

Love Truth & Peace 8:19

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Indicator Light*

1. Tom was driving to work one morning when the overheating indicator light came on on the instrument panel of his car.
2. Looking down he noticed, sure enough the gauge was way over in the red zone.
3. But he drove on to work, got out of the car and promptly forgot about it.
4. That night, driving home, the light came on again and he made a mental note to check the radiator water when he got home.
5. But by the time he arrived, he'd forgotten all about it.
6. The same thing was repeated the next day, and the day after that.
 - a. every time he got in the car, the indicator light came on, telling him something was wrong
 - b. but he always forgot to do anything about it
7. After a week of this – on Saturday, he squinched himself under the dash, found the wire to the light, and clipped it!
8. Monday morning, on the way to work, his car stalled, seized up and wouldn't re-start.
9. Tom had run the radiator bone dry and blown the engine.
10. Instead of *heeding* the indicator light and taking action to correct the problem, he'd ignored the warning -
11. By disconnecting the light, he didn't fix the problem – only silenced the annoying indicator.

B. *Spiritual Indicators*

1. Our love of and devotion to God, in and of itself, is something that is largely *unseen*.
 - a. it's very real –
 - b. but like the water in a car's radiator, it works in secret
2. Our passage this morning shows us that just like the indicator lights on a car's instrument panel, there are certain *outward indicators* of our love of God.
3. But – they are *not* what we might think!

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 18-19

18Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,

19“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth *month*, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts For the house of Judah.

Therefore love truth and peace.’

1. What God says here is tied directly to what we find at the beginning of Chapter 7.
2. Let me set the scene.
3. 18 years before this, a group of some 50,000 Jews had returned to Jerusalem from their 70 year exile in Babylon.
4. They arrived to find the city in utter ruins; the temple a pile of rubble and the walls and buildings of the city burned and broken.
5. If you’ve seen pictures of Berlin at the end of WWII after the Allied bombing runs, you have an idea of what the city looked like to the returning Jewish exiles.
6. One of the first things they did was to lay the foundation for a new temple – but then they broke off the work on the temple and went to work on their own homes and businesses.
7. 16 years passed and the people never renewed their work on God’s house – only on enlarging their own homes and expanding their business ventures.
8. God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir the people to renew work on the temple.
9. The prophets were successful and now 2 years of rebuilding have seen the temple walls rise to about half their height.
10. In chapter 7, we read about a delegation of Jewish elders from the city of Bethel who come to the capital of Jerusalem to ask a question dealing with the practice of some religious rites.
 - a. they want to inquire of the Lord if they ought to continue *fasting* at set times.
 - b. you see, in Babylon, when the Jews came to their senses and realized that all that had befallen them in the loss of their land

- and captivity was God's judgment –
- c. they set up 4 special days of fasting – all commemorating different events in the Babylonian Conquest
 - 1) as we read here, one was in the 4th month
 - 2) another in the 5th
 - 3) a third in the 7th,
 - 4) and a final one in the 10th month
 - d. all four of them were days of *mourning* for their national loss
11. This delegation from Bethel wanted to know if they should keep this over 85 year old tradition going now that they were *back* in the land and it was being restored.
- a. was it right to mourn a temple that was being rebuilt?
 - b. ought they continue to show grief over the loss of a land they are now back living in?
12. God's response to their request in chapters 7 & 8 is enlightening.
- a. He asks them if their fasts had *ever* been ordained by Him
 - b. the answer was - No!
 - c. the fasts had been started by the people, apart from any leading by God's Spirit
 - d. they were merely man's attempt at trying to salve a guilty conscience by performing a religious ritual
 - e. (I wonder if there is much of that going on today!)
 - f. God goes on to say that while the people had come up with their own religious rites of fasting to cover their shame – they weren't genuinely repentant for the *reasons* He had judged them – they were only sorry for their *loss*
 - g. God said that if the people had been *genuinely* sorry for their SIN, then they would repent of it and do what they were supposed to do.
 - h. which was to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.
 - i. instead, they had substituted religious ritual for true righteousness.
13. Now – as the delegation of Jewish elders stands before the prophet Zechariah to find out if they should continue fasting, God says, "No. Now is a time to *feast*, not fast."

- a. the day of judgment is past - this is a day of renewal and promise
 - b. the temple is nearing completion
 - c. in several more years the walls of the City will be rebuilt when Nehemiah comes
 - d. where Jerusalem has been a byword, it will be a blessing!
14. But then God issues this solemn reminder – “Love truth and peace.”
15. Fasting is no longer necessary – but righteousness always is!
16. Empty religious rituals are pointless – but the heart of true religion is to love God and one’s neighbor – and that kind of love is always marked by integrity and a desire for the good of others.

B. Summary

1. The last phrase of v. 19 is a summary of what the Lord has said in vs. 16 & 17.

16 These are the things you shall do:

Speak each man the truth to his neighbor;

Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;

17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor;

And do not love a false oath.

For all these are things that I hate,’ Says the LORD.”

- 2. They had asked about fasting.
- 3. God said, in effect, forget about fasting – do this . . .
- 4. What He says here to the people of Zechariah’s day is the very same as what He’d said to the people of the land *prior* to the coming of the Babylonians.
- 5. We find that message in 7:9-10 . . .

9 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother.

10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor.

Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.'

