian Christians, no, but from the people who had come out of Babylon to Jerusalem. He was to take an offering only from them. This is a fundamental principle in building the body of Christ, in this matter of receiving an offering.

Whom do we take an offering from? Well, that's clear in Zechariah 6.10. We are to take an offering from those who have come out of Babylon. We're not interested in an offering of those who do not receive the message of leaving Babylon. But those who have come out of Babylon can give an offering.

And the first offering we are to give is of our lives, our bodies. That's the first offering. And then the other things, our body and our life is much more important to God than everything else.

And with this offering that they presented, Zechariah was to make a crown for Joshua. You get the picture here of the offering that we make is what God is going to use to crown the Lord Jesus Christ as king. It's a very beautiful picture.

That if I present my body and the offering I have to give to God is a body, this body that God has given me. When we think, if we say we are to offer money, then there is going to be a big difference even with all

of us who are sitting here. Some can give more, some can give less, and that depends on your income.

But when it comes to presenting our body, everyone sitting here is equal to present our body in the moment of temptation and say, Lord, here is my offering to you. I've come out of Babylon and here is my offering. And every one of us has that opportunity to present our body as an offering to Christ.

Our tongue and our eyes in the moment of temptation and our self-will to follow Jesus, whose body was always presented to the Father. This is the meaning of the breaking of bread. This is my body broken for you and I eat it.

I say, Lord, I want to go this way. I'm presenting my body as an offering. And when I do that, that is the means by which finally Jesus Christ will be enthroned as king of this universe.

That's the way. That's why it's so important that God can find people throughout the earth like these people mentioned here. Just think if your name and my name can be put there in the new covenant, these people who have come from Babylon take their offering of their bodies and make a crown for Jesus, that he can be enthroned as king, that he can come back in glory.

That's the picture here. And that says the Lord, of course, this man whose name is Branch. We considered that in studying Zechariah chapter three, that is referring to Christ manifest in the flesh, because that's mentioned in Isaiah 11, verse one, that a branch will come out from the root of Jesse, the father of David.

He is of the seed of David. He will branch out from where he is and he will build the temple of the Lord. Jesus said that I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Yes, it's repeated. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord. The government will be on his shoulder.

He will be the one who builds the temple of the Lord. He uses us, but he is the one. He is the architect and he is the builder and he will bear the honor.

Praise God. He is the only one who is going to get the glory for building the church. We can say we are giving ourselves to build the church, but he is the one who will bear the honor and he will sit and rule on his throne.

Thus, he will be a priest on his throne and the council of peace will be between the two. That is, see it in relation to the building of the temple of the Lord. Verse 13, the last part, he will be a priest on his throne.

In the Old Testament, a priest could never sit on a throne and a king could never be a high priest. That was impossible under the Old Testament. The high priest was one, the king was another.

And we can say the only exception in one sense to that was Melchizedek, who was a king and a priest. That's why in the New Covenant, Jesus is called a priest after the order of Melchizedek. He was a king and a priest.

He rules and he intercedes. As a king, he rules. As a priest, he intercedes.

In the Old Testament, the king ruled and the priest interceded. But Jesus rules and intercedes. And that is a different type of rulership.

And the measure in which we can be a leader for others is the measure in which we can intercede for them. Because we are also called, in Revelation 1.6, he has made us kings and priests. This is a New Covenant concept.

And the council of peace will be between the two offices. There will be peace between the king and the priest because it will be united in Jesus Christ. And perhaps that could also refer to the fact that Jesus is the one who brings peace between God and man, between the two.

And the crown will become a reminder in the temple of the Lord to heal him, Tobijah, Jediah and him, the son of Zephaniah. And those who are far off will also come and build the temple of the Lord. Now, whenever we read about those who are far off, that refers to the Gentiles, the non-Jews.

