



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Zechariah 8:1-23

“From Empty Fasts to Joyful Feasts”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is found in the 8th chapter of the prophecy of Zechariah. And this morning in an attempt to cover the entire 8th chapter in the exposition, I want to read this chapter and also say to you that due to the exigencies of a brief time, after all we are suppose to stop in the vicinity of 12:00, and some of you have an engagement this afternoon, we won't be able to stress every particular statement of the 8th chapter and therefore I am going to read it so that you will understand, I hope, some of the things that I want to stress in the message that follows.

Let's begin reading now at the first verse of the 8th chapter. You following along in your text as I read, and you'll remember the background of this chapter is the same as that of chapter 7. The Israelites are back in the land of Palestine, following the captivity. Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets, are attempting to stir up the people to complete the work on the temple, which was God's will for them, and now in the midst of their work, a delegation from the city of Bethel, famous for its idolatry in years past, has now come to ask a question about certain fasts.

Now, these fasts were not set forth in the Old Testament as required fasts, but, rather they were fasts that were designed to celebrate the fact the God had had to discipline the children of Israel, and so they have asked a question, “Should we observe

the fasts now that the temple is under construction?” And in the last chapter, Zechariah really did not answer that question. But now in the 8th chapter he will continue and ultimately he will answer the question by simply saying, “The fasts will one day become feasts.” And he leaves the matter somewhat up in the air, which I think was purposeful.

“Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, (May I retranslate that? The Hebrew expression as well as the Greek translation of the Hebrew made many years ago, should be rendered in the future, and so let’s render it that way.) Thus saith the Lord, I shall return unto Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets of it. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, (There are Haggai and Zechariah among them.) who were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built? For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour.”

Now, that verse is very interesting because it says in effect that while Israel was disobedient I sent them a period of time in which trade was dead. There was no economic prosperity but economic depression, furthermore there was violence. It wasn't safe for a man to go out or come in because of the affliction. And we are reminded of Newark, and Detroit and Watts, and the other disturbances that we have today. Could it possibly be that some of the things that we see in the United States are results of our lack of proper relationship to God? And then he speaks of internecine strife. That is strife among the Israelites themselves, and I for one, think about the strife in this country with Stokely Carmichael and Elaine Brown and many others, and wonder if there is some connection here.

Now, the 11th verse,

“But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD. And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts;

therefore love the truth and peace. (And since I am not going to comment on this I want you to notice that in the Scripture it is love the truth first, before peace. When the truth is loved properly. God will give peace, but there is no peace if we do not put truth first.) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. (It's almost as if someone spontaneously says, let me go too.” And you catch the sense and the disposition, the mood, of this sense of thrilling spontaneity. We want to go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, which shall prevail in the future.) Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts (Have you noticed as I have been reading, I have been trying to emphasize that. That's the tenth time in this chapter that we have the expression, “Thus saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts.”) In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.”

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

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of truing to the word of God. The privilege of listening to Thy voice through the Holy Spirit, who inspired holy men of ole to direct the words to us, and help us, oh God, to remember that as we read these words, we are not just reading a book that is studied in theological seminaries or a book that is designed to comfort us when we are in trouble. It is the word of God. And Lord, help us to realize that because it is the word of God it is the most important book in all of the world, and that our relationship to Thee is the most important relationship that we shall ever have. Help us to treat it in solemnity, and to treat the one of whom it speaks in worship. We thank Thee for Jesus Christ of whom this

book speaks. And we do not want to regard the book above him, but the book only as a means to him.

And so Lord enable us as we meet today to worship the one who has loved us and given himself for us in response to the Word that is proclaimed. May the ministry that comes down from Thee lead to worship that returns to Thee. We especially, Lord, pray for some who are not able to be here with us. We remember particularly those who are in the hospital, some who are desperately ill.

