



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Zechariah 7:1-14

“The Question About Fasts ”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading today is in Zechariah chapter 7 verses 1 through 14. Zechariah chapter 7 verses 1 through 14.

“And it came to pass that in the fourth year of King Darius that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chislev, when they had sent unto the house of God, Sherezzer, and Regem-Melech and their men, to pray before the LORD, and to speak unto the priests who were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month and separating myself as I have done these so many years? Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto Me even to Me? And when ye did eat and when ye did drink, do not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities round about it, when men inhabited the Negev and the Shafila, and the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah saying: Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts saying: Execute true judgment and, Show mercy and compassions, Every man to his brother. And oppress

nor the widow nor the fatherless, The sojourner nor the poor. And let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear. Yeah, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law and the words, which the LORD of hosts hath sent in His Spirit by the former prophets. Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass that as he cried and they would not hear, so they shall cry, and I will not hear, saith the LORD of hosts. (Now, I have made a few changes in the text there and you'll recognize the change to the future tense, which I think is true to the Hebrew text at this point.) But I shall scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no one passed through nor returned; for they laid the pleasant land desolate.”

May God bless this reading of his inspired Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank Thee that as we come to Thee, we can come to Thee with the sense of assurance, that Thou art the one who worketh all things according to the counsel of Thine own will. We know that Thou art sovereign, and therefore Thou art well able to take the requests of men and to answer them if it be Thy will. And so, Lord, we come to Thee with regard to the ministry of the Word today, and pray that as this Word goes forth the Holy Spirit may take the things that are said, and use them to accomplish the purpose where unto Thou hast sent them.

We pray, Lord, that the messenger shall be the messenger in the Lord's message, and that our hearts shall not be stopped nor shall we turn away our shoulder from the hearing of the word of God. We pray, Lord, that that ministry may be fruitful in our lives, and then through us to others also. We thank Thee for the plans of this congregation,

and for that which lies ahead of them, for the wonderful opportunities and responsibilities that Thou hast committed into our hands.

And we pray, oh Father that by the Holy Spirit Thou wilt enable us to enter into and realize these responsibilities and privileges, and so we commit ourselves to Thee for Thy blessing upon us. We pray particularly for those who are ill, and unable to be here with us. And, Lord, we would particularly remember the [name redacted] family. And we ask that Thou wilt strengthen them and comfort them, and encourage them. And Father if it be Thy will, we pray that Thou wilt lay Thy hand upon this young girl, and in Thine own way restore her to health and strength. We ask, Lord, that the ministry of the Word in our daily lives this week may reflect the one whom we serve, and whom we honor. And may, oh Father, the worship that we have for Jesus Christ not be that of emptiness and formality, but of genuine real content out of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ, and so we commit ourselves to Thee, and each one upon our hearts. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are continuing as we have been doing for the last several months, our studies in the prophecy of Zechariah. And particularly in the light of current events, and the subject for today is The Question About Fasts. The prophets were men of reality. They despised and denounced the emptiness of mere ritual, which to them became hypocrisy. If you had studied the Greek language, and had studied the word for hypocrisy, you would like that it comes from a Greek word, *hupokrinomai*, which means “to answer from under.” And the background of that word is very interesting. It was the custom in ancient days for actors upon a stage to frequently use masks in order to play their parts, and so to answer from under was an illusion to a man, who like an actor was playing a part. And from this figure of answering from under a mask, there has come down to us the word hypocrisy, and it has come on in to the English language, and I think that is a very fitting origin if the word. For that is exactly what a hypocrite does.

He has a mask upon his face, and he answers from out from under the mask that is upon his face.

