

October 12, 2025

Return: Participating in God's Kingdom

Zechariah 7-8

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...We're going to be jumping ahead this morning to Zechariah 7-8. But before we get to the passage we are looking at today, let me summarize what has led up to these couple of chapters in this book. Beginning in ch. 1:7, we find a series of eight visions that the prophet experienced full of bizarre and strange images, just like your own dreams. Just like Ebenezer Scrooge, I'm sure Zechariah was wondering if he had "a bit of bad beef," but the scriptures are clear that these dreams came from God. And the idea that God communicates to people through dreams shouldn't be strange to us as it goes all the way back to Genesis. The dreams of Jacob in Genesis 28, Joseph in Genesis 37, and Pharaoh in Genesis 41 all gave meaning to current events or offered insight into the future.

God gave Zechariah these dreams, all which seem to have occurred in the same night, in a really cool symmetrical structure. These dreams, or visions, that God gave Zechariah were given to encourage the post-exilic Jews to rebuild the temple, showing God's watchfulness, protection, and promise of future restoration for Jerusalem and the people of Israel as a whole.

The visions include themes of God's sovereignty over world empires, Israel's past sins and their punishment, the future rebuilding and purification of Jerusalem, the roles of leaders like Joshua and Zerubbabel and their messianic symbolism, and culminating in messianic prophecies about a future king and the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom.

Which brings us to the conclusion of the dream visions with a challenge in Zechariah 7-8. A group of Israelites come, and they have been mourning over the former temple's destruction for nearly 70 years. They ask, "Should we stop grieving? Is God's Kingdom coming soon?" This reminds us of the same question the apostles asked Jesus many years later, "Is it at this time that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" in Acts 1:6.

In response, Zechariah again reminds his audience that they will see the messianic kingdom, but only if they pursue justice and peace and remain faithful to the covenant. In other words, Zechariah reverses their question and asks, "Will you become the kind of people who are ready to receive and participate in God's coming Kingdom?"

Which leads us to some questions for us to answer. What made you decide to come to church this morning? Why were you singing the songs that we sung together? Why did you participate in the prayers that were offered? In short, what are you doing here? Why are you here today?

I hope the answer comes to your mind quickly. But more importantly, I hope that the answer you have is the answer that the Lord wants to hear. For the correct answer, of course, is because we want to offer our praise and worship to God because He is the only one worthy of it. Notice I said it's an "offering," "We want to offer our praise and worship to God."

But there are a lot of other reasons why we may have come here this morning. And while we may be able to say in our minds that we are here to worship God, that may not be the true motive of our hearts.

These very questions were being asked by the Lord through the prophet Zechariah to the people of Israel. In Zechariah 7 the people asked the question, "Should we stop grieving? Is the kingdom coming?"

To understand this question, we need to know a little background information. Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem, the Israelite captives in Babylon were keeping four separate fasts to commemorate the events that occurred during the destruction of Jerusalem and their exile. Now that the captives had returned from Babylon, the people wanted to know if they should still keep these fasts and periods of mourning. God's questions to Israel found in 7:4-7 strike at the heart of the problem, where God points out their selfish forms of worship. [Read 7:4-7]

The people were fasting and mourning during these periods of time that were to be a remembrance for what had happened to their city, temple, and people. Once those days of mourning were completed, the people would go right back to their eating, drinking, and feasting.

The Lord points out that these things were not done to be pleasing to God. In fact, God had not even asked the people to keep these days for remembrance. Even though the people remembered these days, the point of the worship was not for the glory of God. Instead the purpose was for their own benefit and a wallowing in their own self-pity for what had happened to them.

God is telling the people that there is no value to worship if the honor is done for their own selfish reasons and not for the adoration of God. While we may be amazed at how the people of Israel would be keeping these fasts for their own benefit, we must recognize that we may be doing the same thing in our worship today.

I asked some questions earlier and how you answered those questions reveals the different kinds of people we have here today. Sometimes people come to worship the Lord only for the benefits they can get from it. In this way of thinking, worship is always approached with the attitude of what am I going to get out of it. When this person walks away from worship, they may say they got nothing out of it, so they are not going to put in the effort to worship, and may even start to look elsewhere until they find a place that gives them what they want.

We must see that this attitude is nothing more than selfish, self-pleasing worship. We are not concerned about what we are offering to God, but with what we are getting out of it. Although there is great blessing and we do, in fact, receive many benefits from gathering together to worship, what we receive from worship has nothing to do with the act itself. Any benefits to us are the result of the true worship of God. For worship, by definition, is about what we are giving to God, not what we receive. If we come to worship to see what we are going to get out of it, then we are coming for ourselves.

There are also those who are simply unwilling to worship. Yes, they certainly show up, but coming to worship is not from a great desire or love for God, but merely from routine, habit, and many times having nothing else to do.

This unwilling heart shows up when worship may be inconvenient. This person normally does not come unless it is convenient for them. There are other things that take priority and when those things are done, then we will show up. Effort is not made to be sure to fully participate in all that is being done in the worship of God. How poorly we present ourselves before God, and to each other, when we are unwilling to come to worship regularly. We show that we are worshipping for ourselves and not for giving to God.

Then, there are those who come to church and are the old “bumps on a log.” Yes, they have come, they will shake some hands, and will even be friendly, but there is no interest in the actual worship to God. There is no effort to sing from the heart and sing with love to and for Him. There is no effort to focus their minds on what God is saying through His as it is taught. The person simply stares off into space. The mind and the heart have not been activated in the worship. Worship is more a matter of putting one’s time in and being done for the week and then go about their way.