And oh Father, we bring them to Thee and we ask Thy blessing upon them and upon their families. May Thy hand, oh God, be upon us and upon them in mercy if it should please Thee, and Lord we pray for each one gathered in this auditorium today for the spiritual needs that exist. Thou hast said in Thy word, that if we have not responded to Jesus Christ, we are dying men and dying women. And so, oh Father, may the Holy Spirit take the Word and bring to life, out of death, those who may be in this auditorium without Jesus Christ. We commit our time to Thee, the singing of the hymns, the ministry of the Word. For Thy blessing in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today, as we continue our series in Zechariah, Zechariah in the light of current events is “From Empty Fasts to Joyful Feasts.” As I mentioned in the Scripture reading, the delegation from Bethel had come, and they had come about a question of fasts. And in the answer, which Zechariah gave to the question, shall we continue to observe the fasts, now that the temple is being constructed. The prophet had taken out a considerable space of in his answer to them, to denounce the emptiness of mere ritual, which leads to formality and hypocrisy. He also called them to the Word, and he reminded them of the judgment of God. And during the course of the message last Sunday morning, I tried to point out that the prophets were men of reality, and if there is one thing that the prophets hated it was hypocrisy and sham and can't, and the kind of thing that often goes on in our Christian churches. Of course when they spoke, they

were very much concerned about things like the sacrifices, the prayers, the going to the temple and other such observances.

Furthermore, they had their festival days, and we have our festival days of Christmas and Easter and Good Friday and such days. And I tried to emphasize the fact that the prophets saw that it was not necessary simply for the children of Israel to observe the things, which God had set forth in his law, but they were to observe them from the heart. And Isaiah in the first chapter, remember brought the children of Israel before the judgment of God in that great court scene which was called by a German scholar, The Great Arraignment. He brought the nation before the judgment of God and pronounced them guilty. He said that they had been treading the temple courts, but there was no reality in their temple treading. They had been bring their offerings, but there was no reality in the confession that should have accompanied them. And furthermore they were stretching out their hands in prayer to God, and as far as God was concerned it was wickedness.

In fact, Isaiah sums it up by saying, “Wickedness amid worship, and God cannot bear it.” And then I mentioned the prophet Malachi, who dealt with the same thing very severely. Malachi spoke about how, in his day, men were bring offerings to God, and they were offerings of animals that had been torn, animals that were not fit to be offered to a Holy God according to his own law. They had been coming to the one was master of the heavens, and had been calling him the Lord of hosts, but they had not been giving him any fear whatsoever, and furthermore, when they came they had had the nerve to say, after God had brought home in conviction to them their condition, wherein have we despised Thy name.

They had polluted the table often Lord in the temple, and they had had the nerve to say, “Wherein have we polluted Thee?” They had brought the sacrifices that were disobedience in themselves, and in the midst of it had had the nerve to say, “We don’t understand in what way we have displeased God.” So not only had they displeased him,

but they were stupid in their disobedience. They had, in a sense, convinced the world about them that the God, who was the Lord of hosts, was a God of triviality. A God who does not lay any claim whatsoever upon the hearts of men, but who only seems to be interested in the outward.

In fact, in their carrying out the many and laborious acts of worship, which they carried out. They had even had the nerve to say within their hearts, “Oh, what a weariness all of this is.” And God had become a God of weariness among the children of Israel. And I tried to stress to you, that is exactly what we have in the evangelical church today. We have people who are going through the motions. We have individuals, and no doubt there are some in this auditorium this morning, who the last place you would like to be is in this auditorium. We have people who attend church and do not have any real desire to listen to the word of God at all. We have people who attend prayer meetings who do not really have any desire to pray. They come because they want to be seen in a prayer meeting. They come because they want to be seen in church. And then there are some, who perhaps are even more confused. They come because they think they can gain some merit from God by coming to a prayer meeting or attending a church as if God in heaven is a God with whom we may bargain. We may do good works, and therefore we may please him, and therefore he will bless us.

In other words, the message that the prophets gave was a message, which was valid for today. Most of you know I am a lover of the column Peanuts. When I was in Portland a few weeks ago, I referred to a couple of the scripts that Mr. Schultz had drawn to illustrate a point or two. And then some friends of mine came down from Portland about two weeks ago for the convention of the medical doctors here in the city, and they brought me Peanuts' date book for 1968. They knew that I would like it. And so I was thumbing through the other day, and looking at the cartoons and the date book for next year, and I ran across one, which illustrates exactly what I am talking about here, or what I am going to talk about.