Now, the prophets were men who despised hypocrisy, for example the prophet Isaiah. He begins his great book with what the German scholar Evalt has called the great arraignment. And in this great arraignment, a law case, it is God who is the judge. And it is God, who through the prophet is the plaintiff, and it is Israel, who is the defendant, and it is heaven and earth who are witnesses. And the charges that God lays against the children of Israel are not charges that they have not known the true God. As a matter of fact, God speaks to them, and he speaks to them in the familiar names of deity, which they knew, the Lord or Yahweh. The Lord of hosts, the holy one of Israel. They knew all about God. As a matter of fact, they knew all about the Law of God, but God could not stand the nation Israel at the time that Isaiah wrote those words, and Isaiah says, giving God's message to them, “Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons, and the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot bear. It is iniquity even the solemn meeting.” It is just as if God were to appear in this audience today, and say, “The gathering together of the saints of God in an assembly like this is wickedness in my sight.” For that is exactly what God was saying, “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. They are a trouble unto me. I am wearing of bearing them. And when ye spread forth your hands in prayer, I will hide mine eyes from you. Ye when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.”

And then he lays upon them the commands that are the commands of God for them. “Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Seek justice. Relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless. Plead for the widow.” And then of course because he is God and not man, if men had come to that place, the next step would be to hue the enemy into pieces, but because God is God, and he is not only holy and very practical,

but also a God of love, he says, “Come now, and let us conclude our reasoning. Saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” In other words, if you come to me and acknowledge your iniquity then I will forgive.

Now, Isaiah was not the only prophet who for God could not stand the hypocrisy of religious people. Malachi too was that way. Malachi, you’ll remember speaks to the people of his day, and a couple of centuries after the day of Isaiah. And it seems that they have not learned the lessons of the prophets, and so the Father speaks through the prophet and says,

“A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master, if then I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Saith the Lord of hosts unto you. Oh ye priests, that despise my name, and they say, wherein have we despised Thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine alter and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee in that Thee say by so doing the table of the Lord is contemptible, and if ye offer the blind for a sacrifice is that not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick is it not evil? Offer it now, unto thy governor. Will he be pleased with Thee or accept Thy person saith the Lord of hosts. And no I pray you beseech God that he will be gracious unto us. This hath been by your means. Will ye regard your person? Saith the Lord of hosts.”

And you see in Malachi’s day the same difficulty that Isaiah experienced was found in Israel. There was not open rebellion. There was the punctilious observance of all of the requirements of the law, so far as they thought. But their conscious was gone. They were no longer thinking. Their whole head had become sick in the midst of their religious observances. Very carefully carrying out all of the details that God had set before them in the Word. God said it is wickedness, even your solemn assembly. The God who is the God of Israel has been preached to the world as a God of triviality. What

kind of a God is this who requires nothing more than the outward observance of his precepts? What kind of a God is this that is not really concerned with the heart at all, but wants you to slay an animal or so, that wants you to gather in a solemn meeting, that wants you to lift up prayers to God, but do not really mean those prayers from the heart. What kind of a God is this? Why this God is a God of triviality.

Now, it's no wonder that the 20th century does not think much of the God of the Christian, for the same thing goes on in our assemblies too. We go through our religious motions, but it does not mean very much to us. We are very sure to be here on Sunday morning, and very proud of that fact. And very sure to be in church on Sunday night, and very proud of that, but the world does not notice any difference between our actions, and the actions of good men in the world. It's no wonder that they think that our God is a God of triviality, and that he does not care. And not only that but it's obvious that when men come to that state, that you can see upon their faces, that they do not really enjoy what they are doing. And so as Malachi said, “God has become a weariness to them.” And you can look in our churches today, and surely see that because in our Christian churches you do not see the joy of the Lord upon the faces of people when they enter the congregations. It looks as if it is a meeting to which they do not want to attend. It surely is weariness to them. “You mean to say, we've really got to go to church this morning.”

Now, evangelic smile and say, “No, we're not like that.” But I am not sure about that at all. As a matter of fact, I think down in the hearts of many of us in Believer's Chapel, and I must confess down in my heart, many of time too, there is a weariness with divine things. And I think that it is at that point, that God looks down into the hearts of everyone of us and says, that your going to church, your praying, your preaching, well that is wickedness, wickedness before him. Today, when we enter our Christian churches, religion, if I may use that word without explaining it. Religion is no longer God's good news of salvation, but it's mere social cement for maintaining the status quo in many of our churches. It's a mere husk of a habit. Whenever I think of hypocrisy, I

think of the boner that was pulled by one of the kids who was taking the Scripture exams in Britain, back in the days when everybody used to have to take an exam on Scripture in the schools, and the question was, “What is the prevailing religion in England?” And the little kid forgetting what he had been told by his teacher and looking at the reality said, “The prevailing religion in England is hypocrisy.” [Laughter]

