

Rebuild: Ezra-Nehemiah
Part 3: Finishing the Temple | Ezra 5-6
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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Today's sermon is titled "Finishing the Temple" and it is from Ezra 5-6. We are in our sermon series through Ezra and Nehemiah called "Rebuild." And what I want to clarify with everyone here today is that in finishing the temple, the Lord wasn't just rebuilding a physical structure- he was rebuilding *his people*. He was rebuilding their identity corporately as a covenant community- who the Lord wanted them to be and what the Lord wanted them to do.

And as I mentioned last week, one New Testament parallel regarding the temple is that the church is now the "temple of God," as believers are joined together with Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:12). The church is not a building- amen? The church is you and me gathered here together. Can you just remind each other- by saying this if you're with someone or by typing it out into this chat or as a text to someone: "We are the church!"

Now this is entirely relevant for us in this particular moment of time because there is some rebuilding that we need to do as a church as well in light of this pandemic that has significantly changed our world. Not only that, we've all gone through our own personal changes and trials during this year and half.

We've experienced really great events and significant milestones during this time; we've experienced really hard lows too. Honestly, I don't know of a stretch of time when our church has had to deal with so many loved ones passing away- it's been just crazy.

And the even *harder* part of all of this is that we've gone through most of this- for the most part- alone because the pandemic has forced us to be fragmented and apart. We're wondering what the coming months and years have in store for us; we know we need to get used to COVID-19 in our world and somehow move forward in our lives.

So let's gather together around this part of the Scriptures that will give us some of the foundational things that we need to think about as his people, his disciples, and his church.

Proposition

The "one thing" from Ezra 5-6 for us today is this:

Trust that the Lord rebuilds us as his people, the church.

Organizational Statement

So God's Word here shows three specific ways that he rebuilds his people: first, he rebuilds us as ***people receiving God's Word*** (from 5:1-2); second, he rebuilds us as ***people who obey God*** (from 5:3-17 and 6:1-15); third, he rebuilds us as ***people joyfully consecrated*** (from 6:16-22). These three specific ways that he rebuilds us are why we can ***trust that the Lord rebuilds us as his people, the church.***

Since the passage is a sizable amount of content, we'll go through it step-by-step. I'll also highlight a specific timeless truth for us from each of the three parts of Ezra 5-6.

Transition: First, the Lord rebuilds us as...

Sermon Outline

I. **People Receiving God's Word – see Ezra 5:1-2.**

A. *[I'll highlight this first timeless truth as we work through this part...]* **Truth #1: The ministry of God's Word creates transformation of heart in God's people, the church.**

1. In these verses, we see that the people of Judah, prompted by the ministry of these two prophets of the Lord, restarted the temple rebuilding project.

a) Let's read Ezra 5:1-2.

- o Ezra 5:1-2 (ESV): *1 Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. 2 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*

Haggai and Zechariah were prophets of the Lord. Back in those times, prophets were God's messengers who delivered God's words to his people- sometimes just spoken, sometimes written down for the record. Moses was the first prophet, who received and wrote down the Law from YHWH. Haggai and Zechariah were also prophets who wrote books that are included in the Bible and who had significant ministries during this time.

- b) When you look at these two books, you get neat insights on what was going on with the people during this time. First, when you look at the book of Zechariah, the messages from YHWH address the people's discouragement in rebuilding the temple- but also gets directly at the heart of the problem. Look at what YHWH told Zechariah to say in...
 - o Zechariah 1:2-3 (ESV): *2 The Lord was very angry with your fathers. 3 Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.*

YHWH declared that he cared deeply for his people and that he would establish a new king from the "Branch"- the line of David- who would cleanse his people from their sin and rebuild the true temple. Zechariah called the people of Israel to repentance and to serve YHWH faithfully, especially the leaders!

- c) Second, when you look at the book of Haggai, the messages from YHWH call the people to resume the rebuilding of the temple. YHWH's message to the Jews at this time also cut deeply into their hearts:
 - o Haggai 1:4-5 (ESV): *4 Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? 5 Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.*

They had prioritized rebuilding their own homes but had put off the difficult task of rebuilding the temple. YHWH's messages also promised God's blessing as they trusted and obeyed him. It also inspired the leaders of the people, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, to get the rebuilding project moving again after it had been stopped before (remember this is what happened in 4:24).

- d) So the ministry of God's Word, led by these two prophets of the Lord, were crucial in what happened here. God's Word made it clear to this new generation that their sins collectively as a people led to the destruction of their city and temple and the captivity in Babylonia that they experienced for the last seventy years. It was God's Word that also led them to repentance and shared that YHWH would return to them if they returned to him. God's Word challenged this new generation specifically when they got comfortable in their new homes and put off the hard task of rebuilding the temple after

it was stopped. When the people needed rebuke, vision, encouragement, care, and support (as it said in verse 2), God led them through his Word! What is apparent here is that the ministry of God's Word created this transformation of heart in God's people here in this Scripture.