Lucy and Linus are together, and Lucy is saying in the first panel, “Our generation has been given the works.” And in the next panel she’s throwing her hands up in the air saying, “All of the worlds problems are being shoved on us.” And so in the third panel Linus speaks and says, “What do you think we should do?” And Lucy with a leery, wicked grin says, “Stick the next generation.” [Laughter]

And you know it illustrates something I think in the word of God. It’s very interesting to me how five hundred years before the time of Christ they were having the same problems that we have today. And each generation of human beings down through the year has been sticking the next generation with the same problems, and we’ve never yet solved them.

Now, the reason of course is because we are human beings, and we shall never solve them as long as there is such a thing as human nature around because unconscious and conscious hypocrisy will be with us until the Lord comes. You know the Lord Jesus dealt with this. He said, “There are many who will shall say, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Thy name? Have we not cast out demons in Thy name? Have we not in Thy name done many wonderful works?” And Jesus shall say, “Depart from me ye workers of iniquity. I have never known you.”

Now, did you notice it Lord Jesus did not say a few. He said, “Many shall say, Lord, Lord, but he will not know him.” I think the worst thing next to conscious hypocrisy is unconscious hypocrisy, and that is what our Lord seems to be talking about. It is possible to be very deceived about this, for this is a very subtle thing. It is possible for me to be standing up before you and preaching to you these things and be guilty of the very same things, saying within my heart at the same time I am glad I am not like this congregation which is sitting in front of me.

It is very possible for us to look at the Pharisee and the Publican and preach about how the Pharisee was hypocritical, and how he boasted in the fact that the tithed, that he gave a tenth of all that he possessed. He prayed. He did all of the things that he should

do. And he thanked God that he was not like that Publican. And so we talk about the Pharisee, little realizing that we are often like him, because we say, “I thank God today, I am not like the Pharisee.”

Now, I think that the passage that we are looking at, being a continuation of that preceding passage should be seen out of that context. In a moment, we shall see why. In other words, what I am trying to get over is this. That it is possible for us to be very, very hypocritical in our self-righteousness, and not even know it. And there are going to be some great surprises at the great white throne judgment. There are going to be some people standing at the great white throne judgment who were absolutely sure that they would never stand there. And there are some to be standing at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and who are going to loose some rewards which they thought with all certainty and assurance that they surely would have because they have not really looked at themselves in the light of God's word.

Now, in the 8th chapter of this wonderful book, which I have grown to love anew as I have studied it over the past few weeks again, we have what amounts to a Decalogue of promises. Ten times the prophet, “Thus saith the Lord.” The second verse, the third verse, the fourth verse, the sixth verse, the seventh verse, the ninth verse, the fourteenth verse, the nineteenth verse, the twentieth verse, and the twenty-third verse. I have them all underlined in red in my Bible, for I noted them. Why did the Lord say this, “Thus saith the Lord.” Well, he wanted to give the children of Israel assurance of ultimate blessing. Ultimate blessing, which would touch not only them, but also touch the nations of the earth, and in giving them this assurance of ultimate blessing. He was in effect saying to them, “It's not going to be necessary any longer to observe the fasts, which you have observed to celebrate the discipline of God, for the day is coming when the discipline shall be over, and Israel shall respond to the word of God and I shall give them the promises which I gave to their father Abraham and confirm to the saints of the Old

Testament days.” So let’s look at this Decalogue of promises contained in the 8th chapter. I want you to notice simply these three major divisions.

The writer of the book, the prophet first speaks of the future restoration of Israel in the first eight verses. He then in the 8th or 9th verse through the 17th verse, gives them an exhortation based upon some future promises which he reiterates again, and finally he says in the last five or six verses of the chapter a word about the future universal salvation that pertains to not only Israel but the nations of the Gentiles as well. Restoration will lead to the removal to all the fasts that commemorate their refusal to heed the word of God in the past. He says in the second verse, “I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy and I was jealous for her with great fury.” That is *anthropathea*.