I think of the old Southern darkie, who got up one night during a revival meeting, and says, “Brethren and sisters, you know I know that I ain’t been what I ought to be. I’ve robbed hen roosts and stole hogs, and told lies, and got drunk and slashed folks with my razor, and shot craps and cussed and swore. But I thank the Lord for one thing. I ain’t never lost my religion.” [Laughter]

Now, Zechariah was a prophet who followed in the footsteps of Isaiah and Malachi. He was a prophet who knew full well that for us to go through the motions of spiritual things is not only something God has difficulty with. He cannot away with it. He cannot bear it. He cannot stand it. As a matter of fact it is iniquity and wickedness to God. Much better to confess that you have no joy of the Lord, much better to confess that you cannot in reality worship and serve him, than to come together with the saints of God with a façade upon your face, as a hypocrite, and to answer under that mask as if you were worshipping and serving the God who is the God of hosts, and who knows every single thought of your heart.

Now, the children of Israel have come back to the land of Palestine. At least a remnant of them have, remember? They have come back under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, and even though God has, in mercy, brought them back to that land, still they are not completely sure that God is to be first in their lives, and so for many years, they do not do the first thing. They do not put first things, first. God raised up some prophets. Their names were Haggai and Zechariah, and these prophets stirred up the people of God until finally they began in 520 B.C. to build again the temple of the Lord.

Now, people apparently had come back and settled in various parts of the land of Judea, and some had settled in Bethel. Now, Bethel was a place famous for its idolatry and past times, but now there were some men there by the name of Regem-Melech and then also one other man, whose name is listed here in Zechariah chapter 7.

Now, they had come back and for two years the temple had been constructed, and the Oedipus was rising before the eyes of the people who were in the land. And about this time, Zechariah and the children of Israel who were in Jerusalem received a visit from the men from Bethel.

Now, verse 2 should be rendered, “Now, they of Bethel had sent Sherezer and Regem-Melech and their men to pray before the Lord and to speak unto the priests who were in the house of the Lord of hosts.” And so Bethel had sent a delegation, a delegation of two. And these two men had come with a very practical question. You see Israel, during the seventy years of captivity, had instituted some fasts. They are not referred to in the Bible and so far as we know, there was not specific divine authorization of these fasts. Some of the fasts were fasts that were connected with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. And the one that is mentioned here, the fast in the fifth month, was one that Israel had undergone during the years of captivity, because they were attempting to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebakanezer, and by their fasting they were acknowledging that that was a calamity, and a catastrophe that had come upon them. In the 8th chapter we will say more about this, but just for the moment, I want you to notice that this particular request that had come was a kind of a natural request.

“Now, that the temple is rising before our eyes, shall we observe the fast, which was a fast designed to commemorate the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple which Solomon had built. Now that we have a new temple shall we go through the process of observing the fasts again?”

And so the question was very natural. Now, I want you to notice another thing. In the 3rd verse we read that the delegation had come to speak unto the priests who were in the house of the Lord and to the prophets saying. Now, it was natural too for them to come to the priests, because the priests were those in Israel who were responsible for instructing the children of Israel in the word of God. “The priests lips shall keep knowledge.” Malachi said, and all the way back to Deuteronomy chapter 33 it had been said in the Old Testament that the priests were those who led the worship of the people of God and also were responsible to instruct them in the Scripture.

Now, the prophets were men who were designed by God to give prophetic Revelation, to give new truth. They were designed by God as an office or a gift to give Revelation, new truth as the people needed it. And so God raised up prophets to bring new Revelation. But it was the duty of the priests to teach the Law of Moses, the Revelation that God had already given.

Now, I think there is a little ignorance here. It’s quite obvious that finally when this word came to Zechariah the Prophet he says in the 5th verse, “Speak unto the people of the land, and to the priests saying.” Apparently these men had come to the priests and they didn’t know how to answer the question, and so apparently at this time the priests were deficient in their responsibilities before God. And so they have to come to Zechariah.

