

Zech. 7 True Obedience

Chapters 7 & 8 serve as a transition from Zechariah's night visions to the oracles found in the remaining chapters. Also, chapters 7 & 8 go together. At the beginning of 7 we have some questions about fasting and the answers aren't given until the end of cp. 8. But, I will separate them into two chapters for preaching. Today's topic is true obedience. So, let's begin. I have 3 simple truths: 1) Obedience begins with God's Word; 2) Obedience comes from the heart; and 3) Obedience results in good works.

1. Obedience begins with God's Word. Throughout this passage we see the Word of the Lord coming to Zechariah (v. 1, 4, 8). And the people know Zechariah is God's prophet. As the temple is close to being rebuilt and their worship is returning as it was before the exile, we see a group of men coming from the town of Bethel (12 miles north of Jerusalem). And they come to "***entreat the favor of the Lord***" (v. 2). When they speak to Zechariah, they expect God to answer. These men have a really good question on the topic of fasting (which we will come to in a moment) and they need an answer from God. I think there is real desire to be obedient. And this will only come as they seek direction from the Word of God.

From the beginning God has always given us his Word. In the beginning, God created all things by his Word. And then, after the creation of Adam and Eve, he tells them exactly what He requires and He expects them to be obedient. In Gen. 1:26 He says, "***Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion . . .***" Concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he tells them not to eat of it. And he tells them what will happen if they do. These are clear words with clear expectations of obedience.

A good example for us is the institution of the family. God gives parents the great responsibility of teaching their children. We teach our children lots of things. And the most important thing we teach is the difference between right and wrong. And there are clear consequences of disobedience. (I remember my road experience on Juniper.) In the same kind of way, God expects obedience to his Word. The Israelites coming back from exile understood this clearly. Why were they sent into exile for 70 years? Disobedience to the Word of God. Look back at 6:15 from last week. "***And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.***" Nothing has changed today.

Do you remember when Jesus was tempted by the devil before beginning his formal ministry? He was praying and fasting for 40 days and Satan comes to him. Knowing his authority, and knowing his hunger as a man, he says, "*Just command it. Just say the Word. Command these stones to be bread.*" What did Jesus say, "***It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God***" (Matt. 4:4). What was Jesus saying? First, he was saying, "*I most obey God.*" And how do we know what obedience is? The Word of God! Jesus said, "***It is written.***" God has preserved his words in the Bible. Everything we need for life and godliness is here! (2 Pet. 1:3).

When the Apostle Paul instructs Pastor Timothy, he says, **“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”**

This is merely a reminder for us today. So how are we doing? How is your daily reading, your time in the word every day. What are you studying through? What are you reading particularly. And when you are reading, how is your meditation, your thinking on different passages. What about memorization. Also, how do you use the Word of God as you talk with other people. Do you use the Word as you speak with others? In the context of obedience Heb. 4:11 says: **“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”** (Hebrews 4:11-13 [ESV](#))

Brothers and sisters, God does not leave us in the dark. He tells us what he requires of us. And he expects us to obey.

2. Obedience flows from the heart. We’ve seen that God requires obedience, and this is obedience to his Word. But, what kind of obedience does he require? He requires an obedience that comes from the heart. This means that true obedience isn’t merely following rules. There must be a desire that comes from within. In our text we see a group of men coming from the town of Bethel in order to ask some good questions from the priests about fasting. In v. 3 they ask, **“Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years.”** This is a great question. You see, when the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians, the Israelites instituted a fast to remember the temple. And apparently, they had kept this fast for their 70 years during exile. And now that the temple was almost finished, they wondered, *“Should we continue this fast?”* This inquiry seems very reasonable. And then comes the answer of Zechariah in v. 4: **“Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me. 5 Say to all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? 6 And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?’”**

Here, Zechariah does not answer the question as they thought. Instead, he goes right to the purpose of fasting . . . and feasting. He goes to the heart, the motive behind the fasting. Then, he continues by reminding them of their past; he warns them that what He is saying is what the former prophets also said. And, in former times, Israel did not obey. Look at v. 7 **“Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were**

inhabited?” Then in v. 9: **“Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another IN YOUR HEART. 11 But they revised to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. 12 They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts.”** In that day, as they were joyous over the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple, Zechariah is warning them not to do the same things as before.