2. [Now let's come back to this first timeless truth] Truth #1: The ministry of God's Word creates transformation of heart in God's people, the church.
 - a) Context: I say this all the time that it is a blessing in disguise that I am not very good at public speaking. I'm not eloquent or long-winded enough to even deceive myself into *thinking* that I have something important or valuable to say from myself. I know I'm not, so I *depend* on God's Word to speak, convict, and lead the church. I couldn't come up with 40 minutes of material on my own; but I gladly preach every week from the Scriptures and we dedicate this much time to it in our corporate gatherings. I do this because I know God's Word transforms hearts and reveals who God is and what his will is for all of us. God's Word is what gives us rebuke, vision, encouragement, care, and support at just the right times.
 - b) Context: But do you know that *you* have a ministry of God's Word too? We all have "Word ministry" in our church! First, your Word ministry is to feed yourself through your own Bible intake- this is why we *incessantly* encourage people to start Bible reading plans and to learn inductive Bible study methods. There is nothing more exciting than seeing people get excited about God's Word as they discover life-giving truth for themselves and as they hear God speaking to them personally and powerfully on their own. Also, your Word ministry is with others around you. This is a way to disciple the people closest to you: talk about the Bible and study it together with your friends, children, spouse, and other family members; talk about the Bible and study it together with brothers and sisters from the church in LIFE group- this is what the purpose of LIFE group is! Also, talk about the Bible and study it together with your friends who are not yet believers in Christ, so that they can get personally introduced to God whom we know and love!
 - c) Context: But as you consider your Word ministry (in yourself, in others, and in our church), remember this important *why*. We plant God's Word in our hearts and in others' hearts because it is what *creates* transformation in people! Just remember that God's words *create*, just like in the beginning when he spoke, his words created the universe! His words *create* conviction of sin, heart change to repent, and faith to trust and follow Jesus. No matter if you're eloquent or good with your words or not, the only change agent of our hearts is God's Word. Oh church, let's be people receiving God's Word with an insatiable hunger and curiosity and seriousness!

Transition: So first we have seen that the Lord rebuilds us as people receiving God's Word. Second, the Lord rebuilds us as...

II. People Who Obey God – see Ezra 5:3-17 & 6:1-15.

A. [I'll highlight this second timeless truth as we work through this part...] Truth #2: Obedience requires faith that the Lord will accomplish his will, no matter the outcome.

1. In these verses, we see that the people of Judah faced the challenge of an inquiry to the king regarding the decree to rebuild the temple, but the Lord upheld their cause.
 - a) Let me do a large bit of summarizing through this part. After the people of Judah have that fire back under them to rebuild the temple, they experience pushback from a specific group of people, collectively identified as *Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and his associates*. Their scope of power seemed to include a chunk of the Persian empire that included Jerusalem. These men questioned the legitimacy of rebuilding the temple. They went as far as to write a letter to King Darius, the ruler of the Persian empire at the time.

- b) They reported that the Jews were rebuilding their temple, possibly without authorization from the king. The Jews in Jerusalem had explained to them that the temple was built by Solomon, but their ancestors sinned against YHWH and thus he sent the Babylonians to destroy the city and the temple (so you see, they did understand *why* all this happened and repented for it). The Jews claimed that King Cyrus had decreed for them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The letter requested that King Darius check the royal archives to verify if all of this was true or not.
- c) Now we get to chapter 6, which records that King Darius did conduct a search in the archives and found the records. The records there confirmed that the Jews were permitted to rebuild the temple and also that Cyrus had pledged to fund the whole project and to return the original items of the temple. After discovering this, King Darius ordered Tattenai and his buddies to literally *keep away* from the Jews who were rebuilding the temple. He went even further and decreed that the Jews were to be given funds from the “royal revenue” and supplies (like livestock to sacrifice and food for the temple workers).
- d) King Darius also decreed- and this is really, really important- that the Jews were not just *permitted* to offer sacrifices to YHWH, they were *encouraged* to do so. Here’s what verse 10 says exactly: *...that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons*. The common practice of the Babylonians and the Persians was to integrate other gods and religion into their own- this was a polytheistic view of the world. If the God of the Jews, or the “God of heaven” as Darius put it, could help him and his own prosperity, the more the merrier.
- e) But another way to see it is that this was God’s big plan all along! YHWH was not just the God of the Jews, but of the whole world! When he made his covenant with Abraham way back in Genesis 12:2-3, YHWH promised that he would bless Abraham’s descendants (this was the nation of Israel) so that they could bless the other people groups around them. Some of the exiles were already a blessing to King Darius- like Daniel (remember Daniel and the lion’s den?)- and now he was asking the Jews to intercede on behalf of him and his family!
- f) After all this now, let’s read what happened next in...
 - o Ezra 6:14-15 (ESV): *14 And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; 15 and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.*

