

From Who We Are to Who We Will Become

Jonathan K. Dodson | Zechariah 7-8 | November 29, 2015

The book of Zechariah is a mind-melting, heart-thrilling glimpse into God. We've seen visions of heavenly horsemen, measuring men, a massive scroll & lampstand, a flying basket, the celestial city of God and its Branch-King. These images deal powerfully with our longings for justice, forgiveness, and peace. In fact, this progression from God's justice, to the renewal of a people and eventually the whole world are represented in the design for our series: red-gold-white. With the night visions complete, we now stop off in a hinge passage 7-8 which connects the visions of the first half of the book with the promises and warnings of the second half. ADV This interlude tells us three things about how God sees us: 1) as we are 2) as we should be 3) and as we will become.

Sees Us As We Are

The date is Dec 7, 518 BC, two years have passed since the remnant of Israelites have returned to the land. They are now two years into temple reconstruction. The people of Bethel, a city 12 miles to the north on the edge of the province, send a group of emissaries to inquire after Zechariah and the priests in Jerusalem. They want to know if they can discontinue an annual fast. The occasion for their fifth month fast is the memory of Babylonian defeat and exile, when the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the city burned. But now the city is being rebuilt. The temple foundation has been laid. Why should they continue to fast? The Lord responds by telling Zechariah, "[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? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?](#)" (7:6-7). What is he saying about fasting? There are actually positive and negative views on fasting (in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers, Is 58 & Jesus, when you fast). You can fast and not fast for the wrong reason. **How do we know if we have the right reason?** Two ways: **1) You look for the out.** Do I have to fast? Do I really need to read the Bible? I've already read it? Won't God let me into heaven even if I don't pray? You look for the out. **2) Your piety is based on circumstances.** He asks: "[Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous?](#)" (7). He says, I didn't just ask you to fast when things are hard but when things are easy, prosperous. If you're active in church, fasting, praying mainly when things are difficult you're probably wrongly motivated. If that's you, God's saying you're missing the point. You've missed the heart of it. Listen to his question again: "[Was it for me that you fasted?](#)" Was it for me? [Was it for me when you prayed, when you read, when you sang, when you served, when you gave...or was it to get something from me?](#) When you fast or pray: "[What do you find yourself praying for? What is your perceived reward?](#)" Is it God's will, God's presence, God's glory or your will, your way, your glory? **Are you loving God or leveraging God?** When we leverage something, we apply our weight to get what we want. Are you applying the weight of devotion only to get something from God? Less difficulty, less suffering, easier work, easier community, more success or [do you want him?](#) If our devotion isn't for him, we'll shape-shift over time: "[refusing to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. 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.” (11-12). If our devotion isn’t for him, we’ll deform over time. Stubborn shoulder, stopped up ears, hardened heart. **The physical action reflects their spiritual condition.** Turned away from God, avoiding his Word, reluctant to love, fast and pray. Unbent knee. Their only hope is the Spirit of God but they quench his voice. God sees them as they are—diamond hard and deserving of great anger. Their hardening does not come without consequences. The Lord refuses to hear them; scatters them, and the land is left desolate. **Disobedience leads to distance** and apart from the Spirit God sees as we are—diamond hard.

