

True Godliness

Zechariah 7:1-14 (New American Standard Bible)

In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev. ² Now the town of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech and their men to seek the favor of the Lord, ³ speaking to the priests who belong to the house of the Lord of armies, and to the prophets, saying, “Shall I weep in the fifth month and fast, as I have done these many years?”

⁴ Then the word of the Lord of armies came to me, saying, ⁵ “Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, ‘**When you fasted and mourned** in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, **was it actually for Me** that you fasted?’ ⁶ And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? ⁷ Are these not the words which the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and carefree along with its cities around it, and the Negev and the foothills were inhabited?”

⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, ⁹ “This is what the Lord of armies has said: ‘**Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; ¹⁰ and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.**’” ¹¹ But they refused to pay attention, and turned a stubborn shoulder and plugged their ears from hearing. ¹² They also made their hearts as hard as a diamond so that they could not hear the Law and the words which the Lord of armies had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of armies.

¹³ And **just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen,**” says the Lord of armies; ¹⁴ “but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they did not know. So the land was desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, since they made the pleasant land desolate.

Introduction

Starting today, for the next four Sundays, I am going to do a sermon series on ‘trueness.’ True godliness, true success, true security, and true sense of belonging. So, this morning, let’s think about true godliness.

Debunk the Myth

When it comes down to godliness, here’s one myth to debunk. Some of us believe that it’s not for us. Others doubt that we will ever achieve godliness in our lifetime. It’s too high or difficult for us to achieve it. That’s not humility, folks. It is unbelief. Don’t believe such a lie from the devil. Of course, if we try to attain godliness by our own might, we may

fail. However, with God's help, we not only can achieve godliness but also can conduct a life thereof.

By the way, God never asks us to be something that we cannot be. Neither does He command us to do something we cannot do. When He calls us to be godly, not only believes He that we can be, but He also empowers us to live a life of godliness in our lifetime. Before we die. Godliness is not for a few chosen saints. It is for you and for me, and for every child of God. Amen?!

Content

Godliness Is God's Desire for His Children: Let me tell you why our Heavenly Father desires godliness in us. It's all because He loves us. It's all because He wants nothing but the best for us. It's all because He wants us to be like Him in every aspect. Listen to George MacDonald, Christian thinker in the 19th century.

“As the love of him [God, kc] who is love transcends ours as the heavens are higher than the earth, **so must God desire in his child** infinitely more than the most conscientious and loving of mothers can desire in hers. He would have his child *rid of all discontentment, all fear, all grudging, all bitterness in word or thought, all measuring of his own with a different gauge than he would apply to another's*. He will have *no curling of the lip, no indifference toward any person, no desire to excel over another*. He will not have *him receive the smallest service without gratitude, would not hear from him a tone to jar the heart of another, a word to make it ache*” (George MacDonald, *Discovering the Character of God*, p. 41).

Did you hear? God wants in us no bitterness, no ingratitude, no grudge or indifference toward others or pride. Until He sees all of them achieved in us, until He sees our hearts united with His, until His own image, likeness, and character are fully realized and function in our lives, and until we are fully transformed into the image of His Son Jesus Christ, God will not rest His work in us. We can trust in such an awesome loving Heavenly Father! Praise the Lord! Let's say Amen to His plan for us and jump right into working with Him for our godliness. One day at a time. We will never regret it.

So, I urge you this morning to be attentive to the Word of God to gain the right understanding of godliness and the practice thereof. Here's the definition.

What is Godliness? Godliness is being *God-like, pious, devout, or faithful* to God. Godliness reflects to the world the Christ-like character that is developed and formed in the heart of the Christian. I need to explain what I mean by the godly.

Who Are the Godly? The godly are those who fear the LORD and **worship** Him (Acts 10:2). By definition, there is no such a thing as ‘godly atheist,’ no matter how morally good he is, because atheists don’t believe in God let alone fear or worship Him. You cannot be like God or loyal to God whose existence you deny. Without God, there’s no godly or godliness.

