

Zechariah

Part 7

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[00:00:00] Please, to the book of the prophet Zechariah, second last book in the Old Testament and chapter 14.

My family tell me, families are honest you know, my family tell me that when I'm on the telephone they can usually tell the kind of person I'm talking to, in many cases, and they have a little game, or when they all lived at home they did, that they would guess amongst themselves who I was talking to and then when I came off the phone they would tell me, that's without listening to any names. And they, first of all, split the one I was communicating with into two broad categories.

[00:01:04] And they told me, after some time, that they would make one assumption in certain cases, but other times they were absolutely sure. When I came off the phone they'd say, now you are talking to someone from Tyneside. Now how do they know that? It seems that without trying, without being deliberate, that sometimes if I'm listening to someone at the other end I may say yes, indeed, of course, thank you very much, and they make certain assumptions. But sometimes if they hear me saying I, why I, never in the world, or fancy that, they know for a fact that it's someone I know well, that I love and appreciate, and that I'm feeling relaxed with them. Now I'm not saying, well, that's good, bad, or indifferent, but it's something that happens. [00:02:06] We tend to gauge how we act, the kind of thing we talk about, the way we say things, the way even we stand or sit.

We tend to gauge it or just change our style a bit depending who it is we are with or talking to. Now you may, after that, spot certain things in your own experience, having been given that guideline.

But without wanting to lighten the Gospel at all, far be the thought. That kind of thought comes to me when I read words like this, holiness unto the Lord.

Now some of you, just a reflection of my experience, if you were speaking to a lifelong friend [00:03:07] that you've known from childhood, you might speak in a certain way, or stand or sit in a certain way.

But if you were speaking to one of the big bosses at work, or maybe if you're at school the headmaster at school, or if you were privileged to be in the presence of the sovereign of the land, it would certainly make a difference as to how you conducted yourself, wouldn't it? Without saying that on other occasions you are behaving less than the best, you would certainly feel that a certain kind of conduct would be appropriate, the more dignified, the more majestic, the more important the person in whose presence you were. Again, when I think of this, and some of us have been thinking during the week, there [00:04:02] will be a time come, not only in heaven but on earth, when holiness will be

the norm, not the exception but the norm.

There are people in this world, you know, that have special suits, the best suits, keep hanging up in the wardrobe, and marriages, funerals, going to church, when they want to be smart and look right and be right for the occasion, they have a special suit or a special set of clothes. Well, again, I can see merit in saying only the best is good enough on certain occasions.

But what the Bible tells me is that God never changes.

God's standards are absolute.

[00:05:02] I might make a difference depending who I'm with and what I'm doing, whether it's a formal occasion or whether it's a casual occasion. But God's standards are absolute, they never change. Now, we must recognize that, because the Bible tells us that the moment will surely come when each of us will be presented before the presence of the God of whom it needs to be said, Holiness unto the Lord.

We tend to get like the company we keep, and because much of our time is spent in the company of people who have set standards according to man's opinions, it means that when we realize [00:06:04] that something is important or dignity is called for, we have to shake ourselves and say, now look, I'll have to behave myself here, what I do, how I do it, the way I act, what I say, and how I say it. And we need to be reminded that God never changes. He had to say to some, I, the Lord, change not. It said of the Lord Jesus, Jesus Christ the same, yesterday and today and forever.

Now, it's a solemn thought, but a necessary one. You see, it's possible in the Gospel, I've probably done it on many occasions, to start at the end of my need. Well, there may be times when that emphasis is necessary, but sometimes at least, probably [00:07:02] most of the time, we need to start not at the end of my need, but at the end of the holiness of God and what is due to him from us as his creatures. Now, what does it mean when it says God is holy?

It means this, among other things, wholly set apart for him, utterly devoted to him, fully committed to him and his interests.

Could any of us ever say that that was always true of us?

If we were to be good enough for God, if we were to be right to meet God, who is utter, complete, absolute holiness in himself, that would have to be true.

[00:08:09] The Bible tells us that God never, ever lowers his standards to accommodate our frailty, our frailty, our weakness, and he certainly doesn't reduce his standards to allow for our sins.

God's standards are absolute. Listen to what the scripture says here and there.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

He is the father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

God is faithful, entirely consistent with what he's declared himself to be.

[00:09:08] You know, that's a lovely statement in 1 Corinthians 1, God is faithful. We can depend upon him, he's told us about himself, he's telling the truth because he's the God of truth, and we can rely on what he says about himself in the Bible because God is true. As the Bible says, even if everybody else was a liar, if all men were liars, God would remain true.

God, who has revealed himself in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, has shown himself to be entirely consistent. Think again.

He dwells in light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen, nor can see.

