Sermon Notes for July 5, 2015

A Call to True Religion
Zechariah 7:1-8:23

Introduction
A group of men came from Bethel to ask the priests a question about fasting.
The date is December 7, 518 B.C.
The Old Testament law required only one fast – on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. But during the exile, the Jews living in Babylonia added 4 more fasts to remember the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.
Their question was really, is the exile over?
The answer they received was far more challenging and encouraging than they could have imagined.
Four questions come out of this text.

I. Are we serving ourselves or God? Zechariah 7:1-7
When you fasted, was it really for me or for yourselves?
Fasting is about repentance and turning from sin. It is about seeking the Lord and hungering for him.
The proof that our heart is right with God is seen in our obedience.
Obedience takes precedence over sacrifice. Isaiah 58:3-9; Amos 5:21-24 and I Samuel 15:22
Whom are we serving, God or ourselves?

II. Are we listening to God or to ourselves? Zechariah 7:8-14
This is what I desire, says the Lord Almighty.
• Administer true justice. Justice is the proper ordering of all society according to God’s word.
• Show mercy and compassion. Mercy refers to covenant loyalty, being faithful to God and keeping his word.
• Don’t oppress the widow, the fatherless, the alien or the poor. God is concerned about the least of these.
“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

But their forefathers would not listen. Verse 11

“When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord Almighty.” Verse 13

Are we listening to God or to ourselves?

III. Are we believing a lie or the truth? Zechariah 8:1-17

Look at God’s promises.

- I am very jealous for Zion.
- I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem.
- Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth and the mountain of the Lord will be called the Holy Mountain.
- I will bless my people with safety and security.
- I will save my people.
- I will bring them back from all the nations.
- I will bless your land.
- You will be a blessing.

Do we believe that God will do what he has promised?

IV. Are we ready for the future?

There is a day coming when our fasting will turn to feasting.

There will be a great hunger for God.

The nations will come to Jerusalem (to the church) to seek the Lord.

“Let us go with you because we have heard that God is with you.”

In our world we see glimpses of this reality when the church rises up and lets the light of Christ shine through.

Conclusion

Aristides was describing the Christians to the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

“They love one another, they never fail to help widows, they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger they take him home and are happy as though he were a real brother. They do not consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit of God.”
Here’s what I believe God would say to you and me.

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Speak the truth in love.
- Stay faithful, live according to my word.
- Don’t be anxious. Don’t be fearful.
- Trust me and pray constantly.
- Share the Good News.
- Remember, I am still on My Throne and I will return.