C. Not Ritual – Relationship!

1. What's shocking to realize is that *prior* to the Babylonian invasion, the people of Jerusalem were making a good *show* of worshipping God!
2. If you had stood near the temple mount you would have seen a steady stream of smoke rising from the altar as people brought sacrifices.
3. The temple offering box continued to fill.
4. The priests were busy hustling back and forth in a frenzy of religious activity.
5. To the unaided eye – things looked good, if all you looked at was the busyness of the temple grounds.
6. But if walked to the gates of Jerusalem and listened to the judges handing down verdicts in civil cases, you'd realize the court system of the land had been badly corrupted
 - a. the rich were bribing judges and securing favor as they sued the poor to steal their lands and houses.
 - b. the widows and orphans were easy prey for thieves who'd figured out how to manipulate the courts.
7. Then if you went to the market place you'd witness both buyers and sellers using false weights in order to cheat one another.
8. As you walked along the streets between the crowded houses, you'd hear violent arguments and abuse going on in many homes.
9. Just walking through crowded intersections you'd witness a level of social interaction that was rude and crude.
 - a. common courtesy obviously absent
 - b. and immodesty all too common.
10. God had sent His messengers the prophets to the people again and again, telling them that religious rites were not enough.
 - a. God is not appeased by a burnt goat
 - b. His anger at sin is not quenched by BBQ tri-tip
 - c. what He looks for is righteousness
 - d. what he demands is justice
 - e. and He marks the treatment of the poor, the widows and orphans, as the measure of a society's true spiritual condition!

11. The people refused to listen to the prophets, and as a result, God's judgment fell in the form of the Babylonian army.
12. Well, here they are some 85 years later, and God's message is the *same*.
13. He is *still* not appeased by empty man-made religious rituals.
14. What He is looking for is this . . .
 - a. "Speak each man the truth to his neighbor;" = are they truth tellers?
 - b. "Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;" = are they impartial in their judgments?
 - c. "Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath." = are they people of integrity?
15. Then God says this in v. 19 – "Forget fasting. Start feasting!"
 - a. why?
 - b. because as they had set their hands to rebuild the temple – God had set about to make sure every other need they had was taken care of.
 - c. the peace and prosperity they had worked so hard for but had eluded them for the 16 years they had *neglected* work on the temple – would now flow to them in abundance.
 - d. they would experience the promise so clearly articulated by Jesus 500 years later
 - e. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest of the issues and needs of life will be taken care of."
[Matthew 6:33]

D. Love Truth & Peace

1. God ends with this – "Therefore - Love truth and peace."
2. The point of the message was not lost on them – I hope it isn't lost on us.
3. Friends – God is not in to ritual – it's all about relationship.
4. And God is saying here that if our relationship with Him IS right – it won't be demonstrated so much in what religious duties and obligations we involve ourselves in but in *how we treat other people*.
5. To love God means to love truth and peace.
6. To Love God means to be a man or woman of *truth*, of *integrity*.
 - a. we'll abhor the idea of being deceitful

- b. we won't weight things on the basis of what we'll get out of it but rather on what is true
 - c. and we'll always speak the truth even if it is to our own harm
 - d. our love for truth will teach us that our *character* is far more important than our *pleasure* or *pocketbook*.
7. To love God means to be a man or woman of *peace*.
 - a. we'll live with an eye to *honor* others –
 - b. regardless of their ability to do something for us
 8. What God said to the people of that day, the Spirit is saying to us today.
 9. The Lord wants our values and priorities to be right and to realize that being in tune with Him means being in harmony with others!
 10. Jesus said it this way when asked what the greatest commandment was, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself."
 11. The Apostle John put it this way in 1 John 4 . . .

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12. Now, catch this . . .

¹²No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

13. Now jump down to v. 16 . . .

¹⁶And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

14. No one has seen God at any time – If we love one another, God

abides in us!

15. Do you see what John is saying?
16. The proof of a genuine relationship with God is love for others!
17. Our love for God is seen by a love for others that works itself out in practical ways of peace and truth.
18. As John says in v. 8 – where this kind of practical love is *lacking* – what can we conclude?
19. [Coffee maker]
 - a. [explain the tube as an indicator]
 - b. [show a coffee cup, a doughnut, sugar and cream]
 - c. do these tell us anything about the level of coffee in the maker?
 - d. these are like religious rituals –
20. Is Calvary Chapel merely a religious show?
 - a. is the music like the smoke from the ancient altar?
 - b. is our offering like that of old?
 - c. is this all just a lot of frenzied religious activity; sound and a fury – signifying nothing?
21. Or is all of what we do here the *overflow* of a heart that genuinely loves God and is demonstrating that love at home before we ever come to church?
 - a. in the car on the way to church?
 - b. at the restaurant after we *leave* church?
 - c. on Monday morning at work or school?

III. CONCLUSION

A. Take A Look Around

1. So – stop and consider this morning;
2. What does the indicator of your relationship with other people say about the genuineness of your relationship with God?
3. Don't be like Tom at the beginning of the message this morning who thought he could fix his problem by disconnecting the warning light.
4. If your life is marked by broken and unhealthy relationships today – if you're at odds with people, specially the people of your own home and family – take that as an indicator there may in fact be a problem in your connection to God.
5. Ask honestly if a love of truth and peace consistently mark those

relationships.

6. If not, the place to begin is by coming to the Lord and asking Him to show you where your relationship with *Him* has gotten off track.
7. If *that* relationship is mended – it *will* result in the mending of all other relationships.

B. An Appeal To The Lost