Now, isn’t that a nice big word. That means, and I have to be careful now, I am not proud of the fact that I pronounced that fairly well, although not really as well as it should have been pronounced. But that means that God has a fellow feeling with men. In other words, his feelings are similar to men. And this is a figure of speech in which God expresses his jealousy for the children of Israel. We call jealousy because we have listened to Shakespeare the “green-eyed monster.” And we also, because we have listened to Milton speak of it as the “injured lovers hell.” Have you ever been jealous of the one you love? You know what Milton meant when he said the “injured lover’s hell.”

Now, I never have been jealous of course and so I can I only think of this by second hand, but I am sure that some of you have been jealous, and you can understand.

Now, isn’t it interesting that the Lord uses this human feeling to express his attitude toward Israel. He says, that I have been jealous for Zion with great fury, and I have been jealous for Zion with great jealousy.” In other words, I am so in love with them tat the fact that they have turned from me to go after other lovers, their idols, and themselves and all of their religiosity and things such as that, I find myself greatly jealous of the children of Israel, and furthermore, I am jealous of them with a great fury, which

means not only that I discipline them, but also that I discipline and judge those after whom Israel has gone. And so God speaks about his great jealousy for them.

I think it's wonderful to see that God pictures himself as a jealous lover, for I think that this reveals his love for men, and of course his love for us, because he is jealous for us too. This is his way of expressing his zeal for us. This is his way of saying how much he hates to see us go after someone else. And don't you see that when you go after someone else, or something else, you are guilty of spiritual adultery. That is you have refused to give him the allegiance that he deserves, and of course in the New Testament the great adulterous of the believers in the world.

Now, the second thing that he says in the third verse is, “I shall return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth.” In other words, not only am I jealous of Israel, but I shall come a second time.

Now, this of course is a promise of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. It's found all through the Bible. If there is one truth that we could put our finger upon and say the Bible is clear in it's affirmation of this wonderful truth, it is that the Lord Jesus shall stand again upon this earth. The Scriptures are full of it, in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament. In the last generation we had a preacher whose name was W.B. Henson; it was a man who was very true to the Word. Once he was preaching and a number of young men who were going to the university and interested in spiritual things, were sitting in the audience. And when he preached a great message on the second coming of Jesus Christ the young men gathered up around him, and said, “Mr. Henson, we appreciate very much the preaching that you have given us today.” But they said to him, “We're not sure about this doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ. We can't get it out of the New Testament.” And Mr. Henson said, “Of course you can't get it out of the New Testament, it's there to stay.” What he meant by it was that the New Testament is very plain and clear about the second coming. You cannot take it out. No matter what you do, it's there.” And in the Old Testament as well as in the New, we find it, but he

goes on to say, “That he will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.” In other words, the Lord is coming back and his personal presence is going to be right there in the city of Jerusalem with the Jerusalemites or the Jews.

You know one of the blessings, of Christianity is that we have a present Savior, one who is with us constantly. I heard of a Jewish peddler, who called upon a Christian, and as he was calling upon the Christian to see some of his wares, the Christian invited him into his home, and he looked over on the wall, and there was a picture of the Lord Jesus, and the picture that was upon the wall, was a picture of the Lord Jesus giving his blessing upon the disciples just prior to his ascension to heaven, when he gave them the promise, “Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” And the Jewish man looked over and he said, “Is that your Messiah? Is that your God?” And the Christian said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, what is he doing?” And the Christian went on to say, “Well, that’s a picture of the Lord Jesus.” And it was a picture of the gather of the Lord Jesus, with the disciples in Galilee and he is just expressing to them the promise, “Lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.” The Jewish peddler looked at the Christian, and he said, “My what a wonderful Messiah to have. One that is with you all of your days.” And he left that home repeating to himself. “What a wonderful Messiah to have, one who is with us to the end of our days.” Well, the day is coming when the nation Israel shall be in the city of Jerusalem, and believers amongst them shall be gathered there, and the Lord Jesus shall be gathered in their midst and nevermore to depart from them. And don’t you know that’s going to be a wonderful day, when all of the Paul’s and all of the Jacobs and all of the rest of them have one to faith in the Lord Jesus, and when they have in their hearts, this faith to say, “Oh what a wonderful Messiah we have, one that is with us all the time. And Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth.”

