

Longing for Restoration – EZRA – Chapter 3

Welcome:

Well hello to everyone this weekend... I was going to say “thank you for being here” but let’s face it; you and I are here because we couldn’t afford the weekend at the beach.... ☺ - I’m kidding of course

My name is Raudel / I’ve been at The Summit 8 a half years / I serve as one of your directional elders, and I also serve as pastor to the Spanish Campus.... **If you ever want a cross-cultural experience without having to spend travel money, you are welcome to attend one of our Spanish services, we consistently have anywhere from 10 to 15 countries represented each week at our Spanish services.**

Quick confession today, I was tasked over a month ago to preach on Ezra, and I confess I tried everything to get out of it... I really tried to preach Nehemiah instead; why? Because nobody preaches on Ezra... **a lot of you didn’t even know it was a book in the Bible until I u saw in the Bible Reading Plan.** not a lot of insight on it / not much said on it...

- But hey, we have the Holy Spirit, and that’s my only hope when preparing a message whether it’s from Ezra or Romans.
- So let us pray, because we need to here from The Lord in a world that’s longing for restoration, that’s what Ezra is about; let’s pray.

Intro:

The context of Ezra is this. Ezra is about the restoration of God's people after a long exile, and the rebuilding of God’s altar.

Back in 587 BC, the Babylonians completely destroyed Jerusalem after a 30-month siege. **Basically brought Jerusalem down to the ground, destroyed the Temple, and took God’s people to exile hundreds of miles away.** Besides the fall, you could say this is the low point in all of the Old Testament. It was **as if God** had turned His back on his people. **Ever had that feeling...? God is Cancun....**

But then we get to the book of Ezra. And we read that a new king took power, and this king allowed God’s people to return home. God’s people walked for 4 months and finally stood in the rubble of Jerusalem.

Now, they were desperate to be back home, they are standing in front of a lot of work in order to rebuild; **and what do you think is the first thing they did?** Start moving debris and start building right? Wrong.

For three months, they did nothing. They just got their bearings. Even with all the rubble around them they paused and meditated on the truths they knew about God....

And after three months, on the holiest month of the year, they came together and stood in the rubble of Jerusalem where the Temple once stood, **and they worshiped.** **Read with me what happened.** It's found in Ezra Chapter 3, verse 1:

“1 When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 They set the altar in its place,” Ezra 3:1-3a

The rest of the chapter describes what happened later as they re-instituted corporate worship & prayer to God, as first and foremost....

But first let me ask you a question: if you returned home in those circumstances (with everything in ruins around you), **why would you make the first thing that you did to worship God? Is it just that they were primitive and superstitious people who didn't understand?** Or is there something deeper here that we need to know? Why would they do this right? **With everything around them lying in rubbles, why would they devote so much energy to restoring corporate worship to God as the people of God?**

- You see this is where charismatics get it right (and BTW the rest of the chapter is as charismatic as a service will get... don’t read it yet, track w/me... **but there is a reason worship to God was first**)

The reason is this: You and I are going to worship something, and it's either going to be what we have deemed in our mind as ideal and most needed for us; or God. **That's why they moved so quickly to worship God, because they understood that if they didn't worship God, they would end up worshiping idols instead.** We look at that and think, "**How oldschool!**" And it is primitive. But for years in exile, Judah was surrounded by hundreds of idols.

Everywhere they turned they were confronted with every kind of idol. But at least they acknowledged it, and, **they saw the only two choices as either worship idols, or worship God.** It's binary; it's simple.

I wonder sometimes if what's really happening in our country is that **the you and I/the church** thinks they have their eyes on Jesus, but in reality, they have their eyes on personal goals and agendas....

- It's easy for a believer / for Christ's church to have our eyes on being influential, and not on Jesus
- It's easy to have our eyes on this world, and not the one to come
- It's easy to have your eyes on the "ideal" government / the "ideal" economy, the "ideal" family, the "ideal" kids, the ideal "family beach house", the ideal "retirement", the "ideal ministry & what's next" and have your eyes completely OFF of Jesus... 'cause you are so preoccupied with self and upwards mobility, even as the church (I'm not against progress and success, but there is a profound difference between the self centered false ambition for success and influence, **and the true ambition to love and serve.** It's the difference between trying to raise ourselves up, and trying to lift up Jesus and our fellow human beings).
- It's so easy to have our eyes on ourselves **as if we** could provide more satisfaction on us, than God.
- **Listen, it's easy to pray daily to Jesus for something you love more than Jesus!** – What we daydream about gives it away... we love to be exalted rather than God, and will do so so using Jesus if we have too so many times....
- The gospel is not "pulling for ourselves", is surrendering yourself, giving up your life that you may find it, in the one that gives us life

We think **that** what the people of God did here by worshipping God first in front of all that rubble, instead of start cleaning up, we think that's primitive... not wise... we think that's old school, not relevant.... Today we believe that we are a little more sophisticated right? **Not really.... To worship God last is not much of an advancement....** To pray and fast and seek God's face, **only after you have tried everything else, it actually backwards, not forward progress.**

- There are a lot of things that will occupy us as believers that are nothing more than the fruit of our doing, and doing, without praying first; and now we have to spend our time and energy on

damage control and dealing with things we acquired that God never intended to give us....

