

Zechariah 7-8 • Blessings in the days to come

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

We're in the book of Zechariah so open your Bible please to Zechariah chapter 7. This is our third installment here in the prophetic book of Zechariah. This book is so, an absolutely incredible. I mean, I've told you that several times, but this is really, truly an amazing book prophetically, one of the longer, in fact, I think it is the longest of the minor prophets, number 11 of the 12 minor prophets.

We've made mention to you that the term minor prophet has nothing to do with importance, it's only size because these books are usually shorter in length, but this is the exception being at a total of 14 chapters. We're going to cover just two chapters tonight and that's going to be 7 and 8.

And, I was going to take more originally, but when we get into chapter 9, we start a series of oracles that the Lord gave to Zechariah, which then goes really, it's really two oracles, but it goes through the end of the book. And so, I really kind of wanted to take those in a contiguous fashion. So, we're going to be doing chapter 7 and 8 tonight.

So, let's pray what we just sang a moment ago, "here's my heart, Lord, speak what is true". Father, we present our hearts to you tonight in the name of Jesus, and we do present to you Lord, our hearts. As we open our Bibles, likewise, we desire Father, that you would cause our hearts to truly be opened to hear your voice this evening, because it is your voice we need to hear. You have the words of life, you have the words of truth, there is none like you, and Lord, I know that you have something significant to show us tonight in the scripture.

I thank you Lord for this book of Zechariah and I pray that you would help us to lay hold of its meaning tonight in these chapters and to apply them to our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray this prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen.

For those of you who may be just joining us or may be jumping into our Zechariah study at this particular place, let me just say here that these chapters are the prophetic visions and messages that were given to a very young man.

We believe that Zechariah was quite young when he received these visions, but the timeframe of this is important because this all came to Zechariah during that time, just after the people of Israel had been released from their exile and captivity in the Persian kingdom.

And you'll remember that they had been captured by the Babylonians, their city had been destroyed, their temple had been completely decimated and it was all due to the fact that they had given their hearts to pagan idolatry over the years. And they had refused to respond to the many prophets that God had sent to them over the years calling them to repentance and back to a faithful covenant relationship with the Lord their God.

And so, God allowed the Babylonian empire to come and to conquer the people, the southern Kingdom of Judah and dominate and decimate the city. Now, it is more than 70 years later and the Jews are back in their homeland, thanks to God moving upon the heart of King Cyrus; the Medo-Persian king who came into power after the Medes and the Persians conquered the Babylonians. He released the Jews to go back to their homeland that they might rebuild the temple and Zechariah is back in the land to encourage the people prophetically and that's largely what his ministry is all about.

Zechariah was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai and together these 2 prophets had the wonderful ministry of just giving words of encouragement to the people of the Lord that they might continue the work of rebuilding the temple.

And you'll remember it was under the direction of a man named Zerubbabel. I like that name. It's just fun to say Zerubbabel. Go ahead and name one of your kids that it'll be great. Anyway, Zechariah was not just called to encourage them, but, to encourage them to keep building and here's the reason why.

When they got back to the land, there was great excitement and they laid the foundation of the temple, but they began to receive all kinds of opposition from, you would say the enemies of the Lord, or at least the enemies of Israel, or both. And they actually stopped the building process, they stopped for 15 years and it just sat, it was just the foundation sitting there.

And they used that time to kind of build up their own homes and that sort of thing. And we went through all of this in the book of Haggai, where God spoke to the people and said, it's time to get back to work, and so forth. And so, He is encouraging them through Zechariah and his prophecies about the rebuilding of the temple and to get on with it.

But the opportunity of rebuilding the physical temple in Jerusalem was one that the Lord used to speak to them about an even greater rebuilding that would come many years later, in fact, has not fully been realized to this day. And so, the Lord is going to speak over the course of these next several chapters through Zechariah and speak of the coming of Messiah.

And I've told you before, but I'll repeat again that Zechariah speaks more about the first and second comings of Jesus, than any other minor prophet, or in fact all of them combined. And he will speak of this leader who will not just build a physical temple, but will build God's kingdom on earth. And he's referring of course to the Messiah and so we've got some really fun things to look at here.

Now, in the previous chapters that we've seen or studied up to this point, we saw how the Lord gave Zechariah several visions outlining his redemptive plan to bless and rebuild the nation of Israel. And now, as we get into chapter 7, we're going to see how the Lord responds to a particular question that was brought to the Lord and Zechariah is going to be the one to give the response of the Lord by a particular group of people, a delegation from Bethany.