Now this is not an exhaustive list, but last type of person I could come up with was the person with a guilty conscience. The only reason this person comes to church is because they feel that entering the building and serving their penance of sitting through a church service will some how cleanse them from their sin they committed that week. To them, worship is not about what one can give to God, but about clearing a guilty conscience for another week and feeling sanctified for an hour.

They believe that by attending or simply being a member of a church, God has put His stamp of approval upon their lives no matter how wretched it is. I am amazed at how many people who claim to be Christians think that everything is okay spiritually as long as they can get through the doors of the church on a Sunday morning and that somehow that is going to cover the multitude of sins. But that is also not the worship that God is asking of us. This is also worship to please ourselves and to make us feel better.

Now, we all fit somewhere on this spectrum of wrong ideas of worship. But we're not alone, for these were the same types of attitudes of the people whom the Lord tells Zechariah to speak to in order to call out their selfish worship.

Then in vs. 8-10, Zechariah goes on to point out how hypocritical the people are being in their selfish worship. [Read 7:8-10]

In verses 9-10, specifically, Zechariah describes what God desires from His people. And what is described here is the only heart that can come to God in worship. And here, we begin to see what type of people we are called to be in order to receive and participate in God's kingdom.

Notice some of the things God is looking for in us. First, showing mercy and kindness, or that word also means, compassion. How much mercy do we show other people when we find a flaw in them? How much compassion do we give to those who are struggling in sin? This does not mean that we are not to call out sin and offer correction when it is needed. But compassion should be the motive behind our correction. Compassion is not “shooting first and asking questions later.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:3, “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Before we act, let us think of the mercy and compassion that our Lord has shown to us through his son Jesus. Then, with this in mind, let us act.

Do not oppress the poor, the widow, the fatherless, those who are less fortunate. This had been one of Israel's grievous sins throughout their history. Taking advantage of those who couldn't take care of themselves and then continuing to go to the temple and worship God as if nothing were wrong.

Then, the text says, "Do not think evil of one another". Again, God is looking at our hearts when we come before Him. Notice, the text does not tell us here not to "say" evil of one another. That is certainly commanded in other places of God's word. But we are not to even think evil of one another. We must immediately wipe those kind of thoughts out of our minds.

When our worship is self-pleasing, our worship is done in vain. We are being hypocritical. Let me put it like this: if we find any of these characteristics in our hearts or as our motives for worship, we are wasting our time here. Our time here is worthless, useless, and is of no profit to ourselves and certainly not to God.

I believe this was the point of Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea when He says, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Of course, God is not saying that He would rather have cold people. But He is pointing how useless the hypocritical life is and will come to the same end result as those who are cold. We are not fooling God.

And so, God pronounces his judgement on this type of false worship in vs. 11-14.  
[Read 7:11-14]

This is the reminder that Zechariah gives to the people. Judgment is coming upon those who worship God with self-interests and not God's interests. Zechariah recalls some historical lessons here. The Israelites were scattered with a whirlwind among the nations and their land was left desolate. The Lord Almighty was very angry with them.

The message is clear for these people and for us as well. When God's people do not put God first and are not seeking to give to God all they have, then they will be judged. God judged Israel for this in the wilderness. God judged Israel for this heart by bring Assyria and Babylon against them.

Notice the true character of these people, and really we see the same character in ourselves, when we do not offer our hearts: "They refused to pay attention" (vs. 11), "They stubbornly turned their back and stopped up their ears" (vs. 11), "They made their hearts hard" (vs. 12), "They would not listen to the law or to the words of the Lord" (vs. 12).

These are the characteristics of those who offer self-pleasing, hypocritical worship. Now, we say to ourselves that we are not doing these things. First, we need to double check ourselves. God has commanded us to sacrifice our whole lives, and to love the Lord with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Can you honestly say that describes you here today? If not, then we are being a stubborn, hardhearted and rebellious people.

But God responds in ch. 8 and aren't you grateful for the grace of God this morning? First, Zechariah tells us that God is jealous for our hearts. [Read 8:2]

Let us not continue to fool ourselves into believing that the course we are on is acceptable to God. God is unwilling to share our hearts with anyone or anything else. God does not tolerate second place. God burns with jealousy for His people. God is grieved when we give Him our leftovers. God is angry when He is placed behind our schedules that

we make so important to ourselves. There are many decisions that we will willfully make that will determine where our heart will be with the Lord. Putting God first in the simple things will make it easier in the more difficult things. Consider every decision you make and ask if this is putting God first.

And when we put God first, God has promised that He will be faithful and righteous to us. These are the words found in Zechariah 8:8 and then vs. 12-13. [Read]

Jesus also said in Matthew 6:33, our NT Reading for today, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you."

Unfortunately these words have become cliché in many ways because we hear them so many times. But God says that He can and will take care of the rest of the things in this life if we will simply trust Him by giving it all too Him. I know that it is against everything that our mind and body scream to our souls. It seems risky to surrender to God, but when we surrender, God has promised to take care of the rest. Let go of your will and let God's will become your purpose in life.

So why are you here today? Did you come to give to the Lord, or have their been other reasons? Have you given your heart to the Lord or have you kept it back, simply going through the motions? God is jealous for our hearts and it is not too late to give them to Him. Let's be the generation ready to receive and participate in God's kingdom.

Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the Lord's supper.