Illus: There was a book review in the New York Times a few years ago about a memoir called "*Easter Everywhere*". It's about the spiritual journey of a woman named Darcey who lives in Brooklyn. The book describes some of the deep longings of her life.

The New York Times writer captures in his review the heart of the book / the aha! moment for this woman; he says:

"...she nails the central question — of her memoir and perhaps of her life — with an extraordinary quote from Simone Weil: "One has only the choice between God and idolatry," Weil wrote.

"If one denies God... one is worshiping some things of this world in the belief that one sees them only as such, but in fact, though unknown to oneself [we are] imagining the attributes of Divinity in them." 2x

In other words, we have a longing for transcendence; we tend to look at something **and we (sometimes without realizing it) imagine those things to have the beauty and the worth that in reality only God can deliver....**

- The reason why video games and breath taking earth views on instagram are so popular is because we find in them the transcendence our hearts is longing for.... It momentarily takes us out of the reality of our broken sinful self, and world....

We are wired to find eternal significance in something. We will give every fiber of our being to someone or something, and whatever that thing is we will worship. We will worship, there is no question about it ("*You may not call it worship, but something is at the center of your life. It's that one thing that makes everything else okay. The one thing that you can't imagine living without. The one thing that, if threatened, would crush your entire world.*" Pappalardo). The only question is whether we will worship God or an idol / Creator or things created; Ezra 3 promises that true restoration, and the true quench of our longing starts when we first worship God.

Listen, I too wish this world would be a little better when I leave it than when I came into it, but church, it's very possible to love this

world so much that you live fixed to this world, & to fix this world/to see it perfect, **and miss the fact believer that this is not our home.**

Oh how we easily forget that.... Here in the text we see that, as with everything on this side of heaven, that little mini exodus of the people of God had in Ezra, to return home, they quickly realized that what they had treasured as "home here" wasn't really home....

In the words of pastor Keller, **"All the mini-exoduses and mini-homecomings of the Bible failed in the end to deliver the final and full homecoming the prophets promised and everyone longed for."** TK – A kind of spiritual homesickness resides in every heart. Though we experience redemption and forgiveness in this life through Christ, we still long and wait for our full redemption (Rom. 8:23-24). (*This will tie to my last point..*)

The return to Jerusalem was bittersweet for God's people. Though rejoicing and celebration filled the city, **a sense that things still weren't as they should be, remained.** Beloved church we are suppose to experience this / we are suppose to feel like that; regardless of what those cute NC MAP t-shirts say, this world is not our home. **If you are so in love with this world that you really think everything you need is here, you have believed a delusion....** We, though redeemed and ransomed, long for our full redemption and full restoration. And Ezra gives us a picture of that; especially in this third chapter.

It offers a picture of what our wait should look like **as we long and wait for God to set all things right.**

So let me share about that **wait** a little bit according to Ezra 3

1. We must seek unity (v.1) while we wait for full restoration

Unity is essential for God's people.

- If you are familiar with the history of Israel, **then verse 1 should sound really refreshing to you:** **"the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem"**. You see, God's people were often divided / at odds with one another. The Northern and Southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah) even went to war against each other. **But now they were united as "one man."**

Church, as we wait for our full redemption, **we must be unified.** Jesus promised that He would build His Church (Matt. 16:18). But he

prayed that His Church would be unified (John 17:11). He will build and grow the Church, **but we must strive to remain as one.** This is why the apostle Paul constantly stressed our obligation to **"one another"** (See: Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:32). We must remain unified as we long for our full restoration.

