

I. Introduction

- A. Thank you for being part of our family today.
- B. We are looking at the Book of Ezra.
 - 1. Ezra is the story of a comeback. A spiritual comeback for God's people.
 - 2. It was bottom of the ninth, two strikes, two outs, and BAM, an out of the park walk off grand slam to win the game.
- C. My message today is called:
 - 1. *Transcendence*
- D. Okay, I know it's a big word, and has a lot of meaning. We'll get into that.
- E. So, let's get right into Scripture.
- F. As we go, I'll fill in the background that we need.

II. *Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites. (Ezra 3:8, 9, NKJV)*

- A. Okay. What is this about? So, this happens 500 years before Christ.
- B. It happens because the Jews have been in exile for 70 years. They have been in exile throughout the Babylonian and then the Persian empire. Millions of Jews had made exile a new normal. They should be in the Promised land. They should be there, because the Promised Land is the place where they will experience maximum grace from God, and God will receive maximum glory from them. But they are not in the Promised Land. They are in exile. And exile is becoming their new normal. That is not a good thing.
 - 1. Here's the principle:
 - a) *Lesson 1: Never let distance between your heart and God's heart become a new normal in your life.*
- C. But in Ezra there's good news. The good news is that God's people are coming back to the Promised land. In fact, 47,000 Jews have left exile. They have traveled back to Jerusalem (the city), which is in Judah (the kingdom). They are regathering. They are restarting. They are restoring their "old normal" to the Promised Land. And the core of that is once again embracing their true identity as the redeemed, forgiven, grace-filled, holy, priestly, blessed, provisioned, mighty, beautiful, purposeful people of God.
- D. So that is the situation.
- E. Now, it's time for them to do the main thing.
- F. The main thing is rebuilding their temple.
 - 1. The temple in question was first built 500 years earlier by Solomon. It was destroyed 50-ish years earlier by Nebuchadnezzar. And by destroyed, I mean the temple was busted down, burned down, looted, and blasted to pieces.
 - 2. Now, some time has passed, and the materials have arrived to get building.
 - 3. It's time to build.
 - a) But let's pause here and think about what's being built.

III. The Temple

- A. The temple was a large building. The building was meant to be a constant reminder that God is central to everything. Every square inch was packed with symbols and object lessons. All of the rituals, all of the sacrifices, all of the priestly garments, all of the furnishings, even the floor-plan—everything was packed with symbols and object lessons.
- B. Solomon's temple stood for 500 years, which is over twice as long as our country has been a country. Then it was destroyed.
- C. Now, they are building the temple again.
- D. Why?
- E. Not because God needs a home. Not because God is homeless. Not because worship requires a building, it doesn't. Not because God's glory is limited to a particular place or time.
 - 1. They are rebuilding the temple because they needed an enduring way to orient their lives to the presence of God.
 - a) God is their true north, and the Temple stands to remind them.
 - 2. They are rebuilding the temple because they need a magnet to keep calling their people home.
 - 3. They are rebuilding the temple because they need a three dimensional projection of the great truths of Scripture.
 - 4. They live in an age where homes didn't have Bibles—only the priests in the Temple have a copy of writings of Scripture... and the Temple put those writings into visible, three dimensional form (Hebrews 8:5).
 - a) *Do you want to know the way of salvation?*
 - (1) Come to the Temple, and see the altar, and the sacrifices to pay for your sins. But no, the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins... but the sacrifices could point to the coming Savior, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 - b) *Do you want to understand the approach to your God?*
 - (1) Come to the Temple, and watch the priests in their garments, purified, and majestic, and full of glory. And no, those priests could not themselves usher you into God's presence. But they could point you to the ultimate priest, our Final Great High Priest, who alone brings together a holy God with sinners, now called saints.
 - c) *Do you want to piece together the major truths of our faith?*
 - (1) Come to the Temple and see the character of God, the nature of his Son, the realities of divine justice, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, the nature of Jesus Christ, joined as God and human, just like gold joined with wood... because this temple is a three dimensional Bible, an edifice of truth and every piece fits with every other piece.