We read that in Ephesians 2.13. Now in Christ Jesus, you who were far off have been brought near. You see, those who are far off, verse 17, Ephesians 2, he came and preached peace to you who were far away and to you who were near, to the Gentiles and the Jews. And together they are going to build the body of Christ.

Zechariah 6.15. Those who are far off, the Gentiles, will come. And together with those who are near, they will become one body and will build the temple of the Lord. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.

And it will take place if you completely obey the Lord your God. What a beautiful verse, that God's purposes take place when you completely obey the Lord your God. It is complete obedience.

It's very interesting that that word completely is used there. Complete obedience is what enables Jesus to build his church in any place. And that's why it's very important if we are going to build Jerusalem, that we preach complete obedience, not partial obedience.

Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me. This is the proof that the message we preach has been sent by the Lord, that the Jew and the Gentile, the people from different communities and different groups, come and become one. And together they build the church and the glory goes to Christ.

And then we come to chapter 7, and here was a question that was raised by certain people. Zechariah chapter 7, verse 1. 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 just later, the town of Bethel had sent Charizer and Regemilech and their men to seek the favor of the Lord.

There were certain people who came to Zechariah asking a question. And the question was this, speaking to the priests who belong to the house of the Lord and to the prophet, saying, Shall I weep in the fifth month and abstain as I have done these many years? You see, the Jews had, as a tradition, when they went into Babylon in captivity, organized certain fasts in certain months. And those are mentioned here later on.

It says here, when you fasted and mourned, verse 5, in the fifth and in the seventh month. Actually, there were four fasts, and they're all described in chapter 8, verse 19. The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth month.

There were four fasts that God had not commanded them, but these fasts were related to certain events in the history of Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar came and laid siege to Jerusalem, broke down the walls,

captured the city, various events that took place in various months. And when the Jews were in Babylon, they thought of these months, and they thought, these are the days when certain things happen, when God's judgment came upon us, and we are going to fast now and seek God. And they had these fasts four times a year, in the fourth month, in the fifth month, in the seventh month, in the tenth month.

And now that they had come back to Jerusalem from the captivity, they came to find out, should we now continue to have these fasts? Now, there are certain things that God has not necessarily commanded, which are a good thing to do. For example, to read the Bible every day, that's a good thing. Or to pray at a certain time every day, or various activities like this are good.

But the word of the Lord that came to Zechariah, in reply to these people's question, did not really answer their question. The Lord said, when you fellows sat there in Babylon, and you fasted and mourned, in the fifth and seventh month, over all these seventy years you did it, was it actually for me that you fasted? He said, you fellows just went through it as a man. Don't you just eat for yourself? Don't you drink for yourself? Are not these the words which the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with its cities around it, and the Negev and the foothills were inhabited? Now, what were the words which some of the former prophets prophesied concerning this? We can look at one example in Isaiah 58.

In Isaiah 58, one of the prophets, that was Isaiah, had prophesied to the whole nation of Israel, long before they went into captivity, and this is what Isaiah had said. The Lord told Isaiah, cry loudly and don't hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins, yet they seek me day by day.

They come to the meetings. Why have we fasted, verse three, and thou dost not see? You know, Isaiah was a fantastic prophet. Tradition tells us, history tells us, that Isaiah was sawn in two.

You read in Hebrews chapter 11 about those who were sawn asunder, and Jewish history tells us that that actually happened to the prophet Isaiah. When you read through the prophet Isaiah, you're not surprised that he was sawn asunder because of some of the things he said. For example, he said in Isaiah chapter 1, he said in verse 10, Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom.

Think of that, telling all the bishops in Jerusalem, you rulers of Sodom, you people of Gomorrah, what are all your multiplied sacrifices of me? I am fed up of all your burnt offerings, and when you, verse 12, when you come to appear before me, bring, verse 13, bring your worthless offerings no longer. Their incense is an abomination, and I hate, verse 14, your festivals, they become a burden, and so on. The, he says, I, last part of verse 13, I cannot endure all your meetings.