It begins in chapter 7, verse 1 by saying:

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 Chislev.*

² *Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favor of the LORD, ...”* (ESV)

And what that means is, they came to ask a question, they a query they wanted to bring to the Lord.

³ *“... saying to the priests of the house of the LORD of hosts and the prophets, “Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?””* (ESV)

All right, stop there, let's talk about what's going on. Zechariah now receives this, and I should say not just Zechariah, but many, some of the other prophets and priests receives this delegation of individuals from Bethel who want to know whether they should continue to fast every year which they had been doing now for over 70 years as they commemorated and lamented the fall of Jerusalem, and that's what they were remembering.

And the reason they're asking is because the Jews are now back in their homeland, they're no longer in exile, they're back. They've come back to the land and so, the natural question comes to their hearts and minds, since the exile is technically over, we're back in our homeland, should we still be fasting in this commemoration, if you will, of when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians?

Now, the response of the Lord in verse 4 and following is quite interesting because it goes on to say:

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?*

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?’”* (ESV)

Now stop there. The Lord begins, or responds, I should say, to their question with a question, and that question is “when you fasted and mourned, did you do it for you or did you do it for me? And in fact, when you stopped fasting and then began to feast, were you feasting for me or were you feasting for you?”

In other words, he's kind of asking, “was it about me or was it about you?” And the thing that you need to know, first of all, is that this whole concept or this whole idea of fasting and this commemorative fast that the people established on this annual basis was their idea. It was not something God commanded for them to do.

They simply did it as an ongoing lament to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. But secondly, the thing that it's important to know is that their fasting was not the kind of fasting that God was looking for. And so, we're going to talk a little bit here this evening about fasting and the thing that God wants to speak to them about related to fasting is why they were doing it. And the problem with fasting, and it's the same problem with anything that we do when we do things for the Lord, is that those things can easily lose their significance and we can start to do things because of just habit, ritual, tradition.

And the Jews were very much given to those things. Anyway, those the creation of rituals and traditions and ultimately there's nothing fundamentally wrong with a tradition necessarily. But, with the Jews, and frankly with a lot of Christians, even today, those things can begin to mean more, in fact, just the doing of the thing, can mean more than the reason for why that is being done.

In other words, rather than speaking and ministering to the heart of the Lord through our fasting and fasting out of a true heart of sorrow, it began to begin to be simply this ritual. Should we still, and that's what they're asking, should we still carry out this ritual that we've been doing for 70 plus years?

And that's why the Lord begins to ask this question because fasting is all about seeking God and that's the point of fasting technically. But seeking God means more than just seeking his ear or trying to get his ear, it is trying also, it's seeking to attain his heart and that's the thing that we miss.

So, somebody, really has a prayer need on their mind or on their heart, and so they begin to fast. They say, I'm just really going to dedicate this time to really seeking, the Lord through fasting, but ultimately, they're not really seeking the Lord, many times, they're seeking to just have his ear.

In other words, I want to do this because I want to make sure I get his attention, I want to make sure he hears me, I want to make sure he really knows what it is that I want and so I'm going to begin to fast.

And yet fasting is more about seeking the heart and the mind of God, and that's what the Lord is asking here of his people related to this question concerning fasting, it is exactly why were you fasting? Was it for you or was it for me? Were you seeking my face? Were you seeking my heart? Or, were you fulfilling certain religious obligations?

God had spoken to the people previous to this. In fact, during the time of Isaiah, which, and Isaiah was a contemporary of king Hezekiah, you'll remember king Hezekiah was a very godly king and led the nation of Judah and Godliness and yet even then, the Lord spoke to them about their fasting and called them kind of on the carpet, if you will, concerning their lack of humility, even in their fasting. Let me show you some passages here on the screen.

First from Isaiah 58, verses 3 and 4 says:

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Isaiah 58:3-4 (ESV)

Why have we fasted, and you see it not? (You see it not this is a question that the Lord was, or excuse me, the people were putting to the Lord) Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' (That's their question. And the Lord says:) Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.

He goes on in verse 5 to say:

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Isaiah 58:5 (ESV)

Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? (Is that what I'm asking of you?) Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?

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Isaiah 58:6-7 (ESV)

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (your own kin, your own kind, in other words)

Do you see what the Lord is saying here through Isaiah? Is this not the fast that I have chosen, that when you fast you would reach my heart. My heart, is that you would, not just for a day humble yourself or at least show all the signs of humility with sack cloth and ashes and all the rest, but that you would so reach my heart, that it would affect your daily life, would affect your living, would affect your relationships with your fellow man, your countrymen, would change the way you respond to people. That is the kind of fast that I am looking for because it is the kind of fast that reaches not just my ear, but reaches my heart. To know my heart, to know my will, for your life.