And he is the God who has set the standards in whether at the moment it appeals to me [00:10:05] either to go to heaven or to go to hell, to have my sins forgiven or not. I have to meet him, and I have to meet his standards. God with whom there is no variableness, nor standard, nor shadow of turning. He is entirely invariable, inflexible, inexorably righteous and holy, the standards ever remaining the same. Now, it's a strange consideration, but you know, we are consistent. We can be relied upon. The Bible says so.

It says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Consistently, invariably, in what we do, in what we say, in what we think about, our attitude [00:11:07] to life, our lifestyle, the way we go about our jobs or bringing up our families, or the way we conduct our affairs at home or in business. We are consistent in that we do things for ourselves, and we fall far short of the standards that God has set. If you like, we are consistently inconsistent. We are regularly unreliable. And it's the only thing we can depend upon, that we fulfill God's word every day. Now, it's a mercy that God has left his word on record. You know, we could have been left, and we could have been just left to our own devices and doing either the best we can or the evil that we are disposed to do, quite content [00:12:03] in our own way, and then, at the end, when, as the Bible tells us, every one of us must give account of himself or herself to God, to get a rude awakening, to find that we've fallen short of the standard that God has set. We couldn't have complained. We choose how to live. We choose the friends we make. We choose how to spend our time. We choose how to spend our talent and the resources that God, as a faithful creator, has committed to our care. But God, in his kindness, doesn't leave it till the end. He tells us now.

He said, that's the standard. You'll never get there. If you are going to be saved, there must be some other way.

We sang the hymn because it reinforces the fact that God never reduces his standards [00:13:08] to accommodate our frailty, weakness, or sins. What was it we sang? The love of God is righteous love.

We sang other words as well. Love that condemns the sinner's sin, yet in condemning, pardon seals.

Holiness unto the Lord. If you've studied your Bible, I know most of you have, you will notice that there are certain books in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, that concentrate on this matter of holiness, God's absolute standards, far higher than we could ever attain as a result of our own devices. It's worthwhile thinking about why certain books emphasize the holiness of God.

[00:14:05] Second Thessalonians, Second Timothy, First and Second Peter, Jude.

As you study your Bible, you'll realize that these books in the New Testament tell us about conditions at the end of history, towards the end of the day of God's grace, and just before Jesus is going to come again.

It tells us that one of the indications that the coming of Jesus is getting very close is that the world and the people in the world will be marked by ungodliness and unholiness and blatant departure from the standards that God has set.

Those of us who are a little older can look back with thanksgiving to a time when the [00:15:04] standards accepted in society round about us were reasonable standards of conduct. Because those who made the laws, for this country at least, were guided indirectly, whether they were Christians or not, they were guided indirectly by God's standards revealed in the Bible. You see, for about three or four hundred years ago, every household had a Bible. And whether or not it was believed, in many houses it was read. And even when it wasn't read regularly or believingly, it was respected, and it was always there on the shelf. And those enlightened people who made the laws in those days, whatever else might be said about them, instinctively they set laws for society which, whether they realized it [00:16:03] or not, were at least in part based upon God's standards. And perhaps until about thirty, forty, fifty years ago, they were the normal standards of behavior accepted in society.

But the Bible became abandoned, no longer read, no longer respected, no longer even on the bookshelf, thrown out, abandoned, repudiated.

We shouldn't be surprised that over the next twenty, thirty, forty years into recent history, instead of getting God's standards coming through in the laws, we now begin to get men's opinions.

[00:17:01] Can we be surprised that things are specifically mentioned as sin in the Bible are no longer a crime as far as man's concerned?

Offensive against God's standards, yes, no longer offensive to man's standards and man's opinions. In other words, where God's standards as declared in the Bible are put to one side, instead of holiness being the mark, even recognizing we'll never get there, if you say away with that standard, we're not even going to try to get there, can we be surprised that in society at large, unholiness, ungodliness, rebellion, flagrant, blatant sin on every hand is the order of the day?

I'm not preaching a social gospel. [00:18:01] I'm telling you that what these second epistles have to say, put Jude with them, they are telling us about conditions in the last days in man's society which tell us that time is short, that Christ is coming, and that he will reassert God's standards on earth.

Holiness unto the Lord.

The Bible says, God willeth not the death of the sinner.

He gets no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

What an enigma, what a puzzle! How can this be solved? It's not only that man is reaching up to a very high standard and not quite getting [00:19:02] there, but man is abandoned completely, any pretense, any attempt of reaching God's standards at all.

Now, I may be speaking to someone who says, that's not me. I do my best. I come to the meeting, go to church, read my Bible, pray for God's help. Oh, the Bible is as plain to you and me on that as on the other score. There have been those in history who were specially fitted by God to live to a high standard. He gave them the best of living conditions, protected them in the best way possible, and he said, I'll protect you in a special way, I'll care for you, I'll preserve you, I'll shepherd you, and see, and then this is the way you've got to live.