Think of that. He, he said, I'm fed up, the Lord says he's fed up of all your special meetings, and your conventions, and your all-night prayer meetings, and your fasting and prayer meetings. No wonder they silenced him by sawing him in two and finishing him off.

But one of the things that Isaiah said was about fasting, and it's a very good thing, because very often when we think of an all-night prayer and fasting meeting, we think these must be a whole lot of really spiritual religious people. Well, if an Isaiah were around, he'd say something else to some of these people. It says here, in Isaiah 58, 3, why do you say, why have we fasted and thou dost not see? Why are we humble ourselves and thou dost not notice? He says, I'll tell you.

On the day of your fast, you find your own, your own desire. You come to the meetings, and you fast, and you pray, and you cry out to God, but look at the way you treat your servants and your workers. You drive them hard from morning till night.

You drive hard all your workers to make more money, to get, squeeze out more work from all of them. And you fast religiously, appearing so religious for contention, and to strike with a wicked fist. You don't fast like you do today, to make your voice heard on high.

Is this the fast which I have chosen, the Lord says? Is this the purpose of all your fasting? To bow down your head and pray in such a religious way, and you don't have mercy in your life? No. He says, this is the real fast. Verse 6, where you loosen the bonds of wickedness, undo the bonds of the yoke.

Don't put a yoke on other people, let the oppressed go free. And divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor to the house, and so on. And remember this, every Jew was a brother to the other Jew.

And therefore, if you saw a homeless Jew, it was your brother who was out there. That rich man, who had Lazarus sitting outside his gate, it was not just one of these ordinary beggars that we see on the road, that was his brother. Every Jew was a brother to his fellow Jew.

And that was the sin of the rich man. And that's the point. You see your brother hungry and in need, and you don't do anything, and you fast, and you pray.

This is a lot of humbug, he says. And that's what Zachariah also said. And we know what happened to Zachariah, he was slain in the temple of the Lord.

Well, he says this, you fellows when you were fasting out there, you were just fasting as a religious activity, to please yourself that you fast. And a lot of all night prayer meetings are like that. A lot of breaking of bread meetings are like that.

They come to break bread, but there's no inner reality. There's no fellowship between the people who break bread. There's no willing wanting to go the way of the cross, these people who break bread.

It's all a ritual. And so Zachariah said, you are all doing it for yourself. You know that verse in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31, it says, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Everything, whether you eat or you drink, do it to the glory of God. If you don't eat and drink, you fast, that must be also for the glory of God. That's why Jesus said in the matter of fasting, that you must never let anyone know that you fast.

You must never let anyone know when you pray or when you give. Three things particularly, giving money, praying and fasting, must be concealed as far as possible from as many human beings as possible. But if we don't conceal it, then it is not done for the Lord.

Then it is done for the eyes of men. And so he says, these are what the former prophets prophesied. Then the word of the Lord came to Zachariah again saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother.

Don't just get involved in all this religious activity. Let there be righteousness in your life and mercy in your attitude towards your fellow believers. That's very important.

Like Micah, that was another prophet who said that in Micah chapter six, he says, what does the Lord require of you, but to do it righteously, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. So righteousness in our life and kindness and compassion to our brother is the thing that makes all our religious activity meaningful. That's the meaning of that passage.

It's a very important principle in building the body of that we speak the truth about dead rituals. They come with all their pious appearance and say, this fast that we're having in the fifth month, shall we continue it in it? And Zachariah says, you're speaking about fasting and praying and all that. He says, there's no righteousness and compassion in your life.

What's the use of all this fasting for 70 years? You wasted your time. You might as well have eaten your food on those days because God didn't get anything out of your fast. God didn't get anything out of it because there was no righteousness and no compassion in your life.

A lot of all night prayer and fasting eating, they might as well have slept those nights. They might as well have gone and eaten something and gone to sleep. Nothing's accomplished there.