Now, Zechariah goes on here in our study, has a second message for this delegation from Bethel, and he goes on, if you look at me in verse 8 and following, he says:

⁸ *“And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying,*

⁹ *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, (This is what he just said through Isaiah) 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.”” (ESV)*

He's saying, I don't just want to see it in your life, in your actions, I want to see it in your heart. Now he goes on to say,

¹¹ *“But they (and they is their forefathers) refused 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.*

¹³ *As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,” says the LORD of hosts,*

¹⁴ *“and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land (that land that was once flowing with milk and honey) was made desolate.”” (ESV)*

What is the Lord doing here as He finishes out what He speaks to them through chapter 7? They've had this question about their religious obligations and fasting, and the Lord is reminding them of how their forefathers dealt with the same issues. We read about it in Isaiah. He reminded them of it, saying, even when the land was still inhabited and things seemed to be going well, I spoke to them about these things.

I said, let your fasting be a true change of your heart toward your fellow man, that your lives would truly be different toward others. And they didn't listen. They made their hearts as I, as He says here, rock hard or even hard as a diamond. Which is very hard, as so they wouldn't listen, and that is why I took them away from the land.

The Lord is calling them to remembrance, to learn from the past. It's important that we learn from the past, it's important we learn from our own mistakes.

We're going to actually talk about this here in a little bit as we get into the next chapter, but learning from our mistakes is so important and then moving on.

Seeing the hand of the Lord to teach us, to instruct us even through our mistakes. Some of you have gone through some whoppers in terms of mistakes in the past, and you live in almost a perpetual state of regret for the things that you've done, and I get that, I do. But you know, there's a point where you'd have to learn from what happened and move on because you can't allow those things to paralyze you for moving on with the Lord.

We all make mistakes, it's under the blood of the lamb, it's time to learn and move on, and that's what the Lord is encouraging them to do.

Chapter 8:

¹“*And the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying,*

²“*Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion...*” (ESV)

By the way that word in the Hebrew can also be translated zealous and might even be a better translation given the context here.

He says:

²“*...I am jealous (or zealous) for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.*” (ESV)

And so, you can see here that the zeal or the jealousy of the Lord is expressed in two ways towards Zion. First of all, it is expressed as a desire to bless, the Lord is saying, “I'm zealous to bless my people, I long to bless my people”.

Do you understand that God longs to bless you? Do you get that, or do you struggle with that? I talk to so many people who struggle with that idea, who perpetually live with an idea that God is constantly watching over them, not for good, but for evil.

And they may, those words may not come out of their mouth that way, but they'll ask, and I've learned to kind of hear this in people's questions. When people ask me questions about particular sins, I can tell what's going on. They're wanting to know if God is going to be displeased with them in such a way that He's going to remove His love and His blessing and his favor. And what they're really asking, and I'm learning to understand questions that people ask in such a way as to get to the root of the issue.

And I've learned to come back and say, it sounds to me like you have a problem with your assurance of salvation. Because, I can sit and I can answer questions all day long, I've learned that. I can sit and answer question after question after question, but if the root issue isn't dealt with, it's, it is not going to go away.

I can answer all the questions they pose to me, but it's not going to help unless they address the root cause of their fear or their concern, which is, do I truly believe God loves me? Do I truly believe He's forgiven me? And do I truly believe He's for me? If we could give everybody a dose of some honesty drug, and then ask them that question, you probably would be surprised.

A little bit of truth serum can go a long way sometimes in bringing out what people really, truly, think in their heart. How do you see God? How do you see Him? Is he a stern disciplinarian who is kind of just waiting with that spanking spoon ready to tan your hide as soon as you get you step out of line? Or, is he a loving, gracious Father who's full of patience and tenderness and kindness and are you confident that He will never leave you nor forsake you?

Those are questions that, as believers, we need to ask ourselves and come to some real genuine answers related to those things. God says I'm zealous to bless you. I want desperately to bless you. He says, but at the same time, there's a zeal in my heart toward your enemies. Those who have made your lives miserable in the past, and that's the second way He speaks of this zeal or jealousy, if you will, in this passage.

Now in verse 3, he goes on:

³ Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.

Now, this is primarily a prophecy that is given to the future, that is directed toward the future when Jesus will rule and reign on Mount Zion during the Millennial Kingdom.