Now, Zechariah is very careful. He wants to say that this is not the prophet speaking, but this is God speaking. And so he says, “Then came the word of the Lord of hosts, unto me saying.” Now, I think it’s very important that we realize that. Sometimes I think that as Sunday after Sunday, I open up the word of God and preach this Word to you. I sometimes wonder if you really think that I stand here as a representative of the Lord or stand here upon my own authority. One of the reasons why in the preaching of word, I think it is so important that we give the word of God and not our opinions about

the Word, is that I do not stand as authority before you. As a matter of fact I am not authoritative in this church. I am not the authoritative person.

Now, I have some friends who preach, who say that the final authority in the church is the pastor. Now, I would challenge you to look into the word of God and to show me one text that supports that statement, just one text. Give me one text, and then I will have a little more sympathy with your view. But you cannot find one text. Search it through. You will not find it. You will discover that in the word of God the authority of the local church rests in the elders. They are responsible for discipline. They are responsible for government. They are responsible for oversight. It is the gifted man, the teacher, or the pastor teacher, for there is such a gift. It is that man who takes the word of God, and who brings the word of God to the saints to build them up in the faith so they can do God's work. But he is not authoritative. And so when I stand before you this morning, or another morning, I do not stand here as an authority, and I have no authority except in so far as I preach to you the word of God. And if you have a controversy with me, and I have given to you the word of God, your controversy is with God. If you have a controversy with me, and I have not given you the word of God, then I am at fault. I hope, by the way, that you will come and speak to me, and tell me that. And I want to assure you I will fight for my view point, if I think I am right, and you better have some good passages of Scripture which stand up to the tests of exegesis.

Now, you don't have to quote the text, in the Greek. And I will try not to wave a red herring before you by saying the Greek says this however, but I want you to feel like you can come to me, and you can say, "I don't agree with that for this reason." But I want to assure you that when I stand up here, I think as a rule, I think I am speaking the words that God gives me. But I am not the authority in this church. The elders are the authorities in this church.

Now, when the men come to Zechariah they have come so the text says to smooth the face of the Lord or to make his face pleasant. That's what the Hebrew text

says. It's translated “to pray” here. Now, I don't think that they had really come to pray from the heart. They had come to pray like little Jimmy prayed just before Christmas. He knelt down by his bedside, and he prayed. And he prayed very loud. And finally mother stopped him and said, “Jimmy, don't pray so loud. The Lord is not deaf.” He said, “The Lord may not be deaf, but grandma is.” [Laughter] By the way a lot of our prayers are like that too aren't they. They are not prayers for the Lord. They are prayers for the saints. They are prayers directed towards the saints. They are prayers designed to impress the saints, and it seems obvious from Zechariah's reply that that's the kind of praying that he anticipated that they would make in the city of Jerusalem. They would put on a good show. And they asked the question now, “Should I weep in the fifth month separating myself as I have done these so many years. God has been such a weariness to us all through the seventy years.”

Now, you can sense from the question that is asked that they have not been doing this voluntarily. They have been doing it involuntarily. They have thought that they must do it. They have thought that they ought to do it, but there has been no real joy in fasting because of the discipline that God has brought upon them.

Now, let's look at Zechariah's answer. And I said there is a little ignorance here, because the priests didn't know, but the prophet did. Now, before we look at the answer, I want to point out to you that this request was a request that on the surface appeared to be a very wonderful request. And I want to say this to you, because I think that Christians today, some of our evangelical Christians, are the most gullible of people that I have ever known. The gift of discernment is almost completely lacking in the saints of God. We have people who are earnest and sincere who are so misled by false doctrine. Misled by sensationalism. Misled by great claims of a fleshly character that the work of God is suffering for that.

