**Sunday, April 18th, 2021**

**Zechariah 7:8-13**

Eight-year-old Jeremy found Grandpa in the living room watching TV.

He asked Grandpa for help with his apple.

Grandpa was a bit hard of hearing, but when Jeremy handed him the apple,

          he took it.

And he ate it.

Just as he swallowed the last bite, Jeremy said:

          "Grandpa, I didn't want you to eat it.

          I just wanted you to get the worm out!"

Not listening can leave a bad taste in our mouths.

When we don't listen to what God is telling us

          we often have a lot of problems in our lives,

          some of them much worse than simply

          swallowing a worm along with the apple.

Zechariah tried to show the people how God wanted them to live.

But they did not listen.

They paid more attention to the problems in their lives,

          than God's instructions about how He wanted them

          to interact with each other.

Through Zechariah, God urged the people

          to show true justice, and mercy, and compassion, to one another.

But they refused to pay attention.

They covered their ears and stubbornly refused to listen.

God loved His people very much.

But He was angry when they refused to live His way.

He was saddened when the people refused to pay attention.

The people simply did not understand that they were causing

          many of the problems in their lives.

They did not see that life could be so much more enjoyable and satisfying,

          if they lived God's way.

Two friends, Martha and Agnes were enjoying lunch together.

After a while Martha asked Agnes,

“Do you think your husband is hard to please?”

Surprised by the question, Agnes put down her fork and thought for a few minutes.

Then she replied: "I really don't know. I guess I've never tried."

If we say we love our family, but don't do the little things which please them,

          we are not really showing our love for them.

If we neglect trying to please our families and friends,

          then we probably neglect to live our lives so that we please God.

Our relationship with God depends on our relationship

          with all the people we encounter each day.

God wants us to show mercy and compassion to others.

Yet it is not always easy.

Forgiving others is seldom easy.

Yet that is what God urges us to do.

Since God is willing to forgive us,

          we ought to be willing to forgive also.

Yet it is not easy to let go of bad feelings or hatred and forgive.

God provides us the help and strength to live His way.

He wants us to help everyone we can:

          those who are weak, and helpless, and lost.

He wants us to put our faith into action.

It is so easy to ignore others, and not pay them much attention.

He wants us have compassion for all the "forgotten people",

          those who don't have the resources they need:

          the lost, confused, hungry, or sick.

God speaks to us often, but we frequently don't listen,

          or refuse to follow him.

And He is disappointed when we shrug our shoulders,

          and turn our backs to Him, close our ears, and harden our hearts.

Yet whenever we do listen to Him, and obey Him,

          we discover life can be so much more interesting and satisfying.

We make God happy, and discover real joy in our lives.

A father was listening to his two sons who were arguing with each other.

The oldest was telling his younger brother:

“You have to be good, or Father won't love you.”

He called the children to him and said:

“That is not true.”

His son asked: "But you won't love us if we are not good, will you?"

His father replied: "Yes, I shall love you always.

          When you are good,

                    I shall love you with a love that makes me glad.

          When you are not good,

                    I shall love you with a love that hurts me very much.

          But I will always love you, no matter what."

God's love for us never changes.

He always loves you no matter what you do, or what we do not do.

But our attitudes, our words, and our actions

          determine whether His love is sad, or glad.

God want us to enjoy life with Him,

          following and obeying Him.

He knows our lives are more meaningful,

          filled with peace, joy, and hope,

          when we listen and follow Him.

AMEN