Let me just remind you that the next prophetic event on the calendar, on God's prophetic calendar, is the catching away of the church. That's the next thing that is primed to happen. And once that takes place, we enter into the great tribulation period and that will go on for 7 years total.

And at the end of the great tribulation, Jesus will return and we'll come back with him and He will fight for the nation of Israel against the assembled nations

of the world that will come to destroy Jerusalem at that time and he will conquer those enemies in the battle that we call Armageddon, which will signal the end of the tribulation period.

And then he will establish his throne in Jerusalem, which will begin the new age, which is the millennial age. We call it the Millennial Kingdom, or the Messianic Kingdom. And when Jesus is ruling and reigning on the earth, and we're going to see more of this even tonight in these passages in Zechariah, there will be great blessing upon the earth, but Jerusalem will literally be the center of the earth and the peoples of the earth as we will see prophetically we'll stream toward Jerusalem to have an audience with the Lord at that time.

So, this prophecy that is given to us in verse 3, where the Lord speaks of Jerusalem as how it will be called the faithful city, and how the mountain of the Lord will be called the Holy Mountain that will find its ultimate fulfillment in the messianic or Millennial Kingdom.

And then He begins to speak about the characteristics of the Millennial Kingdom. We've seen this with several other prophets.

Verse 4, He says:

⁴ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age." (ESV)

And this is one of the interesting characteristics that will be part of the millennial age. Remember that there will still be people on the earth during the Millennial Kingdom who will be mortal. Now if you're a believer in Jesus Christ and you are a born again Christian, that's not you, you will have received your resurrection body when the Lord comes to catch away his church, as Paul says to the Thessalonians, we will be changed, transformed in the twinkling of an eye. But for those who remain and who survive the great tribulation, which will include gentiles and the remnant of Israel, there will still be mortal individuals on the earth during the Millennial Kingdom, and, but, yet their lifespan will be greatly lengthened at that time. And that's what the Lord is saying here, old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem with staff in hand because of their age. And frankly Isaiah also speaks of this characteristic of extended lifespans.

Let me show you this on the screen from Isaiah 65, it says:

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Isaiah 65:20 (NIV84)

Never again will there be in it (and that is the land) an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; (can you imagine?) the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

I quoted that out of the NIV because I particularly like that rendering of that verse, it's just, it's well worded.

And so, we can see here that during the Millennial Kingdom this will be that one of the characteristics and there will be other characteristics. There will be peace among animals, the animals that were once predators will no longer prey upon other animals. In fact, animals that were carnivorous will become herbivorous. Isn't, that's strange. It talks about, the lion eating grass or, like, another animal that does that sort of thing now. We're told that they're, that the child will put its hand in the viper's nest. Isn't that a weird thought? Can you? What a strange idea and they won't be harmed. And it says, no one will harm on my Holy Mountain, and they will no longer train for war anymore. In fact, we're told that during the Millennial Kingdom, the implements of war that have been amassed by the nations of the world will be turned into equipment for agriculture and the growing of food and that sort of thing during the Millennial Kingdom.

So, it's going to be an absolutely incredible time. He goes on in verse 7. Did I read the whole 6 as well? If I didn't, I'm going to read it again.

Am I at verse five? Thank you. Thank you.

Verse 5:

⁵ *“And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.*

⁶ *Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts?” (ESV)*

Another interesting rhetorical question. In other words, however incredible or marvelous this may seem to you and me, that these things are going to be characteristically true of the Millennial Kingdom. The Lord says, oh, this is just all part of my plan. This is the way I intended life to be, before sin interrupted the whole process, this is the way I intended things.

Going on verse 7:

⁷ *Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country,*

⁸ *and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”*

Isn't that great? Great words. I will be their God in faithfulness and righteousness. Now the Lord now promises them as he goes on here in verse 9 and following some very different conditions for the rebuilding of the temple.

Now we're bringing it back, okay? We're bringing it back to the present here with verse 9, and it says:

⁹ *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets who were present on the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.” (ESV)*

Now he's calling them to remembrance. Remember, it's been 15 years since they laid the foundation, and that's the far, that's all the farther they got because the work stopped. And so, He says, now, as you move forward, now as you begin to step out again in obedience to the Lord, let your hands be strong and I want you to remember the promises that were given from the previous prophets who spoke to you about these things that the temple might be built.

