

15-5-19pm

God's Message to the 12%?

Zechariah 8:1-23

Introduction: Some years ago the Gallup organization polled the Christian community. They found that only 12% were committed to make any real changes. When shown changes which would promote godliness in themselves and have an impact on the lost, only 12% said they would alter their life and that of their children to gain these benefits.

So, let's ask ourselves some honest questions. If prompted by God, would I actually make visible changes? Zechariah 8 was written to people in need of change. Twenty (20) years earlier they returned from Babylon. They rebuilt the altar and began sacrificing again. But within two years they stopped. They got preoccupied with their own houses and lives. It stayed this way for nearly sixteen years.

So, God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Their preaching got the rebuilding going again, but it also moved the people to ask good questions about worship.

They asked whether they should continue some fasting events (7:3). You see, during their captivity the Jews added four fasts to what God established. Their fasts centered on remembering the destruction of Jerusalem and their captivity. Being now back and worshipping again, they asked if they should continue these fasts. Good question.

In every era God has been in the business of changing His saints. In Zechariah's day it was no different. God wanted to change their:

- Desolation to Population 7:14; 8:5,6;
- Scattering to Gathering 8:7,8;
- Poverty to Plenty 8:10-12;
- Reproach to Honor 8:23; and
- Being Cursed to being a Blessing 8:13.

These changes must have sounded sweet to the people.

1. PROMISE ANNOUNCED (8:1-8) *Simple questions Involved answer*

Their simple fasting question received an involved answer. In Zech. 7-8 God's answer centers around a promise (8:7-8). God would gather Jews from wherever they were scattered. Why? They were "My People", God said.

THE REASON for this promise is simple (v.2). God was passionate about His people. He was jealous over them. They affected His heart. Jerusalem's streets would once again be filled with both the old and the young. (Interesting: a society blessed by God has both old and young as part of it. A thought for churches to ponder.) God then describes... *old + young (Boys/Girls)*

THE REMNANT (v.6-8). Those He re-gathers would be amazed. Returning would be marvelous in their eyes. Most importantly, they would be authentic. Those returning would have hearts walking in truth and righteousness. *Authentic Real Genuine*

2. PRESENT ASSIGNMENT (v.9-17) *Great... what about now?*

Okay, so God will regather the people sometime in the future. Great! But what were they to do about these fasting times now? God answers that, but his answer was not glamorous or attention grabbing. His instructions rarely are. God's promise about the future brought a call to change in the here and now. Those living at Jerusalem were to do two things -

Temple Work... Truth Work

In v.9, 16, and 17 their work was laid out. God calls for:

- strong hands and listening ears,
- personal truthfulness and societal justice,
- loving their neighbor and to stop lying under oath.

Put into a simple formula, God prescribed ...

Part Hard Work, 5 Parts Heart Work.

God always emphasizes the heart. They asked about worship actions and God goes after worship attitudes. God confronted their hearts. They asked about doing the fasts, but God deals with their attitudes behind the fasts. The

returnees had become just like their ancestors who were sent into captivity. They had old generation hearts. Their fasts designed to promote broken heartedness no longer did. They fasted out of self-pity!

They did religious activities, but the grief they felt was over their PHYSICAL condition, not their SPIRITUAL condition.

3. PRECISE ANSWER (v.18, 19)

Finally, God answers the fasting question. It is prophetic, looking to the Messianic kingdom. God will turn these sad fasts into joyous events. That is His long term answer. The short term answer was this. In light of the glorious future those living right then and there were to start to "love the truth and peace" (19). Though these Jews were not enjoying the promise, they were to start enacting the heart attitudes foretold in the promise.

4. PREDICTION AWAITS (v.20-23)

God's Kingdom age promises will make marvelous things happen. There will be a great interest by non-Jews to be in Jerusalem. The regathered Jews will be a magnet to Gentiles due to their authentic hearts and joyous worship. God describes it this way. *"In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you'."*

SO WHAT?..... Zechariah was a post exilic prophet. He preached to the returning Jews about their future. This is not a passage written to The Church. So what are Church Age saints to do with all this?

1 - When God promises a glorious future someday, those hearing about it ought to change their lives in light of it.

2 - The heart condition God will develop in a future, perfect era is what we must seek to develop in our present, messy era.

3 - The power of authentic lives and worship in a future day is an effect that can be foreshadowed in our day.

We all "**say**" we want our church to be a place for lost souls. Talk, though, is cheap. What changes are we ready to enact to see that happen? What would a local church look like whose members worshipped with authentic hearts?

What do we see in the worship of Revelation 5 that needs to be shadowed in my church this coming Sunday?

So, let's ask. "**Am I a 12% Christian or part of the 88%?**"

What changes am I REALLY willing to make? Which ones WILL I make? Sometimes less is really more...