- d) *Do you want to glimpse the majesty of God?*
- (1) Come to the temple, and hear the majestic praises of the holy choirs, and see the sun glistening off gold covered walls, remember the complete absence of imagines and idols, observe the solemn proceedings, and view the sheer scope and grandeur of this architectural wonder, and you will know there is a Glorious One above who makes the human heart soar to heights we can never capture on earth.
 - (a) All of those purposes of yesterday's Temple are accomplished today by applying your mind and heart to God's Word.
- F. Why rebuild the temple?
1. The bottom line is a reality I can only describe as transcendence.
 2. I wanted a simpler word, but this is all I could find.
 3. Transcendence means to go beyond what we think or imagine. It means to extend beyond the limits of the ordinary, to rise above the realm of matter and energy, to draw your mind to those heavenly realms your soul and spirit were designed for.
 - a) *Lesson 2: God wants you to orient your life to realities that transcend what you see with your eyes, and feel in your emotions... to reformat your mind on eternal truths of holiness, love and grace.*
 - b) The temple was God's way of energizing their minds in the midst of life's grit and grime, to remind them there was a heaven above, ruled by a God above.
 - c) The temple was God's way of showing there was a blood-bought salvation that opened the door to all who would believe.
 - (1) Long before Jesus came to be incarnate God himself, there was a temple to incarnate the wonders of God for everybody to see.
- G. And when those people dedicated themselves to building a temple, they were lighting a beacon of hope for the world.
- H. They were declaring in no uncertain terms the world is not all there is. God is in heaven. And he is not fickle and not random. Not portable. Not malleable. Not changeable. God is solid and enduring, and his grace, his *hesed*, endures forever.
- I. What is the temple today?
1. *Do you not know that you [plural] are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)*
 2. *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." (2 Corinthians 6:16)*
 3. *You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)*
- J. There is a true sense in which you as an individual are the temple of God. Yes.
- K. But that's not what these verses are saying. These verses are saying that we, collectively, are the temple of God. We, together, gathered together, we the church, we are God's temple.
- L. Want to see God's temple today? Look around.
1. The world looks at us to see the way of salvation through the blood of the Lamb.
 2. The world looks at us to see the glories of invisible God, and the wonders of his heaven.
 3. The world looks at us to find a way to approach a God of justice through a pathway of grace.
 - a) We are the temple. We are the priests.
 - b) *Lesson 3: We in the church are the receptacles of so much glory and so much grace that, when we're at our best, a lost and dying world sits up and takes notice.*
- M. There is a sacredness and transcendence to the church. There is a wonder to the people of God who have believed on his name, that makes the demons flee and the angels cheer and the Spirit of God radiate the love of Christ into every corner of our lives to the glory of the Father.
- N. People may scoff at us. They may think we're fools and out of date. We look at ourselves, and say, "not many mighty, not many wise, not many noble..." We're kind of a bunch of societal misfits.
1. *But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29):*
 - a) *Lesson 4: The Imperfect Church is God's wrecking ball to the devil's lies and the world's delusion and pride.*
 - b) You are not an insignificant speck, crawling through life.
 - c) You are not a cog in a heartless cosmic machine.
 - d) You are not a pawn of the stars, or a victim of the fates.
 - e) You are not a plaything to be used and discarded by the power brokers of earth.
 - f) You are not the wrong shape, wrong size, wrong color, wrong socio-economic status, wrong anything.
 - g) You are not doomed to repeat your mistakes, and not locked into your addictions.
- O. If you have been saved, you have joined the ranks of the immortals. That is who you are.
1. You are a living stone in a glorious edifice of grace and truth.
 2. You are an eternal child of God, packed full with the privileges, and glories, and wealth of the King of Heaven himself.
 3. You are under the watchful care of Infinite Love, and the unfailing provision of infinite grace.
 4. And you are more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus the Lord... so much so, that God has given you the rank of Ambassador of Heaven to earth.
- P. And the more deeply you realize all that, and embrace that, and connect the dots of it to Scripture, and link arms with fellow Christians... the more this insane world around us can see Jesus and be saved.
- Q. Welcome home to the Promised Land...