The most important observation to make here is...they *finally finished* the temple! They had started it way back around 538BC, getting the altar and foundations quickly laid. But they hit some bumps in the road: they faced opposition, then construction stopped, they got discouraged and distracted with their own pursuits. Finally in the sixth year of King Darius’ reign- so around 515BC, they finished it! So it took about 22-23 years to finish building the temple, with all kinds of obstacles and opposition that they faced in between. It was not easy; it took an extraordinarily *long* time; it had a lot of starts and stops in between; it was in no way close to the glory and splendor of the original temple- but they *finished* it!

- 2. [Now let’s come back to this second timeless truth] Truth #2: Obedience requires faith that the Lord will accomplish his will, no matter the outcome.
 - a) Context: Now I don’t want you to think or get the impression that if we obey, there will *always* be overwhelmingly positive results. This was the case for the Jews this particular time, but it’s not always like this! We will not *always* experience favor from powerful people, financial prosperity, or an overall “win” when we obey the Lord. But I

can say for sure- 100%- is that when we obey the Lord, we will be doing his will (just as the Jews were accomplishing God's will by finishing the temple and interceding on behalf of King Darius). Let me say that again: when we obey the Lord, we will be doing his will!

- b) Context: We need not think any farther than the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He said this in his prayer on the Mount of Olives...
- o Luke 22:42 (NLT): *"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."*

That night, Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples, arrested, and put on trial. Early that following morning, he was beaten up and sentenced to death on a Roman cross. In obedience, he suffered and died; in suffering and dying, he fulfilled God's will to save the world. Through his suffering and death, our sins were paid for and our lives were redeemed!

- c) Context: Church, what must define us as God's people is not just **people receiving his Word**, but also **people who obey God** as we receive his Word! If we truly understand that Jesus Christ is truly Lord of all, then as his people, our lives will be marked by proper, appropriate submission to him- this willingness to obey him at his word. Period. Jesus himself said it even more bluntly.
- o Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV): *21 Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" 23 And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."*
- d) Context: So we must say, "Lord Jesus, you said that we must forgive those who wrong us, so even though everything in me says not to, I will choose to forgive." We must say, "Lord Jesus, you said that I cannot love both you and money, so even though money is so alluring, I will choose to forsake it." We must say, "Lord Jesus, you said that we cannot engage in sexual immorality, so even though I'm neck deep into this, I will choose to live in purity." We must say, "Lord Jesus, you said to love your neighbor as yourself, so even though I have a lot going on, I choose to look for opportunities to do this." Can you trust and believe that all these little decisions like this are accomplishing God's will on earth? They are!

Transition: So we have seen that the Lord rebuilds us as **people receiving God's Word** and **people who obey God**. Third, the Lord rebuilds us as...

III. People Joyfully Consecrated – see Ezra 6:16-22.

- A. **[I'll highlight this third timeless truth as we work through this part ...] Truth #3: We can be joyfully consecrated to the Lord as we remember what he has done and will do.**
1. In these verses, we see that the people of Judah rededicated themselves to the Lord after the temple was finished and they celebrated the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread.
 - a) So in Ezra 6:16-18, we see that the Jews- all the people along with the priests and Levites- dedicated the rebuilt temple with a bunch of offerings to the Lord. A lot of scholars note that this was the 70-year mark of their time taken into captivity until the completion of the temple. This officially ended their exile! Now let's read the read of the passage.
 - o Ezra 6:19-22 (ESV): *19 On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover. 20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for*

their fellow priests, and for themselves. 21 It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. 22 And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