Now, this of course is the effect of the preceding. Today Jerusalem the city of peace is in pieces. Now, I know that we say that Jerusalem is in the hand of the Jews today, but it’s really not. They do not really have the ultimate control of that city. In fact,

in the United Nations, at this very moment, a lot of politicking is going over the fate of the city of Jerusalem the city of peace. It's in pieces, but the time is coming when it's going to be a city of truth. The mountain of the Lord of hosts, the kingdom place, the holy mountain. It's not holy today. The land is not holy today. You remember when I was preaching back in b about the second chapter I said, that Christians often speak about Palestine as the holy land. It's not the holy land today at all. The only way, in which we could possibly conceive of it as the holy land, is in the sense that some day it shall be holy, but it's not holy today, and so to go to Palestine you don't go to the holy land. It shall be called the holy land, and the city shall be called the holy mountain, the place of God's kingdom, but it's not now. It's to be however, a city of truth. That means that that city is to be characterized by truth.

One of the outstanding men who has perhaps given us more information, us who are not Italians, about Italy was a man by the name of Hutton. He has written travel books about Italy, because he loved Italy. Someone asked him not long ago, “What do you find today that is different among the people who come to Italy from the days of ole?” He said, “Well, in the old days, they used to come to Italy as travelers, and they would stop and look at all of the magnificent things that are to be seen there, all of the great historical relics that are found. Today,” he said, “The men who come are simply trippers.” I am reminded of the American who jumped out of his car and rushed into the Louvre and shouted out as he got in the door, “Where is the Mona Lisa? I am double parked?” [Laughter] Someone asked an Italian, “What did you think about Italy?” “Well, the thing I remember about Italy was that I ran my stockings in Rome, and when I was in the beauty parlor in Naples, the operator singed my hair.”

Now, what I am getting to is this. You know I think a lot of us are like that about the Bible, about the word of God. We don't any longer study the word of God. The church of Jesus Christ is not the pillar and ground of the truth in actuality. The church of Jesus Christ is a place where the people come to hear a sermon. We come to be lifted

up. We come to be inspired. We come to get a kick in order that this kick might serve us throughout the rest of the week, but we often do not come to study God’s word. We are here to study the word of God.

Now, Jerusalem is going to be the city of truth, and in the kingdom days, men are going to stream out from all over the world to go to Jerusalem in order to hear the word of the Lord of hosts. And I wish that there were some anticipation of that in the evangelical church today. Well, I wish we could talk about all of these things. You see this is a great chapter. I hope you will go home and read it and study it for yourself. The prophet goes on to speak in the latter part of this opening section, of the peace and safety that shall exist among the Jerusalemites. The most defenseless people in any city are the old people, and the children, and the time is coming when the most defenseless of the people shall frolic and play in the city of Jerusalem because no longer shall there be war, but it shall be a city of peace. I sometimes hear preachers say, still in spite of what has been discovered down through the last generation or so that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. The God of the Old Testament is a God of war. He is a cruel God. In fact this was even developed as a very scientific philosophy about God. And anyone who took a course in the history of religion a generation ago might remember it.

God, when the Old Testament begins, is a blood thirsty God who likes to drink the blood of animal sacrifices. He’s a God who likes volcanoes, such as that that which occurred when the law was given. He is a God who likes even human sacrifice such as we find in the Old Testament. Finally by the time of the prophets God began to improve a little bit, and God began to become God who was disturbed by the hypocrisy and the ritualism of the children of Israel. Finally when Jesus came on the scene God had gotten really good except that Jesus still believed in hell. And now since we have brought God up to the 20th century, we have now eliminated hell. And God is really a respectable person. He is the kind of person you could worship in Highland Park or Preston Hollow.

Now, there was nothing that is more detrimental to the true understanding to the Old Testament, than that view of God. Will you look at this chapter, and notice in verse 4, there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age, and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets of it.