Now, if you had looked at these men, you would have said, “My isn't it wonderful the work that God is doing in Bethel where the seminary of the liberals used to be? And

not look at them.” And we would have been so happy over the fact that Bethel is now come back to Jerusalem, and furthermore they are asking about the will of God. Isn't it wonderful that Bethel now, is not longer concerned about the will of the false idols, but now they are coming back asking about he will of God, and furthermore about the will of God in the worship of men. And they should have come to Jerusalem, no longer are they going to serve the idols and have their own worship. They are going to bow to the worship of Jehovah. Isn't it wonderful? Let's have a hallelujah praise meeting in the church of the saints, over what has happened in Bethel.” But the prophet had the gift of discernment. He knew what had been going on all this time, and he knew why these hypocrites had come up from Bethel. It was all on the surface. They were speaking out from under a religious mask, and so Zechariah speaks out and he says, “When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even though seventy years? Did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me, Jehovah? No. It was all a selfish thing. You were putting on a show.” You were saying, “Oh, isn't it terrible that God has judged us? Isn't it terrible that he has discipline us? We have been so sinful and we have been so wrong. And all of the time, they were so wrong in saying that they were wrong. And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink? When the fast was over did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?”

In other words, here on the surface is a question that is an admirable inquiry, but Zechariah by the word of God says that all of this fasting was external and formal and empty ritualism, empty ritualism. In other words, you're very question should we keep it up after we have doesn't it these so many years is a question that is symptomatic of a deeper problem of attitude. It is a barometer of loss of dedication to him.

Now, let me say one word about fasting. The New Testament says it's all right to fast. As a matter of fact the Apostle Paul fasted, and in Romans chapter 14 he says something very specific about it. When I was in Dallas Theological Seminary in my first year, we had a man who was a very fine man. In fact, I think the keenest man in our

class. He was very much concerned about the will of God for his life. And became so concerned that one night he determined that with God's help he would discover his will for his life. And we didn't see him for a bout a day and a half, and finally at the end of the day and a half, he told me that he felt that God had called him to serve on the mission field, and I asked him why. He said, “Well, you haven't seen me around,” And he was not trying to brag. He said, “You haven't seen me around, but I have been fasting for a day and a half. I was so anxious to discover what God's will for me is, and I feel that I have discovered that.” And he became a very effective worker on the mission field.

There is nothing wrong with fasting per say, but fasting of course is simply a means to an end. It's a means to separate ourselves from the affairs of daily life to devote ourselves completely to him for a time. To discover his will. To worship him. To have that relationship deepened, but in all of their fasting there was no deepening of relationship at all.

Now, what is the application of this to us today? You know we have some special days in the Christian church. We have a rabbit and egg festival every spring. And at the rabbit and egg festival, which is a lost weekend so far as God is concerned, I think, so often. What do we do? Well, we go out and buy some new clothes that is one thing we do. And so we wear a new dress, and we wear a new hat. And we men, if we had the money, we would buy a new suit too. And so we put on a great show on Easter, and the churches are crowded. Do you think God is happy? I think he hates Easter above every other Sunday. I think that's the worst day in the year for God because there is so much hypocrisy on that day. And then we have a festival at year-end. That's a commercial spree, in which we are engaged in buying and selling and giving. Many good things happen at Easter, and many good things happened at Christmas. But I wonder if Christmas is not the next worst day in the calendar of God. And we have some other days. We have Good Friday. That's the day when we look sad. I remember a Bible

teacher who said, when he was talking about sadness in the church, “A way with spiracle sanctimoniousness, a religion that wears grave clothes begs to be buried.”

Now, much of this doesn't affect you in Believer's Chapel, so I am coming to you. We have a service in the Christian church, which is called baptism. It's a very holy and a very important ordinance. It is something that means a lot to God, when it is carried out in the right spirit. It means a lot to men when it is carried out in the right spirit.

Now, believe it or not, I have baptized people in almost every circumstance, and I know that some of you won't believe it, but others of it know it to be true because you have seen it. I have even baptized people in swimming pools. I never thought when I had a swimming pool in the back of my house, at my last house, that I would baptize someone in it, but I did at his request with a group of the saints gathered around the pool. It seemed the worst place to have a baptism as far as I was concerned but this man was very sincere. And you know when I finished, someone came up to me whose son had just been baptized in a church recently, and said, “To me this was the most meaningful baptism that I have ever witnessed.” Do you know why? Because it had the note of reality about it.