- b) You see, it was extremely significant that the Jews celebrated the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread at this point. This was the first major event of the new Jewish calendar year- another one of the three major holidays when all Jews were to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The Passover was to remember when YHWH sent the final plague in Egypt: the “angel of death” that would come to kill every firstborn son in Egypt. The people of Israel were instructed to kill a lamb and mark the tops of their doorposts with its blood so that the “angel of death” would *pass over* their homes. This event catalyzed Israel’s release from slavery in Egypt. They had to eat in such a hurry that they could not wait for the bread to rise. This was commemorated by the Jews in the Feast of Unleavened Bread (that is, bread without yeast).
 - c) So, sometime after they had dedicated what’s called the “second” temple, all the Jews returned to Jerusalem for this *joyful remembrance* of what God had done in delivering them from slavery in Egypt and setting them free. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread was full of *symbols* and *liturgy* that looked back and reinforced this *narrative* that YHWH had *this new generation* on a journey as well, and that as they trusted in him and obeyed him along the way, he would certainly accomplish his will.
 - d) They were also *taught* from God’s words to his prophets that YHWH would send a great and final king who would deliver his people and establish a kingdom that would be eternal. They knew that they were not there yet- they still faced a lot of challenges ahead of them- but they had a *joyful hope* in that promise that burned brightly and clearly in this significant milestone of finishing the second temple and celebrating the Passover.
 - e) Therefore, in light of this *joyful remembrance* and *joyful hope*, there was a *joyful consecration* to the Lord in these verses. According to verse 21, even many of the people who had lived in Judah all those years (maybe some were not even Jews) separated themselves from the “uncleanness” of the idolatrous people groups living in the land and dedicated themselves to worship the Lord. In other words, they consecrated themselves, or set themselves apart to obey and serve no other gods but YHWH only!
2. [Now let’s come back to this third timeless truth] Truth #3: We can be joyfully consecrated to the Lord as we remember what he has done and will do.
- a) Context: Here’s the problem that we have to confront as we want to be **people receiving God’s Word** and especially **people who obey God**. We cannot do it! The Bible tells us that we are slaves to sin and are condemned to God’s eternal wrath on our own. But we have a *joyful remembrance* of what God has done on our behalf.
 - o Romans 5:8-10 (ESV): *8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

The gospel is that God loves us and sent Jesus to die for us. We are saved from the wrath of God that we deserve because of our sins; instead, we are made right with God by his blood and we are reconciled with God. There is so much to *joyfully remember* in this!

- b) **Context:** In fact, as ***people receiving God's Word***, we are confronted with the gospel that we are sinners who are saved only by God's grace. God's Word says the grace of God chooses us, regenerates our hearts, gives us faith, calls us to repentance, justifies us before God, adopts us as his children, sanctifies us to be more like him, and causes us to persevere until his return! In light of this saving work of God, we are transformed to be ***people who obey God***- we now joyfully consecrate ourselves to obeying and serving Jesus Christ the rest of our lives on earth.
- c) **Context:** Let's think about the Lord's Supper, something we observe regularly as a church per the ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ (and that we're doing today). We have a *joyful remembrance* as we look back at the cross: Jesus' body was broken and Jesus' blood was shed as the price paid for our sins and our redemption. We could not save ourselves; Christ became our sacrifice of atonement with God; we are now justified and reconciled with God. We also have a *joyful hope* as we look forward to Christ's return, at the great marriage supper of the Lamb! On this day, we will be glorified- no longer crippled by sin and now in perfect, eternal communion with the Lord Jesus. So *now* we observe the Lord's Supper in *joyful consecration*. We are committed to obeying the Lord in the big and small ways, assured that in our obedience we are doing his will with our lives on earth.
- d) **Context:** This brings to mind a conversation I had a little while ago with a brother in Christ from Afghanistan who is here as a refugee. He became a follower of Jesus Christ here in Indonesia. He was sharing with me how he was considering going back to Afghanistan- it had been so long that he was separated from his wife and the rest of his family. He had been unsuccessfully trying to get them here and now he was thinking that it would be better for him to go back home. He shared that he wanted his loved ones to know about Jesus Christ as well, so he was even willing to go back despite all the dangers and risks. He even told me that he was ready to die because this was important to him. I remember thinking to myself, "Where did this willingness to follow Christ into anything come from?" I would now say that this kind of *joyful consecration* comes when Christ's past work on the cross and future promise of eternal glory is a *reality* in our lives. Church, may we ***all be people joyfully consecrated*** to the Lord Jesus Christ today, in all the little ways and big things in our lives!

Transition: So we have seen that the Lord rebuilds us ***people receiving God's Word, people obeying God, and people joyfully consecrated***. So let's close out this sermon with the...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

- A. ***What are the next steps that we can take to exercise this trust that the Lord rebuilds us as his people, the church?***
1. First, get God's Word to reverberate in you, your church, and all around you.
 - a) Read, study, meditate, and memorize it! And just as we've had as our theme for the past year, let the words of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing each other in all wisdom (Colossians 3:16). You have a Word ministry to yourself, to your LIFE group, to your family and friends, to your neighbors. How you be intentional to get God's Word to echo repeatedly inward (to your heart and mind) and outward (to your community)?
 2. Second, consecrate yourself to obey and serve Christ in this season that you face.

- a) Don't trick yourself into thinking that knowing a lot of the Bible is good enough; know that what God wants from you is to *do it!* In light of what Christ has done on the cross and what he promises to do when he returns, set your resolve to obey- no matter the apparent outcomes or opposition you face. Be sure that your obedience in little or big ways definitely means that God is accomplishing his will through your life!

Transition: Praise God for his Word! As we said, we'll be observing the Lord's Supper today. I will give us a few minutes in light of today's sermon to prepare our hearts.

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