Now, that's not a very distinct picture of a God who hates the activities of men, is it? It's not a picture of a very cruel God, but a God who loves to see the men and women protected and the children playing in the streets. Now, Zechariah goes on to say in the 6th verse, “If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in my eyes, saith the Lord of hosts. If you think it's a remarkable wonderful thing that this has happened, should it also be in my eyes a remarkable wonderful thing, no. Because you see I am the great God, and nothing is impossible for me. I can bring all of these things to pass. You may think it's wonderful that these miracles take place, but I do not think it's wonderful, for I am the great God, thus saith the Lord of hosts, behold I will save my people from the east country and from the west country.” And that of course let's us know that the prophet is not speaking about the return from the Babylonian captivity. But he is speaking about the return from the dispersion to the uttermost parts of the earth. “And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and they shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and in righteousness.”

Now, they are there in the city of Jerusalem today. But they are not there in truth and in righteousness. Zionism, I think is probably a harbinger of the coming days when Israel shall return to the land of Palestine, and be there in truth and righteousness. But Zionism as it stands today is not of God in the sense that he approves all that Zionism stands for because you see Zionism, in spite of the fact that it has involved a return of people to the land of Palestine, is as it is set up today a system that denies the truth of the Old Testament revelation which points to the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not think that we

can say today that Zionism is of God. In fact, we might even say, since it is something of a counterfeit that it is not of God, but it is of Satan. But at least it may be in a sense the baggage of one who is to come. All of us have had the experience of a friend who announces to us that he is coming to visit us, and back in the old days it was possible for baggage to arrive before the person. And sometimes there had been little tokens, a package or even some of the baggage that arrives before the person, and because it arrived you know that person is coming.

Now, my son frequently comes to Dallas, and he will frequently tell his office to forward mail to him. Sometimes the mail arrives before he arrives. And when the mail arrives that's a token that he is coming. And so I think that possibly the Zionism that has fought about the return of the nation Israel to the land of Palestine, is like the baggage of the true arrival that shall take place when men believe and return to that city. Apparently the Old Testament teaches there shall be two returns, one in unbelief and one in belief. And perhaps we are seeing that today. But we know from the word of God that Israel shall experience a national conversion, and they shall be in that city, and God shall be their God in truth and in righteousness some day.

Now, in verses 9 through 17, which I want to pass over very lightly with just a remark or so. The prophet exhorts the children of Israel, and he exhorts them just as we might be exhorted today. He tells them that prophecy is not simply a curiosity. Prophecy is designed to have ethical response. It is an ethic. When we preach prophecy today in the Christian church we do not really preach it until we have also preached it as an ethic. And so the prophet says two times at least in this section, “Let your hands be strong. Let your hands be strong.” In other words, in the light of these great promises, which I am giving to you, I want you to be faithful to me. I will be faithful to you. And I am going to fulfill these things. But I want you to be faithful to me. He speaks about the former days. He speaks about the fact that in the former days he didn't hesitate to touch their temporalities if they neglected the spiritualities. And may I say to you that if you neglect

the word of God, if you neglect the things that are set forth in God's word, and you are a child of God, he very easily may reach down and touch your temporalities. And you may experience a time of depression, economic depression because you have neglected to purpose the spiritual things that are set forth in the word of God first, and if you sit in your pride and in your self righteousness, and think that he cannot do that, you make yourselves very liable for Gods' hand to do just that because you see he loves us enough to discipline us, and that's what he does. He reminds them of the fact that they had an economic depression because they did not return to him. It's something to make us fear, and to keep our hands strong before God.

And then of course in the latter part of the section he talks about practical righteousness. He says that he wants them to speak “Every man the truth to his neighbor, execute the judgment of truth, and peace in your gates, and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor, and love no false oath, for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.” In other words in the light of these great promises, there is to be the response of obedience to the word of God. And need I say to you that we cannot obey to you the word of God. Need I impress upon you the fact that you cannot leave this auditorium with this sense now, since I have been exhorted to obey the word of God, I am going out, and I am going to obey the word of God? Don't you know that you can no more obey the word of God now that you are a Christian then you could before in your own strength? Don't you know that the one thing that God wants you to do is to confess that you cannot do his will?