- When 1 Co. 12 describes the church, Paul uses the word Body (using the analogy of our physical bodies), 18 times in only 9 verses to talk about the church/the body of Christ; **what's with the repetition, what's God's point?**
- That in the same way you wouldn't want to separate any member off of your physical body, the church needs to be one... / one body.
- **Yes, an ear looks way different than a toe, but one is not more important than the other, and you want them both....**
- And this body is unified as one, connected by one head... **Christ....**
- The body works **for each other**, it's automatic.... **For example:**
 - When you hammer a finger, the finger tells the brain, *"hey brain, I need I favor, I need you to tell the mouth to scream, please ask the mouth and lungs to let everybody know that I'm hurting down here 'cause this fool just pegged me with the hammer...."* – now there is NO fight, the brain is very obedient,
 - And tells the mouth, *"hey mouth, I got a brother hurting down there..."* (they eyes respond, *"is true I saw it"*), brain keeps saying to the mouth, *"please let everybody know the finger is hurting..., now I know is the middle finger, and probably needed it, but hey, we are one body here,"*
 - Mouth says, *"alright, I'll do it"*, and the mouth screams.... Immediately the ears say, *"hey, he told you2scream, not curse"*
 - Mouth says to the ear, *"sorry ear he was hurting real bad..."*
 - Now the body knows, **and IMMEDIATELY, the other hand goes to the rescue, and starts rubbing and consoling the finger, it's immediate... the body comes to the aid for consolation and unity....** It doesn't matter which member of the body it is, if it's an ugly looking toe, or if it's beautiful eyes, **to the body, all the body and every body is beautiful because they are all created by God.**
 - This all happens immediately, there is a reason why Paul chooses to use the analogy of the human body over and over to describe the church... this happens immediately with NO partiality and no questions asked, **because the church is suppose to be one in Christ; we are 4 God and 4 each other**

- THE ONLY REASON THAT HAPPENS CHURCH IS BECAUSE THE BODY IS CONNECTED... if the body wasn't connected, if the finger had ran away from THE BODY / THE CHURCH, he would have never gotten any help.... L: **You don't need to leave the church, you need to BE the church, and abide in Jesus, and Ezra says: Worship.** Worship even in the rubbles.... ~~God of rubbles will rest.~~
- The church is not a robot, is not a highly organized organization, but a living organism **through the power of The Holy Spirit**
- It's true that robot is highly organized (I'll give that to you), **but it's dead**, doesn't have any power, however, an organism is living and it gives witness... (we overcome by the blood of the lamb, **AND** the power of our testimony); **oneness in Christ leads people to Christ.**
- If you are going to rebuild an altar in this land of hurt and rubble, **we must become as ONE MAN (v.1) and WORSHIP GOD together before we do anything else....**

"Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:12

You cannot fight a Spiritual battle with with human weapons... We need divine intervention! We need The Lord! That's why we worship and pray! – That's why we need to walk in The Spirit praying without ceasing to God throughout the day / worshiping....

- That's why Paul says, "take every thought CAPTIVE to the obedience of Christ", he doesn't say, "*ask your sinful thoughts to please leave...*", he says take them CAPTIVE! **The Spirit of God that raised Christ from the dead lives and dwells IN you....**
- it's true the desires of the flesh are many and are against the will of God, BUT God's Spirit is you **and fights** the flesh so that you don't do what you want to! God wants to restore His altar in you;
- the flesh ain't greater that God's Spirit
- And for there to be corporate worship, there must be corporate repentance: "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*" 2 Chronicles 7:14

- Boy we need some healing in this land! It starts by rebuilding the altar Ezra 3 style church, through worship and prayer above all

Application: What divisions do you see in **your heart** towards others? What divisions do you see even in your small group? How can you make a call to unity? Doesn't matter if you are white, afri-amer, latino, Asian, Native-Amer, **we are called to a higher calling, ONE in Christ**

2. We must walk in obedience (vv. 2-6a) we often confuse grace with a free pass to disobey God... / La Santa Biblia dice, "se fiel hasta la muerte yo te dare la corana de la vida..."

it's time to seek the face of God, in order that we may be found faithful when He returns!!! The Holy Bible says, "*...be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*"

One of the first things we see the returning exiles do is offer sacrifices to the Lord. The AWE and WORTH of THE LORD was on them all. Notice in verses 3 to 5 that they were careful to offer the sacrifices exactly according to how the law commanded. **The fruit of your lips (as pretty as it may sound) is VAIN if the heart ain't worshipping.**

- What good is it to you **if you have a tremendous amount of giftedness, but a lack of character absent from the fruit of the Spirit?** (*I'm not impressed with peoples that are used by God, but people that walk full of the fruit of The Spirit*) Worship starts with the right posture of your heart towards God, and of love towards you fellow brother and sister you are worshipping with.

Their time in exile was a constant reminder of the idolatry and rebellion that brought God's judgment. They would not make the same mistakes again.

As we wait for God to renew all things and bring about our full redemption, the temptation to disobey remains. Jesus warned his followers not to grow weary as they waited for His return (Luke 21:34). Many will grow tired of seeking and obeying the Lord. Some will even depart from the faith by giving in to the world's allures (1Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Application: What areas of your life need growth and repentance? Are you becoming weary as a stranger and alien in this world (1Pet. 1:2)?