[00:20:03] God's comment on the Bible is, they were the most disobedient, rebellious people that there's ever been, honoring God with their lips and yet their hearts, whether it leads to destruction or whether we are on the clean side and think, well, we'll get there in the end if only we try our best.

The Bible says, God says, it can't be done that way.

Christ is the end of the law. If you want to comment, God's comment on any attempt you might make to be good enough for God by your own behavior, God says, look at Calvary, look at Golgotha, look at the cross of Christ, and you'll see God's comment on the best that man can do.

[00:21:03] The best of behavior is only good enough to make it necessary for Jesus to die at Calvary because God's assessment is, there's no other way. The love of God is righteous love. The standard's so high, we could never hope to attain it. Thank God for that.

You will be aware that the strength of a chain is governed by the strength of its weakest link. I remember being shattered as a boy to be told and to know because my conscience confirmed it that I was a sinner, that I had fallen short of God's standards, and that my nature was such that I could do nothing about it. [00:22:04] How terrible I thought! I've been told that I'm not good enough for God, I never could be, and yet I want to be saved, I want to go to heaven, I like to hear about Jesus between three o'clock and four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. I used to think, isn't life lovely, hearing the stories of Jesus, listening to the Sunday school teacher singing those lovely hymns that I still like to sing, but then when Sunday school was over, out into the world again, hearing the nasty things that people said, realizing the harsh, cruel world that was round about, all the illnesses and the diseases and the poverty that there was, the things I heard, even as a little boy, you know, it [00:23:01] may be more open now, but sin was sin a hundred years ago, fifty years ago, twenty years ago, it's just that the lid's been taken off the cesspool now, and you can see what's underneath. It may be a mercy in some way, you can call a spade a spade, but it's always been there. But I had to realize, and many of you had to realize, and it was a shattering experience to know that you were in a position that you could do nothing about. How am I going to be saved? I'm told there's nothing I can do about it, and if nothing else happens to change it, I'm doomed for hell.

Oh, when the scales drop off, that God loves me to such a degree that he's given his very [00:24:01] best, his beloved son, to die at Calvary, to pay the price that God has set.

God sets the standard. He's the judge of all. He says you cannot meet it, however hard you try. He says there's only one virtue, one standard of worth that can meet the standard and pay the debt that we owe to God because of our sins, and that price, God says, is the blood of Christ.

The life of the flesh is in the blood, and it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul. Oh, the joy that sweeps into the soul when for the first time you realize, yes, I cannot meet the standard, but the standard's been met on my behalf by the one who is utterly [00:25:02] precious to God itself.

What a standard for the love of God, that to meet his own righteous claims and that infinitely absolute standard that he requires, that he provided the remedy. He paid the price. He provided the Savior. He said that's it, the blood of Christ, sufficient worth in that to deal with every sin that's ever been committed. Have you thought about it? If you were able to heap upon heap every sin that's ever been committed individually by anybody, if you were put on the top of the heap the absolute sinfulness and rottenness of every sinner, God says the blood of Jesus is sufficient payment for that and any other [00:26:01] that you could bring up. There's not a sin, there's not a kind of sin, there's not an aggregate of sins that you could bring up before God, but to hear him say the blood of Jesus Christ is of sufficient worth to put away every sin and every kind of sin.

Or that we might come to this, I need the love, I need the blood, there's no other way.

I was saying that for me and for many others it was an utterly shattering experience to realize that I was in a predicament that I could do nothing about. With all the mercy of God, when he says the price has been paid, this is the measure of my love for you, that I allow Jesus, my beloved son, to come into the world to die at Calvary [00:27:08] just for you. Well, that's the end of the story, isn't it? It's worth, in the precious, precious blood of Christ, to deal with every sin and to bless every sinner, but at the other end of the scale, it's equally true that for you, as an individual, God made that wonderful provision just for you.

Listen to what a believer is able to say. The Son of God loved me, all by myself. It's no good thinking about other people unless you think of yourself first. The Son of God loved me, the emphasis on the me, me, and gave himself for me. God loved the world by sin undone.

[00:28:08] All the joy, the thrill of knowing, it's all of God, nothing of me at all.

If you want to put it in an obtuse way, I can say my only contribution to the scheme of salvation was committing the sins that made it necessary for Jesus to go to the cross to die for me.