You may be fasting for some “good” reasons, but you aren’t doing it for the “right” reasons. Brothers and sisters, there is nothing more important than obedience to the Word of God. But, if obedience does not flow from the heart it will lead to judgment. It will lead to destruction. Eventually, it will lead to death apart from God. This is hypocrisy! When we look at the list of commands in vv. 9-10, we see justice . . . **“render true judgments.”** But, then we see **“kindness”** and **“mercy”** in the ways we treat the fatherless, the sojourner, the widow . . . Brothers and sisters, obedience flows from the heart! At the end of the day, what we do in this world boils down to this: *“Love God. Love your neighbor!”* This means if we are to obey God, if we are to follow his commands, the basis for following those commands is what? LOVE! And, if we are to do good works to our neighbors, what must be present. LOVE! Mercy and kindness are bound up with love for God and love for man.

If I bring Kristen roses for our anniversary and I say, *“Here, Kristen, these are for you. I’ve brought them to you because its that time of year again. I hope you like them.* Now, should I give gifts to Kristen on our anniversary? Yes. This is kind of like “law” isn’t it? But, what if I go to Food Lion for shopping. And while I am there, I see the roses. And I think, *“Kristen would really like those.”* But, I don’t stop with that thought. I also think, *“I love her so much. I want to give her some roses.”* And *“these roses are a drop in the bucket as compared with my love for my wife.”* This is heart work. Do you see the difference? This is the message of the prophets. This is the message of the Bible: obedience from the heart.

In Matt. 23 Jesus speaks to the religious leaders of his day. In vv. 23 ff. he says **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”** (Matt. 23:23-28). Jesus is not saying anything different from the

prophets in this regard. Zechariah's final answer to their questions does not come until 8:19. And he concludes with the words, "**Love truth and peace.**" Love from the heart must be our motive in all things. "**For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks**" (Luke 6:45).

Now, let's stop for a moment and think about this in real life. Let me ask, "*As Christians, how do we apply such words from Zechariah about obedience from the heart?*" I have 3 general thoughts from the Bible to answer to give us help.

First, Only God knows the heart. Ps. 44:21: "**For he knows the secrets of the heart.**" Our hearts are often up and down, one moment laughing another crying, one moment upset another joyous. One moment we feel fully devoted to God, the next we don't feel like going to church again. This is true. This is why we must always pray as King David prayed: "**Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**" (Ps. 139:23-24).

Second, Only God can change the heart. Only God can take out our hearts of "stone" and give us hearts of "flesh." Ezek. 36:26: "**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**" Of course these are words that look forward to the new covenant in Christ. But, the principle is always the same. Non-Christians have hearts of "stone." Even in our text today, Zechariah says they had hearts as hard as diamonds (v. 12). This means we pray God will change the hearts of those with whom we speak. Even some of you who sit here week after week and your hearts are not changed. And if so, I pray God will change your heart as you hear the Word week after week. But, as Christians, our hearts are different. God has changed our hearts. For salvation comes from God. I cannot attribute my salvation to any of my works or any of my good intentions or my thoughts. I think of Tit. 3:4-7, which says: "**But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**"

Third, verses like these serve as gracious warnings to Christians in the new covenant. At the end of the day, ONLY ONE PERSON ever obeyed God from the heart perfectly. This was the Lord Jesus. And in HIM, we find our good works acceptable by God. And they are often mixed with great swings in motive. But, at the end of the day, Christians are Christians. "**If any man be in Christ he is a new creation**" (2 Cor. 5:17). But, we must take the words of the prophets and the words in the NT, particularly those in the Book of Hebrews as God's gracious words of warning to us.

This means, we must always check our hearts! Ask yourself, why do I do the things I do. Do I only attend church because it is cultural? Or because my spouse wants me to? Do I care for my family because it's my duty? Or is it because I love Christ and his love flows over to my family?

Children, do you obey your parents because they make you? Do you obey them because they will discipline you? Or, do you obey them because you love them and from your heart you want to do what they ask, no matter how hard.

Brothers and sisters, for the Christian, eventually the heart will follow the duty. This is what I desire for myself. This is what I desire for you. *Out of abundance of heart the mouth speaks.* And, *where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.* If you want to see this principle played out, go and read the Sermon on the Mount this week (Matt. 5-7).

3. Obedience from the heart results in good works. Very briefly in closing, If we have the Word of God and we read it . . . and then, in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who has washed us and made us new, we obey (though in differing measures and in differing motives), good works are sure to follow. A good tree will produce good fruit. We will continue this topic next week with cp. 8.

Where we find true obedience to God's Word that results in fruit, we find a willing heart. This will always be true!