Now, we have the Lord's supper. And in this church we observe, as the apostles did, the Lord's supper every Sunday, and so we gather, and I hate to say this. We gather “in solemn meeting.” That's Isaiah's expression. We gather “in solemn meeting.” But I am convinced in my own mind that sometimes the Lord's supper is the worst meeting in the church. I believe in it with all my heart, but sometimes I believe that we so defile and make abominable the finest service in the Lord's assembly that God cannot stand it. He cannot stand it because our hearts are so far from him.

I believe in baptism. I believe in the Lord's supper, but I believe in reality, and when I speak to you this morning, do not think that I am telling you what you do and what I do not do. Often I can speak with great authority because I know it's true of me. And then we have our church going. Why did you come this morning? Why did you

come? Some of you would be better off at home. Is this a weigh station on the way to the ball game this afternoon? Some of you come in. You are not interested. Some of you are having a hard time keeping your eyes open at times in this meeting, not this morning. Why are you here? Have you come in the spirit of Cornelius, who expressing it for his household said, “Now are we all gathered together in the presence of God to hear the things that God has given you Peter, to speak to us that we might be saved.” Is that why you are here? I certainly hope and pray to God it is, because God thinks it is a wicked meeting if that’s not why.

And we don’t take up a collection, so we can skip that. How do you feel when you put that money in the collection plate? Boy, I sure hate to loose this dollar. Do you realize that God gives you the glorious privilege of cooperating with him in the salvation of eternal souls? Do you realize what that is? Do you realize what it really means? That you can be a coworker with God. Prayer meetings, I am interested in this you know because we have had prayer meetings in Believer's Chapel. I hate to say things because you know when I say this, some of you are going to say, who are not in Believer's Chapel visiting this morning. “They don’t really like to pray much there.” I must say I have to agree with you. We had prayer meetings this summer. We had one prayer meeting when about seven people attended. That may be an evangelistic estimate. [Laughter] And out of those that attended perhaps some of us weren’t really anxious to pray anyway. It was a weariness to us. And you would think that if you looked at us you would say, “Their God is a God of trivialities.”

And Bible classes, we love the Bible classes, and so we rush to the Bible classes, but often it makes no difference to us what so ever. We attend Bible class, after Bible class, after Bible class because someone has told us that doctrine is important, and so we leave our unmade beds at home, as our dirty dishes in the sink. And our kids come home, and they wonder where mother has been all day long. She’s been studying the Bible. She’s been growing in grace, don’t you know? She’s becoming an outstanding

evangelical Christian while the house collapses in ruins. [Laughter] And husband wonders what he's going to get for supper that night.

I heard of a preacher who preached a very interesting sermon. Do you know what his sermon was? The Recognition of Friends in Heaven. Wouldn't you like to know what he said? He received a letter during the week. It said, "Dear Preacher, I think it was very interesting the sermon you gave on the topic the recognition of friends in heaven. I think it might be wise sir, if you found it convenient in the next few weeks to preach on the subject The Recognition of Friends on Earth." He said, "It so happens I have been in your church for about two or three months, and not a person has spoken to me since I have been in the church." They were very much concerned about interesting facts of the word of God but they have neglected the truth. Vance Hefner said, "Never has there been a time in theology history of the church when there has been so much wires stretched and so little power in it." And how true it is."

And now, Zechariah after this rebuke says to them, "Should you not hear the words, which the Lord has cried by the former prophets when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity and the cities round about it, when men inhabited the southland the West Country by the plain." In other words, the think the Lord is interested in is not your sacrifices, not your praying not your fasting primarily. He's not interested in all of this activity. He is interested in obedience to the word of God, obedience to the Word.

Now, I want to say, I wish I had two hours this morning, but I don't. And I know some of you are anxious to get out to the Cotton Bowl, and I don't regret that at all because I am going there too. [Laughter] But I do want to say something about this text here in verse 7. I often today hear people say to me, "Isn't it wonderful this new truth that such and such an organization is now emphasizing, and how wonderful it is." And everybody gets all excited about it, and sometimes it's very important truth. I read and I heard of one mission organization had been making great hay over the fact that finally now. They have permitted some native to be on the board of the mission field great

apostolic discovery of biblical truth, after nineteen hundred years mind you. Was it not G.K. Chesterton who said, he wanted to write a book. He wanted to write a book about an Englishman who left England, but who somehow got off course, and came back and touched England landing there, thinking that he had discovered some island in the south seas, and he planted the flag of England on the pavilion, that godless pavilion at Brighton speaking in signs to the people there.

