

FROM FASTING TO FEASTING
ZECHARIAH 8:18-23

Raye Jeanne and I enjoy watching home restoration shows. We like seeing something dilapidated and unusable made beautiful and functional. It's inspiring how skilled and creative some restorers are.

But not all restorers are equally effective. Consider the experience of the Church of St. Michael in Estella, Spain. A statue in the church depicting St. George charging a dragon had **browned with age**. They called in a non-professional restorer with **this result**. That doesn't appear to be quite like the original.



Social media blew up with mocking and laughter — and reminders of another restoration done a few years earlier, this one in a church in Borja (NE Spain). The image is of Christ wearing **His crown of thorns**. After the **image deteriorated**, a restorer was called in to fix it. **It might not have been fixed.**



One assumes that the restorers had good intentions. They just didn't have the skills to match their intentions. Aren't you glad the broken world in which we live will also be restored one day — but that its Restorer (and *our* Restorer) has infinite power and ability to accomplish fully His restorative, saving plan?

That's the core of the message that we will find in Zechariah 8, in the final oracle from God when He responded to the Bethelites who complained about their fasts and wanted to eliminate the fasts. The truth we will find in Zechariah 8:18-23 is...

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE STRENGTHENED TO SERVE HIM NOW BECAUSE OF HIS RESTORATIVE PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE.

Because God has promised, His people can be strong. Zechariah reveals **three fortifying promises** for the future of His people...

1. God Will Turn **FASTING** into **FEASTING** (vv. 18-19)
2. God Will Turn **ENEMIES** into **FRIENDS** (vv. 20-22)
3. God Will Turn **REBELS** into **WORSHIPPERS** (v. 23)

1. God Will Turn **FASTING** into **FEASTING** (vv. 18-19)

- We have seen that in Zechariah 7-8 God responds with four sayings (oracles) to the request of the Bethelites to stop fasting (7:3). While the request was made to the priests, God answered.
- Four times in these chapters, the formula ***then the Word of the Lord of hosts came*** is used, indicating four distinct messages to the Bethelites.
 - ✓ The four statements are affirmations of the sovereign authority of God — ***Lord of hosts***
 - ✓ Chapter 7 contains two statements, both of which are condemnations and warnings
 - ✓ Chapter 8 contains two statements, both of which are promises and hopeful — pointing to the MK
 - ✓ This last oracle finally addresses the question raised by the Bethelites.
- Many of our ungodly emotions come from not thinking rightly about our circumstances — so we are tempted to be fearful, or anxious, or worried, or angry, or despondent, or lonely. We are helped by renewing our minds and learning to think the way God thinks about our situations.
- That is exactly what the Lord does for the Israelites in this section. He renews their minds by turning them from grieving for the past to being confident for the future — a certain future promised by God.
- **How the Israelites lamented (unwisely)** — they observed four fasts:
 - ✓ The fast of the ***tenth month*** marked the beginning of the siege against Jerusalem in January 588 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1)
 - ✓ The fast of the ***fourth month*** remembered the taking of Jerusalem in July 586 B.C. (Jer. 39:2) — 2-1/2 years after the siege began
 - ✓ The fast of the ***fifth month*** was the most significant because it related to the burning and destruction of the Temple (2 Kings 25:8) — August, 586 B.C.
 - ✓ The fast of the ***seventh month*** remembered the assassination of Gedaliah, the Jewish governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:25) — October (581? B.C.). This was grievous to the nation because the assassination was an act against the control of Babylon and thus increased Babylon's hostility against the nation (was it a self-serving fast?).
 - ✓ All these fasts were voluntary (not demanded by God) and had been done for 70 years (essentially the entire Babylonian captivity) — perhaps from grief and perhaps to “appease God.”
- God does not directly answer their question about stopping the fasts. But **God makes a promise:**
 - ✓ The grief will be transformed — they ***will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts***.
 - ✓ The words ***joy*** and ***gladness*** are used together 13x in the OT and appear to be synonyms.
 - ✓ They are part of God's “happy” language — and they will overflow into feasts that are “good.”
 - ✓ When we think about feasts, we tend to think they are invariably happy. But sometimes the nature of the gathering is sad — think about first Christmas w/out loved one or a war memorial gathering.