1. The maximum experience of grace for you.
2. The maximum reflection of glory to God.
3. The maximum testimony of the gospel to the world.
 - a) *Lesson 5: Oh please never stop growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. And if you have stopped, please start up again.*
- R. And when that small remnant of people, who refused to call exile normal, but traveled back where they belonged...when they began to rebuild this temple of grace and truth... Here's how that went down.
- IV. *When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel..." (Ezra 3:10, 11a)*
 - A. Here's the important lesson:
 1. The truth comes first, the praise comes second.
 2. The Word is proclaimed and believed, and the response is worship and praise.
 - B. This is the great problem facing the church in our generation. It is the problem of separating the truth of Scripture from the emotion of faith.
 1. In some churches, it is all very brainy, and cerebral... light no heat.
 2. In other churches, it is all very emotional, and feeling based... heat no light.
 - a) But when the church is on its game, and when the spiritual temple is firing on all cylinders...
 - (1) It's both.
 - (a) Heat and light.
 - (b) Truth and passion.
 - (c) Both.
 3. *So he answered and said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "your neighbor as yourself."* (Luke 10:27)
 - C. Israel had professional worship leaders. They were highly skilled, and highly trained. But here's the most important thing.
 - D. They weren't just skilled musicians, there was something more important than that... which is that they were skilled bible scholars and theologians. They knew how to channel the emotion of praise down the pathway of truth.
 - E. Before they led praise songs, they attended Bible studies. It says so, in verse 10. According to the Ordinance of King David. In the Bible, King David wrote how the priests and choirs and orchestras should operated. They read the Bible, and they put Scripture into their praise.
 1. Light and heat, together.
 - F. And look at what they sang: they sang theology.
 1. Give thanks to God... "For he is good, his mercy endures forever."
 - a) The goodness of God.
 - b) The grace of God.
 - G. The goodness of God in theology is called the benevolence of God, because, well, we have to make things hard. Just kidding, actually we want to make things precise. The goodness of God says that God is the ideal. What God should be, God is. He is perfection in himself. He is happiness within himself. Jesus said, *"No one is good, but One, that is God"* (Mark 10:18).
 1. As a sub-category of benevolence of God, theology describes four other qualities:
 2. *Benevolence (the goodness of God)*
 - a) *The love of God*
 - b) *The mercy of God*
 - c) *The patience of God*
 - (1) and a little thing you might have heard of called
 - d) *The grace of God.*
 - H. When the choirs of God's people stood up to sing, they were mixing measures of passionate praise with equal measures of profound theology.
 1. Because they weren't just skilled musicians, they were skilled bible scholars too.
 - a) And what they produced was truly amazing. Look what happens:
- V. *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. (Ezra 3:11)*
 - A. If this had just been a pep rally, it would not have been a victory for God.
 1. If this had just been the whipping up of emotion, it would not have been a victory for God.
 2. It is dangerous to manufacture worship in the church. You can only paint an indelible picture of a God so great, and salvation so free, the praise just gushes from our hearts.
 - a) What made it a victory for God was that it was a whole-hearted response to God's truth — his goodness and grace — actually playing out in their lives.
 - B. And when they laid the foundation of the temple, they couldn't hold back the excitement any more.
 - C. The impossible had happened. The ruined temple was rising from the ashes. Life out of death. A miracle of grace. And a testimony to the world of the reality of their God.
 1. If you need it, grace supplies it.

2. If you break it, grace fixes it.
 3. If you lost it, grace finds it.
 4. If you spoil it, grace restores it.
 5. If you regret it, grace forgives it.
 6. If you're sick, grace heals.
 7. If you're dirty, grace cleanses.
 8. If you're down low, grace lifts you up.
 9. Where you hurt, grace comforts.
 10. Where you fear, grace fortifies.
 11. Where you doubt, grace convinces.
 12. Where you can't, grace can.
 13. For the deluded, grace brings truth.
 14. For the addicted, grace brings freedom.
 15. For the dysfunctional, grace brings wholeness.
 16. For the lonely, grace brings love.
 17. For the lost, grace brings a salvation so exhaustive words can't do it justice.
 - a) If that's not worth a shout of joy, I don't know what is.
- D. But sad to say, that joy wasn't joy for everybody.
- VI. *But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. (Ezra 3:12, 13)*
- A. The younger generation was shouting and clapping.
 - B. The older generation was weeping and wailing.
 - C. Why were they weeping?
 1. A few were weeping tears of joy, like you see at a wedding.
 2. A few were weeping tears of regret. All those wasted years in exile... all because they refused to orient their lives to the Lord.
 3. But most were weeping tears of disappointment. This new temple was nothing like the Old Temple. That one was awesome, and this one is such a letdown.
 - a) Spiritual nostalgia is not your friend. God has new mercies up his sleeve every single day.
 - D. It says right in verse 12, they were responding to what was "before their eyes."
 1. *Lesson 6: When you respond to what is before your eyes, your life is always more painful than it needs to be. But when you respond to what God promised in his Word, you can live with hope and peace.*
 - E. This requires great maturity in the Lord.
 - F. Here was God's promise... it came from the lips and pen of a prophet of that day. The prophet's name was Haggai.
 1. *'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? 'Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you.... 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.' (Haggai 2:3-9)*
 - a) *Lesson 7: There is nothing you have ruined that God's grace can't bring about something better than before.*
- VII. Conclusion
- A. If you've ever remodeled a home, you might have had the fun of peeling off old wall paper. It's not easy. It's a giant project.
 - B. But it's so satisfying... you peel away that layer... and then underneath, you discover another layer.
 - C. The layer you see.
 - D. The layer you don't see.
 - E. The longer you are saved, the easier it is to let God slip into the layer you don't see.
 - F. In your heart, you are thankful to God.
 - G. But that thankfulness becomes buried, and the bottom layer.
 - H. In your heart you know you are in the presence of God. But you don't think about that much, because that layer is buried.
 - I. You are a Christian, but Christianity is papered over with soccer practice, and heading to the lake, and work and home and dating and career and health and family and a thousand other good things.
 - J. But to rebuild the temple means to un-peel those layers, and let God show through.
 1. It is to stop taking God for granted.
 2. It is to quit assuming he will work on your behalf, and start asking him.
 3. It is to quit just being thankful, and start actually saying thank you.
 4. It is to quit just learning about him, and actually start being satisfied in him.
 - K. To lay the foundation of the temple is to set in the central place, on an immovable rock, right where you can see them all the time, the glories and grace of your Savior and God.
 - L. Because that is the only way to calibrate your heart to true north, and find your way to come back home to God.