Now, that's the one thing he brought you to when you were converted. He brought you to confess the fact that you could not save yourself, and so you looked off to he cross, and you saw that Jesus Christ had died for you. And so you put your trust in him. And he gave you a wonderful salvation, and you went around with the joy of the Lord for a while. And you went around, and you said, “The Lord has saved me. And he's delivered me from the penalty of sin.” And then what did you try to do? You tried in the

strength of the new creation to do the will of God, and what have you discovered? Well, come on now, what have discovered? Don't answer back, I know. And you know. You have discovered that you cannot do the will of God now, that you are Christian, and so what do you do? Well, you do what you did before. You go to the Lord and you say, “Lord I cannot do the word of God. I cannot fulfill these exhortations. I cannot do all of these things that you have laid upon me. They are burdens upon me.” And then we look off to the cross again and we see that Jesus Christ has not only died for us, but we have died with him. And as we believe this wonderful truth the Holy Spirit of God comes into our lives in a new way. He has been there all along. But he comes in a new way. And as we lean upon him, he enables us to do that which is contrary to the nature, which we possess. And so we discover again that the Christian life is getting saved over and over and over again. Not from the penalty of sin. But from the power of sin in our daily lives.

Now, in the last part of the chapter, the apostle tells that that time is coming that not only are the Jews going to be saved but the Gentiles as well. And Jerusalem is going to be the capital of the earth. And you know there is not going to be any anti-Semitism, in these days. There is going to be anti-Gentilism. I am so sorry I am a Gentile. Everybody is going to want to take hold of the Jew. And they're going to grab hold of his skirts and say, “We want to go with you for we have heard that God is with you.” What a wonderful promise that is. Well, the prophet's answer then had a two-fold objective, present and future. For the present, he wanted to reveal to them the sham of feasts that were carried out in ritualistic hypocrisy, and then for the future he wanted to set before them the glory that makes the fasts irrelevant.

You know there is one question missing from this chapter. Have you noticed it? It's missing from many of the chapters of the Old Testament. How can God fulfill his promises to a wicked, hypocritical people who go around saying in effect that the God whom they worship is a God of triviality, a God to whom they express in their service? He's a weariness to us. How can God fulfill these promises to such a people? Well the

Old Testament doesn't give us a clear answer to this in many places. In some places it does. The clear answer of course comes when we turn to the New Testament, and we read of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

William Butler Yates was an Irish poet and dramatist. In one of his works he describes a scene in Ireland in which the family is gathered around the kitchen table, and on the wall there is a black crucifix. And while they are sitting around the table the door suddenly opens and a little fairy girl comes in. She is dressed in green, and she is singing beautiful songs. She is the picture of the pagan cheerfulness, which the world thinks that is has, apart from Christianity. And so she comes in blithely singing, and everything seems to be wonderful, until finally she looks over and she sees the cross that's hanging on the wall, and suddenly she stops in her singing, and Mr. Yates wants to get over a point here. She says, “Take that ugly black thing down off the wall.” I don't think there is any better expression of the reaction of human nature to the cross of Jesus Christ than that. “Take that ugly black thing down from the wall.”

A Christian, when he looks at the crucifix, does not think of something that is ugly and black. He thinks of something that is wonderful. He thinks of the cross of our Lord Jesus, upon which Jesus Christ was hanging, and by the way, I am not saying I approve of people wearing crucifixes with Christ on the cross. Of course our Lord is in resurrection, but there is something that the crucifix reminds us of, and it is that Christ died for our sins. And if you think for one moment of the fact that Jesus Christ died with hands outstretched, you'll realize that there was a message in this, and it was Athanasius who pointed to this. And in a wonderful statement which he made, he said, something like this, he said, “It's only on a cross that a man dies with outstretched hands.” You see the reason that Jesus Christ died in this way is that he might point out to men that he is welcoming all to his arms, and for those who want to come to him, he is able to save and deliver. Shall we stand for the benediction?

“From Empty Fasts to Joyful Feasts” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died with outstretched arms in love for us. The fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit who takes of the things of Christ and brings them home to our hearts, and then leads us in the joyful train of triumph of the Son of God, the love of God the Father, the author of the plan of salvation, be and abide with all who know our Lord in sincerity. And, oh Father, give no rest nor peace to those who do not know him. For Thy name's sake. Amen.