- ✓ The feasts of Israel sometimes had those tones — and certainly the fasts did. Why? Because they looked *backward* and looking back, they looked at the pain, suffering, and griefs. In Zechariah's day, for four months every year, for 70 years they had been looking backward at multiple losses. It is not reading too much into the text to suppose they were feeding despondency and mistrust of God.
 - ✓ God turns that around and says, "I will make something better than fasts — I will make a time of perpetual gladness and feasts. Don't look backward at what has happened, but look forward to what is coming (by My gracious hand)." This is another of God's coming "redemptive reversals."
 - ✓ "Whereas past memories of Jerusalem brought lament and pain, future memories of Zion will focus on the feasting within the city: "Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals" (Isa 33:20)." [Klein]
 - ✓ What is coming, of course, is the Messiah ruling in Jerusalem on His millennial throne; God is promising the coming of the final great King of Israel (1:16; 2:5; 8:3ff). [More below...]
 - ✓ This is a reminder that what is ahead for God's people far outweighs what is behind (2 Cor. 4:16ff).
- Because of the coming Kingdom, **God calls Israel to genuine faith:**
 - ✓ **So** introduces a conclusion — because of God's promise, this is what Israel is to do...
 - ✓ They are to **love truth and peace**. This clause is both an encouragement and correction. Previously they had loved their fasting and their rituals; this is a reminder to abstain from ritual and cultivate a genuine delight in every form of truth and peace. It's a call to genuine faith (love of God) and the actions that flow from that faith (not ritual but heart transformation).
 - ✓ Specifically, they are to love *the* truth and *the* peace — that is, God's (genuine) truth and peace.
 - ✓ This is what will characterize God's kingdom (8:3, 8, 12); they should do then what they would do in the future (7:9; 8:16-17), akin to the call of the NT believer (2 Cor. 5:9).
 - ✓ But the great emphasis is on *loving* what God loves. God is not honored by ritual activities without a heart of devotion for Him; in both testaments He calls for love of Him (Lev. 19:18; Dt. 6:5; Mt. 22:37).
 - ✓ He *will* transform every grief into joy — for Israel and for us. Let us have a greater love for Him and trust in His magnanimous promises than we do sorrow for our losses. He will repay.
 - ✓ You know the name William Carey as a missionary to India who translated the Bible into Hindi and planted churches that are in existence even today. Yet he was well-acquainted with sorrow: three of his children died in childhood; the death of the third child led to his wife's "insanity" from which she never recovered. He ultimately outlived both her and his second wife. And after working for 20 years on the translation of the Bible, all his work was destroyed in a fire. What did he think?

God's judgement of what things are good...frequently differs from ours, for he often bestows those external, apparently good things on his Enemies, and visits his saints with poverty, disappointment, afflictions, contempt, and many other things supposed by us to be evil. He, however, well knows these external evils to be necessary to the substantial good of his servants, and were not this the case they would not be exercised under them; for he doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the Children of Men. I rejoice that you have both been enabled to commit your ways to the Lord; persevere in that cause and all will be well. The joy of the Lord will be your strength.

- Life is lamentable. But God has promised. Have faith (and obedience) in Him. All will be well.

2. God Will Turn ENEMIES into FRIENDS (vv. 20-22)

- There is one fundamental promise in these verses: the nations (Gentiles) will come to Israel for salvation. But that one promise is told from three different perspectives:

- **The promise from God's perspective** (v. 20)

- ✓ **Thus says the Lord of hosts** — again, God is emphasizing His sovereign power over all things
- ✓ That power is manifested in bringing the nations to Israel for salvation.
- ✓ It is a fulfillment of the promise of **Dt. 4:1-8** — when the nations see the salvation and obedience of Israel, they will be drawn to the God who saves Israel (cf. **2:11**; **Is. 2:1-4**; **60:1-3**; **66:18**).
- ✓ Not just will people come, but **the inhabitants of many cities** — the worldwide places of power and authority would stream to Israel in submission and obedience to God.
- ✓ Cities like Babylon, Nineveh, Noph (Memphis, Egypt), Damascus, Alexandria, and Rome will come.
- ✓ Cities like Beirut, Moscow, Cairo, Baghdad, Tehran, Bahrain, and Washington D.C. will come to Israel — not just in “friendship,” but for salvation. Friends and enemies alike will seek God's salvation.
- ✓ All those places that sought to subjugate Israel will one day come to Israel without swords, in submission and peace, and for the salvation that produces truth and peace (**v. 19**).
- ✓ What an astounding day that will be. But isn't that what God's salvation does (**Rom. 5:10**)?

- **The promise from the nations' perspective** (v. 21) — what the Gentiles say about going to Jerusalem

- ✓ In this verse, God speaks, but He recounts what the nations will say — this is their perspective...
- ✓ **Let us go at once** — there is urgency to the gathering of nations. They are in a hurry to be saved.
- ✓ **To entreat the favor of the Lord** — this is not just a gathering of people, but it is an evangelistic gathering. And for the first time in history, this is a gathering of genuine seekers — people who are coming for the purpose of being saved.
- ✓ To entreat the favor of the Lord is to appeal for grace. The same phrase is used in **7:2**. The Bethelites misunderstood and attempted to manipulate God's grace; these will come genuinely.
- ✓ They will also **seek the Lord** — to seek God is to make Him the object of one's desire (Ps. 27:4, 8).
- ✓ Why do people appeal to the grace of God? Because they realize they are sinners and they have no ability to commend themselves to God. And that is what the nations will do. Astounding promise.
- ✓ And notice the last clause — **I will also go**. The speaker calls the others to go (**us**) and affirms a second time that he will go. There is urgency, anticipation, and joy.
- ✓ This is what the remarkable salvation of God in the last day will do. But every gift of salvation is the same kind of astounding salvation — “who would have thought it?” Noah. Abraham. Peter. Paul. Onesimus. Martin Luther. You. Me. God draws people to Himself that are unanticipated. (If you are not a believer, no sin you have done can keep you away. Go to Him and ask for salvation...)