All the work, all the solution, all the blessing rests upon him, not a weak link in the chain, or the thing that shattered me, eventually encouraged me, because this is what assurance is. God says to my soul, you need salvation, you need the love, I provide it. You need the blood, Jesus shed it. [00:29:03] You accept that, joy will flood your soul, and you needn't have a moment's doubt, because you've done nothing about it. It's all been done on your behalf. That's the assurance of faith. I, with my puny ways, I cannot undo what the mighty God has done. The mighty God has arranged my salvation, his is the plan, he has done the work, he's brought me to himself, all the love that brought me to himself. We rely utterly upon what God has done for us.

This is the gospel, this it is, which fills my soul with the right estimation of myself. I need to feel sorry with a godly sorrow. I need to prove the reality of my acceptance of the love of God by turning my back completely [00:30:06] on my old life, or if I believe that Jesus died for me.

If I say God's love was so wonderful that he spared not his only son, but delivered him up for us all.

How can there be any reality in that confession if I say, well, I know the way I used to live made it necessary for Jesus to die upon the cross. I only live once in the world, surely I can just enjoy myself just a little bit, live for myself, do something that pleases me or my family, or if there's any reality I will rightly esteem.

If that's what made it necessary for the son of God to die for me and go to the cross and [00:31:04] shed his precious blood, if my life made it necessary for him to be like that, how can I possibly go back to the old life? My lifestyle will confirm that I realize the cost to God, the cost to Christ of dealing with my every sin. It will show, the reality of my confession will show. I still need the love, I still need the blood, I need the reminder of what was absolutely necessary if I was to have my sins forgiven. Yes, I know that there is a heaven to be gained, there is a hell to be shunned. I know as a responsible creature that my sins must be forgiven if I'm to go to heaven. [00:32:02] I know I need to get right with God.

There's nothing I can do about it, but God has done everything about it on my behalf.

And he uses the word of God, he uses the words of the gospel preacher, using the word of God to bring faith to the soul.

Or that there might be someone here for the first time who realizes, yes, I can see it now, there's nothing that I can do to save myself. Long story short, yes, I can see from the New Testament that any time now, God is going to stamp his holiness upon everything, and to do that, and in doing that, he will sweep [00:33:01] away all unholiness and ungodliness and rebellion against him.

Man will be at his worst, outwardly speaking, when God will come in in judgment and sweep all ungodliness and unrighteousness away. Read again the epistle of Jude if the Lord spares you to get home. But there's another fact, a lovely little fact which is dealt with in our closing hymn which we're going to sing in a couple of minutes. It's hymn number 94, something that's always moved me. The greatness and the kindness and the mercy of God. You know, God moves in a wonderful as well as a mysterious way.

God alone has done the work. Nothing that you and I can do about it. For it pleases God to involve those who love him upon earth in bringing salvation to others. [00:34:07] You know, when you think about it, it's a marvellous thing. God could achieve things by act of power, without involving man at all. He has the power.

He doesn't do that. May seem a roundabout way of doing things, but it's the grace of God. When God wants to achieve something on earth, do you know what he does? He puts an interest in that particular thing, or the blessing of a particular person, in the heart of someone who already knows him as a saviour God. And having put that interest in their heart, he moves them to pray to him that what he wants to achieve will be brought to pass. And then he's pleased to accomplish his own will by answering the prayers of his people. [00:35:02] He doesn't need, he chooses to work in that way. I've known many who've been brought into wonderful spiritual blessing because there were others who were praying conscientiously, regularly, diligently, fervently on their behalf. Oh, there are those here, myself included, who would read the words of this Hymn 94, to any who've not yet trusted the saviour for themselves, speaking from personal experience. I have a saviour.

He's pleading in glory, so precious, though earthly enjoyments be few. And now he is watching in tenderness o'er me, but o'er that my saviour were your saviour too. My saviour, what he's done for me, he's capable and worthy of doing for all.

[00:36:05] He wants you to shelter under the worth of his precious blood. Have your sins and your sinfulness and your unworthiness swept away once and for all. And as one of the links in the chain,

not the work that's been done, but so that you might enter into it, he moves the hearts of those who believe already to cry to him that you might be blessed in a similar way. Let us think about it while we sing this lovely little hymn, number 94. I have a saviour.

He's pleading in glory, so precious, though earthly enjoyments be few.

[00:37:03] And now he is watching in tenderness o'er me, but o'er that my saviour were your saviour too.

For you I am praying, for you I am praying, for you I am praying, I'm praying for you.

I have a rest and the earnest is given, though now I am blind, he'll appear from my view.

[00:38:25] His love is ever watching, his Jesus in heaven, and though he has failed, let me hear you say to him, for you I am praying, for you I am praying, for you I am praying, I'm praying for you.

[00:39:22] I have a pinch and it's almost a river, and he's a-walking on the river, never new.

I take a bow in his bosom and give a bow to my Lord, give forgiveness to him.

[00:40:13] For you I am praying, for you I am praying, for you I am praying, I'm praying for you.

Amen.