



The Open Heart and the Open Hand Zechariah 7:1-14

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Religion vs. Relationship

The people asked a simple question that seemed to require a basic yes or no answer, “Should we, or should we not observe the regular fast in the fifth year of the month?” It was a good question too because that particular fast was a response to the destruction of the temple many years before this (2 Kings 25:8-9). Now that the temple was being rebuilt, the people wanted to know whether or not they were supposed to keep up with this religious observance. But they didn’t get a simple yes or no answer to their question. Instead God gave them a prophetic word, challenging them to move past the emptiness of their religious observances and into a true heart level relationship with God.

Religion vs. relationship: that was the real issue for God’s people in Zechariah’s day. They were going through the motions. They were showing up for the ceremonies. They were observing the “spiritual disciplines”, but their hearts were unmoved and unchanged. Their motives were muddled. God asks them, “Did you ever actually do this for me?” And if it wasn’t for God, then who was it for, really? It’s amazing how easy it is for us to settle into a spiritual life of religious observance rather than a heart level relationship with God. It’s sad too, because in the end it is both lifeless and totally fruitless.

The Open Heart

The answer is an open heart. An open heart is a heart that is actively listening and responding to the Word of God. This is where the people were failing – just like the generation before them. The Word of God; the voice of God – this is the theme that is repeated most often in this chapter. Over and over again it tells us that the Word of the Lord came; that the Lord was speaking to them (7:1; 7:4; 7:7-8; 7:12; 7:13). We are also told, over and over again, that they refused to listen. In fact, in 7:12 it says that, “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.” Do you see it? There is a direct connection between the hardness of their hearts and their refusal to listen.

Relationship is about listening; truly listening; listening with your whole heart. This is what makes the difference between religion and relationship. To be religious you don’t really have to listen. All you need for religion is a to-do list. All you need is a yes or no answer about behavioral questions. But God calls us to so much more.

God is speaking. He speaks through His written Word and through His Spirit. He wants us to open our hearts to His heart, to His Word, to His Glory, purpose and honor.

The Open Hand

One of the sure signs that we are living with an open heart (towards God), is that we are living with an open hand towards others. It was easy to see that the people of Zechariah’s time had hard hearts toward God. All you had to do was watch how they treated other people; especially people who were hurting and in need. Their lives were characterized by the closed hand and the tight fist. You could tell they didn’t love God by the way they failed to love people. They didn’t reflect the heart of God because they had closed their hearts to the voice of God.

So now God calls them out. God calls them to live with an open hand. He calls them to, “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).

This sounds so much like the message of John in the New Testament, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God

whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." (1 John 4:20-21). And, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (1John 3:17-18).

The message of Zechariah is all about building. The work of building only really begins when we open our hearts to God; to His voice and His Word. Then, as we grow in relationship with Him through Christ, He moves us to open our hearts and our hands to others in love. This is the way of Christ in our lives. This is the gift of the Gospel. His grace goes before us. His heart is for us. What is left for us is this: the heart level response.
Say yes.