



The Heart of God for His People

Zechariah 8

Pastor Adam McMurray

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The Heart of God

Chapters 7 and 8 of Zechariah are all about God's heart. Right at the center is a verse that seems to pulse with significance and meaning. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath" (8:2). What does it mean that God is jealous? Can the maker of heaven and earth possibly be wanting for something? Many Christians have stumbled over this verse and others like it. But it is a mistake to imagine jealousy as we understand it today, and then apply that attribute to God, as if He is some kind of green-eyed monster. More importantly, to misunderstand this verse is to miss the heart of God for His people.

When God says that He is jealous, He is describing His passionate zeal for His people. It is a description of internal intensity, an intensity of love towards us that is so great that He tolerates no rivals and burns with wrath towards anything or anyone that would tarnish or block intimacy in the relationship. God is not a distant God. He is not detached. He is not like the father who feels love and desire for his children but withholds those emotions from them for some reason. God speaks up, God reveals His heart, and perhaps most significantly, God acts.

The Purpose of God

Zechariah 7 ends with the people of God in a very bad place. They have been scattered among the nations, cut off from relationship with their God and Creator. It is an important chapter because it helps us to understand that God's zeal requires that He be intolerant of disobedience and hard-heartedness. This is the jealous wrath of God. But Zechariah 7 is only one half of the picture. In chapter 8, we find that God is also passionate about relationship with His people, so passionate that He will do whatever it takes to restore them to intimate relationship. His purpose is to deliver His people and to dwell in their midst (vs 3), and this purpose is a direct result of His passionate heart for them. In verse 8, God declares through the prophet Zechariah, "I will bring them (his people) to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness." This is a marvelous Gospel verse because it reminds us of the heart and purpose of God. God is the one who is going to act. Something drastic has to happen to restore the broken relationship described in Zechariah 7, and God is the only one who can do it. God is the one who must enact salvation for His people, and He promises to do it because He fervently desires to save and know us. The faithfulness and righteousness that verse 8 speaks of is not our faithfulness and our righteousness, but God's. It points forward to the faithful and righteous work of Jesus Christ on the Cross restoring our broken relationship with the Father. It is in Christ that Zechariah 7 and Zechariah 8 are perfectly fulfilled. This is the marvelous gospel work of God.

The Only Appropriate Response to God's Heart: Fasting Turned to Feasting

In Zechariah 8, God does finally answer the question of His people about fasting which began chapter 7. But it is an answer that can only be given to those who understand what God is promising to do and how the Gospel is the fulfillment of that promise. In verse 19 He says to His people, all these fasts that you have been observing, they will become "seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts". Your fasting will be turned to feasting. For the people of Israel, the fasts were a response to the exile. But fasting is not appropriate for the time of restoration, for in that time God will pour out his blessings for the people to enjoy. "Old men and women shall again sit in the streets" (vs. 4), and children will once again play and run freely without fear (vs. 5). It will be a time of blessing and fruitfulness because God will once again dwell among His people. Too many Christians live with a Zechariah 7 vision of God only. They see God as always angry and always punishing. They need to read on and embrace Zechariah 8. They need to turn from fasting to feasting and enjoy the rich relationship that God has invited them to through the Cross of Christ. My prayer for you today is that God would reveal His heart to you and that you would respond by feasting on the blessing of God through the Gospel of Christ.