Resolve to remain steadfast to God and His Word. You have the Holy Spirit.

Listen I know that the wait for our Lord to return is not easy, this is one broken and sick world (I'm not trying to be a pessimist, sometimes we live in denial until the brokenness of this world hits home...), I know we think the wait can be too hard at times; but let me encourage you this way as we wait upon The Lord to return:

- The problem we see with a promise is that we have to wait...
- The only way to be able to wait, is to really believe the promise
- But if the promise is amazing, true, and sure, then there is no problem at all ☺

This life is a waiting room for the believer, and despite the trials and brokenness of this world we can totally live in a joyful waiting when our hope is in The Lord because of the sure promise we have in Jesus.

Full restoration will have to wait, but that doesn't mean is not coming! –

- **We who are in Christ have a promise! There will be a new heaven, and a new earth / there will be NO more tears / there will be no more violence / and there will be NO more false judgment.... I know we have to wait, but it's coming, I bet you my life on that!!!**
- **Listen, the wait is not a problem when you know there is good news on the other end.... Example of doctor waiting room; the patient that knows will get bad news and how he waits, and the patient that knows will get good news....**

But corporate worship is not possible without corporate repentance. I know that when there is a hot issue that confronts our sin, we don't like it; but church there lies the opportunity to grow, repent, and grow in unity, one body, of many members as, **as one**, to worship God

3. We must work to advance God's kingdom (vv. 6b-11)

Though the altar for sacrifices had been erected, God's Temple remained in ruins. The people committed themselves to rebuilding the house of the Lord. They labored joyously and celebrated as they laid the foundation. This was one more step toward reclaiming their identity as God's people.

The Church has to work for unity. People need to hear the gospel. The Word needs to be preached and taught. We must not give up doing good... our labor is NOT in vain. We must continue in the Lord's labor. Charles Spurgeon said, "*It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus.*" Of course we must exercise wisdom and balance, but God has given us much to do and "build."

- Listen; **if you are not busy with the Lord's work, you'll be busy in selfish gains.**
- *Application:* Beloved church, it's quite possible (we see in Scriptures) that God's people can labor for their own house and neglect God's house (Hag 1:1-5). **Are you busy with your own kingdom to the neglect of God's?**

I need to finish so let me give you my last point. As the church:

4. We must endure discontentment (vv.12-13)

"12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away."

Though God's people were unified in their homeland, bringing sacrifices, and restoring the Temple, **they were still "homesick."** Some of the elders who remembered the first Temple in all its glory were disappointed in the new Temple. Therefore, they wept. Though restored to their home, **a longing remained for full and final restoration.**

C.S. Lewis wrote, "*Our life-long nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation.*" Though secure in God, we long for our true home. **We must endure with a holy discontentment.**

- To feel satisfied with the temporary joys of this world, is to not know pleasures of the eternal Kingdom of God (*Closing Story of house closing, kids being excited, and me pointing the kids to our real home... "In my Father's house...."*)

Application: How do you handle the discontentment of this life? Do you allow the inner pain drive you to God or drive you to despair? --- explain here the difference of a past in Christ, and a past without Christ... and a present where you cry in his hands, where there IS consolation...

Conclusion:

As we long for redemption we must look to Jesus Christ. He left His home in heaven to come and ransom us. Therefore, one day we will be reunited **with Him and the home He has prepared for us**. Let us not grow weary as we wait.

--- This ain't over yet people of God, this ain't over until God says is over... and God says that for those who are found in Him, pain will never have the last Word.

Through Christ, God is building a living temple.

Christ the ultimate builder, the last temple, the one who restores our relationship with God and makes all things new

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...
...Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” – Ephesians 2:19-22*

In Ezra you return to the God of old, but you look forward to a future everlasting and perfect Kingdom; not in this world

In Ezra when the people of God are one, God accomplishes mighty things through us, for His glory, and the good of our city and all people; and when we worship as one, God descends in a special way

The temple eventually get's rebuilt, but it's not our final temple, our final temple is someone, The Lord most high, and company with Him in pleasures forever....

This rebuilt temple is not the final temple, we find here in Ezra the recognition that believers are aliens and strangers here on earth:

pilgrims pressing towards a heavenly city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).

Ezra is old, yet is greatly eschatological; a much needed Word and reminder today for believers, so that whatever our government, and whatever our trials, and whatever injustice, we are not home yet. But in Christ we will be home soon, very soon. Which makes me say, “it is well with my soul, and my present sufferings is real, yet it doesn't even compare with the glory and delight of the God who awaits me for everlasting splendors...”

I love you church, I love all of you, let us be one; let us pray....