And so a lot of rituals, and we have to destroy empty rituals if you are to build the body of Christ. And he said, don't oppress the widow or the orphan or the stranger or the poor. There are four categories of people mentioned here, and God is especially the God of these four categories of people.

The widow, the orphan, the stranger and the poor. Brothers and sisters, be careful how you deal with the widow and the orphan and the stranger and the poor. God's deal harshly with widows, orphans, strangers and poor people.

We can be sure of that. They will reap what they sow. That the grace of God will be withdrawn.

And that's why these four categories are mentioned particularly. And then it says, don't devise evil in your hearts against one another. This again is a new covenant concept.

In your heart, don't think evil about your brother. You see the type of message that Zachariah preached. He said, if you want to build the body of Christ, if you want to build a church, keep this in mind.

Don't have empty religious rituals without meaning. And don't think evil in your hearts against one another. But it says here, even though the prophets said all this, they refused to pay attention, your fathers.

They turned a stubborn shoulder and they stopped their ears from hearing. And they made their hearts like flints so that they would not, could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by spirit through the former prophets. Therefore, great wrath came from the Lord of hosts.

And it came about that just, yeah, great wrath. I just want to give you one example of this from Jeremiah 34. You see, Jeremiah was one of those prophets who prophesied trying to turn God's people away from Babylon.

I want you to see one incident in Jeremiah 34. Verse 8, the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were in Jerusalem to proclaim release to them. That each man, verse 9, should set free his male servant, and each man his female servant, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, so that no one should keep them, a Jew, his brother in bondage.

See, that's the message which we are also called to proclaim. The year of jubilee as we sing in that song. To release other people.

Don't hold a grudge against someone, even if the person has done a terrible evil to you. This unforgiving attitude, this hardness and harshness towards those who are in some way indebted to you, or who have done some harm to you, or who are underneath you, even to children and servants and widows and orphans and strangers and poor. That each one should set them free.

And it says here in wonderful, verse 10, all the officials and all the people obeyed. They entered into a covenant. That's like the breaking of bread.

We enter into a covenant. They obeyed that each man should set free his male servant, his male servant, so that no one should keep them any longer in bondage. They obeyed.

We say what a wonderful revival. But a few days after the meeting was over, verse 11, they turned around and took back the male servants, the female servants, and brought them back into subjection. You find that type of experience? Where we make a fantastic decision in the meeting, and make a covenant with the Lord, and a few days later, they're back again doing the same old thing.

They didn't take the word of God seriously. The fear of God didn't make them tremble at God's word. They didn't fear God.

That's what's written there in Zechariah 7. They refused to pay attention. They stopped their ears from hearing. They made their hearts like flint.

They could not hear. Their ears were deaf. And so it says, here's the law, verse 13 of Zechariah 7. It came about just as he called, and they would not listen.

So they called, and I would not listen, says the Lord of Hosts. That's righteous of God, isn't it? Absolutely righteous that he spoke to them, and they wouldn't listen. And so it says, they spoke to me, and I wouldn't listen.

That is the same measure which they had. God measured it back to them in the same way. God treated them the way they were treating him.

You can't blame God for that. He was absolutely righteous. And so I scattered them, even though they prayed and asked God to protect them, but nothing happened.

God scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they had not known. And thus the land is desolated behind them, so that no one went back and forth. For they, who are the they, not the Babylonians, the Israelites themselves, by their disobedient attitude, made the pleasant land desolate.

That's how they ruined their lives. Because they did not take what the prophet said, God's word, seriously. And Zechariah reminds them of that.

He said, what's the use of all this fasting? If you don't obey what God has said, what's the use of all the meetings and the prayer meetings, the all-night prayer meetings? If you are not compassionate, if you can't release people who have done harm to you, if you're not kind towards people, what's the use of all this religion? Humble, hypocrisy. Be righteous in your life and be compassionate and merciful towards other people. Forgive them.