- **The promise from Israel's perspective** (v. 22) — Zechariah observes & comments on the Gentiles' arrival
 - ✓ **So** is God's conclusion (voiced through Zechariah) — it's the interpretation of vv. 20-21.
 - ✓ **Many peoples will come to seek the Lord of Hosts...**
 - The word **peoples** refers to tribal relationships — “people groups” that transcend borders. The reference is to territories and regions, so that the universality of the response is emphasized.
 - Every place in the world will be drawn to the salvation of God (**Is. 45:23**).
 - Notice that they are also seeking **the LORD of Hosts** (same as in v. 21) — they will go to the powerful one. We tend to draw back in fear from those who have authority. They will go to the One who has authority — because He has the authority to save, and that's what they desire.
 - And notice that they are coming to seek the LORD **in Jerusalem**. The great city is not just the center of Israel, but it is the center of the world, with the King established there (8:3). For the nations to go to Jerusalem for worship is to affirm God as the One true God (Mic. 4:1-3).
 - ✓ But it is not just people groups, but also **mighty nations** — every nation will be represented and notice that it is the **mighty** nations who come (in need and submission). The strongest in the world come acknowledging inability and dependence. (Which is how all people come to God for salvation.)
 - ✓ And as in v. 21, the prophet here affirms that they come **seeking** and **entreating** — humility, the same way all people are saved (Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30-31; Rom. 9:15).
 - ✓ “Christ's earthly reign will include the most extensive corporate worship in human history.” [MacA]
 - ✓ This prophecy had to astound and shock the nation: the nations that had always been opposed to and sought Jerusalem's destruction, now coming to Jerusalem for salvation? Amazing grace.
 - ✓ Indeed, it is by grace — which is another significant component to this prophecy: neither the nations nor Israel is saved by ritual observances (7:3). Salvation is always by grace for those who love (delight in and follow the Lord, v. 19b). It was then. It is today. And it will be in the Kingdom.

3. God Will Turn REBELS into WORSHIPPERS (v. 23)

- In one last declaration in these oracles, **LORD of hosts** affirms one final promise: **ten men...**
 - ✓ The number 10 points to the pervasiveness of the desire — **all** the nations are included and vast numbers from every nation are seeking salvation.
 - ✓ There is an urgency to this desire (as in v. 21) — they are **grasping the (hem of the) garment** — they are on the ground, grasping, and begging for the message of salvation. It is akin to **Mk. 5:29**.
 - ✓ The specific request is **to go with you for we have heard that God is with you**.
 - With this confession, they “complete their spiritual pilgrimage.” [Klein] **Phil. 2:9-11**.
 - They will have found the Savior for whom they have been groping (Acts 17:27; Rom. 11:25). And both the Gentiles and Israel will be saved (**Rom. 11:30-32**).
 - And the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant will be completed (**Gen. 12:3**).

- ✓ Note the use of the word **nations** — it is the same word as v. 22; it is sometimes translated “tongues” (languages). Back in Genesis 11 (Babel), the nations were formed by the introduction of languages and the “tongues” were regathered. One day, under the dominion of Christ, the “tongues” will be regathered into one nation and people under one King, Christ.
- What is also notable in this verse is the timing of these events — **in those days...**
 - ✓ This is the only time that Zechariah uses this particular phrase, but it is commonly used by the prophets to speak of the end of the Millennial Kingdom and the end of time (**Jer. 3:16-17**; 33:15-17).
 - ✓ This is the day when the final Davidic King will ascend to His throne in Jerusalem (Zech. 8:3ff).
 - ✓ [Aside: this is the literal 1000 year rule of Christ on the earth, **Rev. 20:4**; 1 Thess. 5:1-11.]
 - ✓ Our consolation is that King Jesus is ruling now in Heaven; in those days, He will also rule on earth and all people will be subject to Him.
 - ✓ The world has been opposed to God since Genesis 3 and the introduction of sin. And in that day, the opposition against God will be reversed.

CONCLUSION: As you read these verses, you will think about passages like **Rev. 5:9** (and 7:9, 10:11, 14:6). **God is bringing the nations to Himself.** He will accomplish His final salvation. There is no mistake in His restoration process. His people (Israel) will be preserved and grace will be extended to the nations (Gentiles, us). So —

- ✓ **Let us meditate on the joyful future and not the sorrowful past.** (And let us remember God’s grace in both the future and the past.)
- ✓ **Let us be overwhelmed by the favor (grace) of the Lord** that saves sinners (starting with us).
- ✓ **Let us do in this day what all will do in that day — seek the Lord in obedient love.**
- ✓ **Let us anticipate and work for the salvation of the nations.** There will be a stream of people to Israel in the future looking for the message of true salvation. Let’s give them the message now.
- ✓ **Let us not be anxious for today (or tomorrow) because the LORD is almighty.** His sovereign power holds all things and all salvation in His hand. He will keep and preserve Israel and us until and through that day.

COMMUNION PRAYER

BENEDICTION (David L): Isaiah 60:1-3