The godly are those who have made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice (Psalm 50:5). Through the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, we have made a covenant with our Heavenly Father. In this covenant, God is committed to be our God and we as His people are called to the life of godliness. God promises His provision and protection. In return, we pledge our faithfulness and loyalty. We also promise that we would obey His voice and glorify His name in the world. God calls us to love our Lord Jesus Christ and to love our neighbors by demonstrating God’s character in our words and deeds. Godliness is much more than outward appearance (e.g., wearing robes, praying a lengthy prayer, reciting Bible verses). It is, rather, a character and lifestyle of the Christian who fears, worships, and trusts in God (Psalm 86:2). So, let’s take a look at some marks of the godly.

The Marks of the Godly: Here are the first three: worship, prayer, and almsgiving (Acts 10:2). The people of God always practice these three. Today’s text shows us three more. First, the godly ***dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother***. Next, the godly ***do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor***. Finally, the godly ***do not devise evil in their hearts against one another*** (Zechariah 7:9-10). Amen?!

Spirit of True Godliness: In 520 B.C., nearly 20 years after their return from the Babylonian exile, the people of God sent their representatives to their priests with a question: *In the past 70 years while we were in captivity, we practiced fasting and abstinence in the month (when Jerusalem and its Temple burned down by Chaldeans). Should we continue doing them since we are back home?* God’s answer came through the mouth of Zechariah the priest, “Yes, you still do it, but **ask yourself why you do it.**” God continued, “don’t do it for your sake, or for your own glory, but for My glory and honor.”

Remember: God loves those who practice godly deeds such as fasting and praying. But He is most interested in the true motive of their religious practice. Many a time, we do them to be praised by people, do we not? In other words, if nobody watches, we don’t do them. When many watch us, however, we are eager to do so. E.g., In Jesus’ time, Pharisees the religious leaders literally followed every single detail of their elders’ tradition: for instance, they would fast twice a week, cover their heads with ashes when fasting—all to show off their godliness to people! By doing so, Jesus says, they failed to gain the divine reward for their piety.

Same with helping the poor (they would blow the trumpet in the marketplace to let everybody know how generous and kind they were to the poor). Listen to what Jesus says:

when you fast, wash your face, keep your body clean, do it in secret—Don't show it off to people. When you pray, Jesus continues, go into your room, close the door, and pray only to God who is unseen. When you help the poor, do it in secret so that nobody knows what you are doing except God. Do not seek human recognition and reward. If you do, you will get no reward from God.

The point? Make your godliness matter to God first! The spirit of pietism/godliness is to walk humbly before God, not to long for human recognition.

Through the mouth of Zechariah, God also reminds us to be an every-day believer, not only a Sunday believer. Do justice, show mercy, and compassion. Do not oppress orphans, widows, or the poor. Do not devise evil against neighbors. Do them daily all to the glory of God, and it will be well with you.

Conclusion

Godliness is a beautiful word, not to avoid, but to cherish, study, ponder, and practice. Godliness will be obtained through lifelong discipline and will culminate in our entry to Heaven. E.g., Imagine you are about to climb a mountain. You begin the climb from the valleys. *“Up and up the hill after another you climb. The path ceases. (You start a new one—kc). You face more steepness. You climb and climb more. The mountain grows steeper and barer as you go, and you become absorbed in your climbing. All at once you discover that you had lost the stream, where or when you couldn't tell. Then, you find yourself stand upon the peak of the final obstacle. You surmount the final slope. Running up like a child that would scale heaven, you stand on the bare round, the head of the mountain, and see with an invading shock of amazement, that there is no going higher, in every direction the slope is downward. Now the whole world lies beneath you. Your lungs are filled with the heavenly air, and your soul with the feeling that you are above everything that is uplifted on the very crown of the earth. You stand in your rags, a fluttering scarecrow, the conqueror of height, the discoverer of immensity, the monarch of space. Nobody knows of such marvel but you. The mighty city that has been to you the universe is dropped and lost, in a far indistinguishable distance, and you who had lost it have climbed upon the throne of the world”* (Discovering the character of God, George MacDonald, pp. 108-109).

Every step upward and heavenward leads to godliness. Each day you get closer and closer to God. In the end you look down at everything from the heavenly perspective. That's godliness.

Let us pray.