Think of how much God has forgiven you. Don't be so strict on people. God is not so strict with you.

That's a wonderful message. Very important to proclaim if we are to build the body of Christ. And then we come to chapter 8. Then the word of the Lord of hosts came saying, and this is a tremendous encouragement, thus says the Lord of hosts, I'm exceedingly jealous for Zion.

With great wrath I'm jealous for her. Praise God that God himself is committed to the building of Zion, which is the body of Christ. God is jealous.

And when Paul said that familiar verse, which we all know in 2 Corinthians 11.2, he says, I'm jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ. What Paul has got is a little bit of the jealousy which God has. God is jealous that Babylon does not corrupt the bride of his son.

Think, if you were, you had selected a girl to marry your son, wouldn't you be jealous that that girl shouldn't fool around with some other man? Or that some other man should not pollute her? It's the same jealousy that God has for the bride of Christ that she should not be polluted by the world and by the spirit of mammon. I'm jealous for Zion, he says. And that jealousy must be found in the church, in the prophecy in the church.

There must be that spirit of jealousy that preserves the church in purity as a bride for Jesus Christ. That fire of jealousy, which is a beautiful verse in Song of Solomon, which says, Song of Solomon chapter 8, verse 6, the last part, jealousy, the fire of jealousy is as strong as the fire of hell. It's amazing.

The true jealousy, the jealousy that is good, the jealousy of love, it's like a burning fire, it says there. I want this one for myself. God says, I'm jealous, exceedingly jealous for Zion to preserve Zion in purity.

And that's why God sends his prophets with the same jealousy, like Paul, a godly jealousy. Thus says the Lord, I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Praise God.

He's going to be in the midst of this, which is the bride of Christ. And then Jerusalem will be called the city of truth, the city of truth. What is the opposite of truth? A lie.

Or we can say guile. There won't be any guile in Jerusalem. We read in Revelation 14, there was no guile in their mouths, in the 144,000.

We read about Jerusalem in Revelation 21 that it is crystal clear, like glass. You can see through it. You can see clear through the other side.

There is no, you know how glass is, you can see clear through to the outside, not like frosted glass, which is the way a lot of people are, but clear glass, you can see right through to the other side. No hypocrisy. The inside and the outside are the same.

That's why Jerusalem is called the city of truth. There's no lie there. There's no hypocrisy there.

Crystal clear. And the mountain of the Lord of Hosts will be called not the great mountain, but the holy mountain. Babylon is called the great, Jerusalem is called the holy, in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And these are principles that we must bear in mind. Jerusalem, even today, if it's to be called the city of truth in the final day, we have to preach truth. And we have to preach against hypocrisy and guile now.

We have to preach holiness, not greatness, because it's going to be called the city of truth and the holy mountain. Thus says the Lord of Hosts. Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with a staff in his hand because of age, and the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.

Now that is referring to the city of Jerusalem in the final day when Jesus establishes his capital for a thousand years, for a thousand years, it says there will be people will grow, will live to long years, to old age, to an old age. At the same time, there will be boys and girls playing in the streets. And we can apply that to the church as well, that in the church there is no generation gap.

The church is not for the old men and the old women wholly, neither is the church only for the young people. But the old men and the old women are in Jerusalem, and the boys and girls are also there, and they have glorious fellowship one with another. There is no generation gap with the young people there and the old people here, and they have no fellowship with one another.

That's how it is in a lot of so-called churches. That's Babylon. But John the Baptist has come to restore the hearts of the children to the fathers and the fathers to the children, and there will be no generation gap in the church, and the young and the old are together, the old and the young.

Wonderful. And the church in Jerusalem, we have a right attitude towards boys and girls. It's a right attitude towards children, unlike the wrong attitude that the government and so many other people have towards children.

No, we have a right attitude towards children, and I'll tell you something else. We don't have a super-spiritual attitude. It doesn't say the city will be filled with boys and girls praying.