Sees Us As We Should Be

Then a word comes to Zechariah that shows *as we should be*: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart” (7:9–10). Notice the way we should be is radically communal. We render true judgments by being familiar with the truth. We show kindness and mercy by being close to others, especially those in need. Are you close enough to God to speak truthfully about him? Are you close enough to others to know how you can serve them? Or do you live a relatively insulated life? ILL Luke Pray. Guys text truth. Mercy M2. *We are made for others.* We hear this and immediately think about what we have to give up, not who we should be. So how do we get to be as we should be? In Gen 22 God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mt. Moriah but at the last second provides a ram in a thicket as a substitute. With the help of Kierkegaard, let me retell the story with two Abrahams, one who arrives early and one who arrives late. See which one you identify with. **Early Abraham** hears God’s request and says, “Yes, Lord anything for you. I love you.” He gathers his courage, the knife, the wood, and off he goes with Isaac on the trip up the mountain. He’s so eager to honor God that he actually arrives early, only to find that when God gives him Isaac back, he is embarrassed. He cannot take joy in Isaac’s return. Why? Because he did not get to sacrifice for God. He spoils the whole story in proud self-reliance. **Are you fasting for me? Late Abraham?** When he hears God’s request to take the three day journey to the mountain to sacrifice, he throws up his hands and says, “*Forget it, I can just as well sacrifice him here at home rather than the long way to Mt. Moriah.*” Late Abraham forgoes the joy of seeing God provide. Why? Because he is cynical and driven by convenience. At first, these two Abrahams seem very different. One is excited; one is tired. One takes the journey; one does not. One is courageous; one is cynical. Yet, despite their differences *they share something foundational in common: they deny faith.* Early Abraham forgoes faith by reliance on his piety, his eager sacrifice. He is courageously proud, ready to impress God with his action. Late Abraham forgoes faith by denying its opportunity. He refuses to take the trip altogether. I’m not gonna go all out for God. I’m definitely not making that 3 day journey. Sure, he looks religious in making his sacrifice at home, but he’s trying to thwart God. He’s driven by cynicism. What good will it do? Bottomline he’s a coward, unwilling to trust and sacrifice for anyone but himself. Both leverage God for something less; they sacrifice faith. **The cowardice of doubt and the hubris of courage both miss the point—the whole journey was about faith in God.** Trusting him every step of the way. And this is why Abraham is the father of faith. He trusted God. He trusted him up the mountain, as he raised the knife. Will you? With you live by faith in God? Amy Carmichael did. **None that**

trust in me shall be desolate. Tom & Julie Steller do. Take the long view, others, church, God. **Hope in God** (Ps 42). Are you taking the long view, hoping in God? Faithful and true. He sees as we are, diamond hard, and as we should be, faithful and true. Finally, he sees us as we should be.

Sees Us As We Will Be

“And the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. 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” (8:1–3). Based on the jealous love of God, there will be a day when the remnant will be a faithful city. Some translations, “Faithful and True.” Everything we’re meant to be. **See, God chooses to see us differently, not based on our action but based on his.** A ferocious love rises up, a holy jealousy, like a husband going after his distant wife, with tears in his eyes and knees in the dirt, and he begs her to come back, to dwell with him. I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. The word dwell here is picked up by John to describe Jesus: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). God chooses to, and can see us differently, through the life of Jesus. Hanging on the cross, God’s wrath is diverted onto him, our accuser is defeated, so YHWH can walk down from the clouds into the heart of the city *and dwell with us*. Full of grace and truth, Jesus, the Faithful and True calls us the faithful city and chooses to dwell right here, among us. **He chooses to see us as we will be and as we are in Christ.** But you have to take his point of view. We have to lay down your piety and cynicism and take up faith. We need faith. As Kierkegaard says, “**Faith is not renouncing Isaac; it is receiving him.**” We have to, we get to, receive this perspective of ourselves because it is his perspective of us, by faith. Stop focusing on sacrifice and start focusing on Christ. **Was it for me that you fasted?** Faith makes God the reward not his gifts. Faith endures through the circumstances with sight on a greater Reward. Those who stay the course, who continually turn back to Christ, faith becomes sight. And before you know it you behold a whole new city, on top of a mountain, with the Reward full of glory right before your eyes. It has open spaces where the young run free, where the rivers run with wine, and the tables are field with food. There is no want. 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. Fasting turns to feasting in the house of God. But at the bottom of our action, our sacrifice, our kindness, our mercy, our justice will he find proud piety, cold cynicism, or burning faith? A person arriving early, arriving late, or arriving on time, in step with the Spirit, by faith in the promises of God? So, the Lord of hosts comes along and says, be strong and speak truth to one another. Do not devise evil in your hearts. Show kindness and mercy to one another. But don’t do it to be seen, do it because its who I see you to be, now and who you will forever be in Christ—the city called Faithful and True!