Now, He says in verse 10:

¹⁰ *“For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, (in other words, everybody was giving up their time voluntarily back then) neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in, for I set every man against his neighbor.*

¹¹ *“But now (the Lord says) I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts.*

¹² *For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.*

13 And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong.” (ESV)

So, the Lord is encouraging them, “as you go forth in the work, let your hands be strong, keep going, press on, get the work done, get the temple built.”

There's one other thing that I think that I should mention before we move on here from verse 13.

Have you guys ever heard of the idea of the lost 10 tribes of Israel? We've talked about this before. I've brought it up in the past, and there's this idea that it, even some Christians have embraced that because the northern 10 tribes were captured first by the Assyrian empire and essentially distributed among the pagan, gentile nations. But those tribes were essentially lost, they're no longer there, they're just like gone. They were assimilated into the gentile peoples and they became a non-people, if you will.

That's a very strong belief among many people, and they call it these lost 10 tribes and all kinds of weird, even cultic teachings have come out of the idea of the lost 10 tribes of Israel. And then these people believe that because these lower 2 tribes, which are collectively known as Judah, were taken captive to the Babylonian empire, which of course changed hands to be the Medo-Persian empire, and then brought back to their homeland, that those are the only two tribes that ever survived.

And so, what you have is you have these two tribes that survived, and then you got the 10 tribes and who knows, they're just, they're gone, they're just smoke that just evaporated into the air. And there's nothing true about that teaching or that belief. And you can see right here that in verse 13, the Lord says that “even as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, oh, House of Judah and House of Israel”, notice he calls them both by name, each of the northern and the southern kingdom. Why? Because during all those years of apostasy and paganism and disobedience by the northern kings. And by the way, there was never one good king in the north, never once, they were all bad. Many of the people from Israel migrated to the southern kingdom of Judah and lived there, literally gave up their allotted properties according to their tribal clans. And they, instead moved down to Judah to simply be in a godly part of the country.

And so, when the nation of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and carried off into exile, there were people there from all the tribes of Israel and

that is why the Lord speaks here of, and this is one of many places in the Old Testament post exile where the Lord refers to all of the tribes of Israel.

All right let's move on. Verse 14 says:

14 "For thus says the LORD of hosts: "As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts,"

15 so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not.

16 These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates (remember the gates are where they heard legal cases) judgments that are true and make for peace;

17 do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD." (ESV)

And then this final word in this chapter from Zechariah verse 18:

18 "And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,

19 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 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 seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace." (ESV)

I want you to stop there for a moment because we need to talk about what the Lord is saying here because this is an important message, I believe, not just for the people at that time, but for Christians today.

First of all, you'll notice that the Lord makes reference to several different times of fasting that the Jews observed. And whenever a time of fasting was declared, it was typically used or instituted because it was marking some time of terrible difficulty, where there was a time of mourning and lamentation that was connected to that time of fasting, and it was usually because of their sin. Their sin had caused those difficulties.

And so, because the Lord had brought difficulty into their life because of their sin, they instituted times of fasting to commemorate those terrible times. But the Lord is saying here in all of these, in these verses, that concerning all of these

different fasts that they had been observing, which again were the result of their moral and spiritual failures.

The Lord was going to turn them into times of celebration and times of joy. Now that's an interesting thought. Can you imagine taking your times of failure and turning it into a time of celebration? Wow, you kind of think how the world could that be? I mean, you think about the things that you've done in your life that were just really truly awful and stupid and you think to yourself, how in the world could that ever turn into a time of rejoicing?

That is what God is telling them is going to happen in their lives. And the reason that those things will become a time of rejoicing is because it becomes, eventually, a time to celebrate God's forgiveness and God's grace because it speaks of how we choose to view our past mistakes, and this is important.

And we touched on it at the very beginning. How do you choose? Most people I talk to, not all, but most, choose to view their past mistakes as an opportunity for discouragement and shame when they think about it or when it's brought up to them.

There's something else that we can choose to do, and that is, we can choose to see those past mistakes and failures as a reminder of God's unfailing love in the midst of our worst, because we've all done that. And even though those actions on our part were awful and they caused heartache in our life and maybe even the lives of those around us, look where you are today. Look where you are today.

Here you are sitting in church, listening to the word of God, being encouraged, fed through the scriptures, and look where God has you. You're alive, things may not be perfect, but you're here and you're doing well, and he's moving you on. In other words, those things didn't destroy you. You're still here and that's reason to rejoice. God was faithful. God was faithful. He brought you through. He brought you to the other side, and he showed you, life can be different.