Wouldn't it be nice to read that as they're praying there? And it says here they're playing. They're playing. We have a right attitude towards games and boys and girls playing in the streets.

That's Jerusalem. God enjoys it, and we enjoy it. We don't have all this super-spiritual attitude of getting them all to fast and pray when they should be playing on the streets.

Praise God for that. Praise God for the church where we are freed from all this empty ritual, and we can play games for the glory of God and teach our children to do that too. It's wonderful that God is not super-spiritual like so many believers who think it's wrong to play on a Sunday or something like that.

Thus says the Lord of Hosts. Imagine the Word of God speaking about boys and girls playing. Would you think there was such a verse in the Bible? Only God could have thought of such a verse, I tell you.

That's to be spiritual. Verse 6, thus says the Lord of Hosts. If this is too difficult to build a church like this in the sight of the remnant of this people, will it also be difficult in my sight? No.

There's nothing too hard for the Lord. The Lord can build a church like this. City of truth, holy mountain, no generation gap.

Boys and girls enjoying themselves, old men and old women enjoying themselves. God can build a church like this. The Lord says, I'm going to save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the

west, and I'll bring them back.

They'll live in the midst of Jerusalem. Now that's beginning to happen, literally, to Israel, that they'll come back to Jerusalem in 1967. They will be my people, and I'll be their God in truth and righteousness.

That hasn't happened yet, but we see the beginning, the fig tree is beginning to blossom. But when Jesus comes back in glory, that verse will be fully fulfilled. But spiritually, it's being fulfilled in the church.

We must remember these Old Testament prophecies, as we have said before, have two fulfillments. One, literally, in the literal Israel, we see that happening before our eyes, particularly since 1917 and 1948 and 1967. But also spiritually, the same thing is happening in the church.

This is simultaneous development in Israel and the church, preparing the world for the second coming of Christ. And therefore, since nothing is impossible for the Lord, and if the Lord can do that for Israel, He can do it. He's building the body of Christ also in these last days, just like He's bringing Israel back into the land.

Thus says the Lord of Hosts, here's a word of encouragement. Zachariah knew how to encourage as well. Let your hands be strong is a word which means be encouraged.

Don't be discouraged, brother. You who are listening in these days to these words from the mouth of the prophets, those who spoke in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of Hosts was laid, to the end the temple might be built. For before those days, there was no wage for man or wage for animal.

There was poverty, that means there was no job for man or animal. And for the one who went out and came in, there was no peace because of the enemies. I said all men one against another, there was strife.

Two things mentioned in verse 10, poverty and strife. They are the marks of the curse. Poverty and strife.

When the blessing of God comes, there is no poverty, there is no strife. Spiritually, we are delivered. But now, I will not treat the remnant of the people as in the former days, says the Lord of Hosts.

For there will be peace. Always the mark of God's blessing is peace. We know that God's blessing is in a church when there is peace.

We know that God's blessing is not in a church when there is strife and conflict. And don't take the peace in the church for granted. That's a mark of God's blessing.

We have to be thankful for it. The wine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce, the heavens will give their due, and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things. Yes, prosperity.

And secondly, verse 13, unity. It will come about just as you were a curse among the nations. Two houses, the house of Judah and the house of Israel, that were split into two kingdoms in the days of Solomon's son, have now become one again.

And you will together become a blessing. A picture of Jew and Gentile together becoming a blessing in the body of Christ. Do not fear.

Let your hands be strong. Yes, we can close on that note. Think of how the Lord encourages us, bringing people who were separate together to become one in the body of Christ.

No longer split into two kingdoms like the olden days. Prosperity spiritually and unity. That's the mark of God's blessing.

No longer a curse, it says in verse 13, but a blessing. That is the will of God for us. And we praise God for the spiritual principles that we can learn from the book of Zechariah, because he too was preaching to a similar situation as we are facing in these days.

Beyond the foundation to lead people on to perfection. Amen.

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