Now, that 's the way I feel when people come to the word of God after nineteen hundred years, and discover some truth that has been there all along. It's been there all along. If we just pay attention to the word of God all of our problems would be solved in the Christian church if we just paid attention to the word of God. That's all. When I was in Switzerland studying, there was a young Christian man who had just received his doctor's degree in chemistry at the University of Basel, and he and I were talking about the studies out at the university, and there Professor Bart, and Professor Coleman [ph44:23] an Professor Ricker [ph44:26] and others were teaching and this young man about thirty years of age said to me, he said, “You know, Lewis, they are always talking about entdecken.”

Now, entdecken is a German word that means discovery. He said, “They're always talking about entdecken, entdecken, entdecken out at the theological faculty.” But he said, “When we look at their entedecken, we discover it's things that simple Christians believed all along, who studied the word of God.” And so then Zechariah concludes by saying, and I must stop, that it's a great passage. I do need two hours, but I am not going to take it. Verse 9,

“Execute true judgment and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother, and oppress not the widow nor the fatherless, the sojourner nor the poor and let none of your imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refuse to harken.

They pulled away their shoulders, they stopped their ears that they should not hear. They refused. They repudiated.”

They finally rejected, and so hard hearts get hard treatment, and that's what the rest of third passage says. So what's the answer? Well, it's obvious the thing that the prophet has been talking about is that religious activities when there is no reality in them are hollow shams before God and he hates them. He hates them. He hates our coming into Believer's Chapel on Sunday morning, and when we pray, not praying. He hates it when we come into the word of God as if we are reasoning to its truth when we are really not. He hates it. He despises it. He hates all of our Lord's supper activity if it is not genuine before him. He hates all religious activities that have no reality to them.

Now, he doesn't want you to abandon the activities that are set forth in his Word. He wants you to set your heart right, and he wants you know that when the reasoning is concluded that if you will come to him and ask him for the kind of heart that he desires, that he will give it to you, for you cannot manufacture it yourself. The way to get this heart that he is talking about is not to say, “Well, I am going now to try the best I can to please the Lord. You'll never do it, you never can do it. You don't have the power within yourself to do it. He wants to do it for you. He doesn't want you to do something for him. He wants you to yield yourself to him, so that he can do something through you. That's what he wants.

Religious activities leave us with a sense of unreality, insecurity and incompleteness, and we can never be happy in them. I would long for the day when people came to Believer's Chapel with a smile on their faces that was genuine, not a mask. Not that kind of face you know in which you see a lot of teeth, and underneath when you reach out your hand, “Glad to see you, you are the most disagreeable person I have ever known in my life.” I mean reality. When we love to be here because we love to meet with the saints, and to meet with the Lord. And when we want to do something

for him. And when all of the hollow sham of our Christian activities is behind us, and we sense that we have to do with a God who is real. When the man who had the son who was a lunatic, the epileptic, came to the Lord Jesus he said, “We brought him to your disciples but they could do nothing about it.” The Lord Jesus said, “Bring him hither to me.” That’s the answer to come to him, and in coming to him, we find reality. And we shall not find it until we come to him.

If you are here this morning and you have not believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, I have not spoken to you. Your responsibility is to believe in the one who died for you upon the cross and as you say, “Thank you, Lord, for dying for me.” God gives you life. For you who are Christians and living a sham Christian life, which God hates, may God help you to come to him and ask him for the cleansing and pardon, which he so freely will give, and give your reality in your life. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit work in the hearts of those who know our Lord Jesus to give us reality and vitality and a sense of definite relationship to Thee, Lord, and, oh Father, for those who do not know Thee, give them no rest nor peace until they come to Jesus Christ, who can save. For his name’s sake. Amen.