Do you ever look at somebody who's just a mess and you want to grab them by the face so they'll pay attention to your life like you do with a little child and just say, did you know that life can be different? Did you know things can really be different? Did you know you don't have to live this way? You don't have to live hand to mouth, you don't have to live telling lies, you don't have to live taking drugs and trying to, numb yourself against all the pains and problems and issues of this world.

Do you know that there's victory? Do you know that there's joy? Do you know that there is rejoicing, even in this fallen world that is full of so much pain and so much difficulty? Did you know there's another way to live? Well, you know that there's another way to live. It's different from the way you once lived.

It's different from the way I once lived. I've told you many times when Sue and I first got married, I, when I, well started before that, when I left home when I was 18, I vowed I would never enter a church again. I saw no reason, and I used all the usual excuses that people use, like, they're all hypocrites, as if I wasn't.

That's why people say that, they're setting themselves apart. Well, those people are all hypocrites, yeah, so was I. I just didn't, we wanted to admit it. So, the first 5 years, then, after Sue and I got married, we didn't attend church anywhere, not once, didn't want to, had no desire. Sundays were my day, Wednesdays my day, any other day of the week, they were all my days that wasn't about to give them up to anybody.

But life got miserable, life got miserable. Our marriage just fell apart, and when that happened, our lives fell apart and it was miserable. I mean, it was a miserable time. I was 25 years old and miserable.

And God came along and said, there's a different way to live, son, because you've been living for yourself. And this is what happens when you live for yourself, when you run after your own desires and wants and wishes and needs. It's time to live for me, it's time to live a different way. And so, I can look back on all of the dumb stuff that I did and I can rejoice in the goodness of God who brought me out of that, saved me from it, literally picked me up out of the sewer, cleaned me off, and set me on a path of a different way of living, and that becomes a cause or a reason for rejoicing. And that's what the Lord is saying here, this doesn't have to be a reminder of heartache and shame anymore.

This can be a reminder of my goodness, my grace, my love for you, to love you with an everlasting love and to bring you through these things that you thought you couldn't survive. And that's exactly what the Lord did in my life, He brought me through things that I used to say I could never survive.

He literally walked me through the very things I told people I could never do, and He showed me that with His power, I can do all things through Him.

So, God didn't remove his love from you because of all those rotten things, and He gave you eternal life and He calls you his child and it doesn't get any better than that. And that is reason to rejoice.

Now, as we finish out the chapter, these last verses speak exclusively to the millennial age. All right, so these are prophetic in the sense that they have not yet been fulfilled.

Verse 20:

²⁰ *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities.*

²¹ *The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.’*

²² *Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.*

²³ *Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’” (ESV)*

Isn't that great? So, these people are going to, these gentiles are going to grab ahold of a Jew, “you a Jew?” Yeah. Whereas there's been another, this anti-Semitism that has ruled and reigned during this time, during the millennial age, they're going to say, “you're a Jew? we're going with you buddy, we're sticking with you, I am your shadow from here on out, because you are a blessed people”. And they will long to come, and these the streaming of the nations to Jerusalem is something that several of the Old Testament prophets speak of.

I'll just give you one other example from Micah. We'll put this on the screen for you from Micah chapter 4, look at this.

(slide)

Micah 4:1-2 (ESV)

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we

may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

It goes on to say:

(slide)

Micah 4:3-5 (ESV)

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, (This is where their implements of warfare will be made into implements of agriculture) and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

Those are amazing prophecies. In fact, that particular prophecy in Micah is almost verbatim one that is given in the book of Isaiah. So, this is spoken of obviously in other places in the Old Testament, talking about wonderful times to come, when the Lord returns.

So, let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for giving us time tonight in the word. Lord, you didn't have to tell us about things that were going to happen. You didn't have to speak through the prophets and bring such incredible agreement and unity through them about the things that will take place, the characteristics of the last days, the Millennial Kingdom, the peace that will reign and rule in the earth when the Prince of Peace is ruling and reigning.

Lord, we love reading about these things, we love hearing about them. But our hearts yearn for them to become reality, and that's why the spirit and the bride say, come, even so, come Lord Jesus, come for your bride, come for your church. Receive us unto yourself, prepare us Lord God, as a beautiful bride.

We long for the day, but until that day comes, make our hearts faithful, make our hearts true. Give us Lord God, zeal and devotion. Continue to teach us your ways. Help us Lord to apply your word to our lives and guide us through your Spirit to walk with you each and every day.

We thank you. We praise you and we worship you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In Jesus name, amen.