

Unpacking the Preach

Date: 13th June 2021
Sermon Title: The Priorities of God's People
Bible Passage: Ezra 3: 1 - 13

Recapping the Preach

Ezra 1 - 6 tells the story of the initial exiles to return to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon and their task of rebuilding the Temple. Their journey would have taken about 4 months, however the task of preparing to return was a lot longer (70 years in captivity). Jeremiah 29 captures the Lord's instructions to the people while they were in captivity.

- Read Jeremiah 29:4-15. What are the things that the Lord tells the people to do while they are in captivity? How might these things have been instructive for us during lockdown?
- Read Ezra 3: 1 - 13. What stands out to you from this passage?
- How do you think the exiles felt coming back to Jerusalem?
- If you were returning to your home country after 70 years (some of the young people would have been born in captivity and so would not have seen Jerusalem) how would you feel? What would be of first importance for you when you arrived?

Stu pointed out that after settling in the surrounding towns the people gathered in Jerusalem as one man (3:1) and they rebuilt the altar so that they could sacrifice burnt offerings on it. Stu made the point that the restoration of worship was their first priority.

- Why was the building of the altar significant for the exiles?
- Why do you think this was the first task they performed, before rebuilding the Temple?
- Why do you think the exiles were fearful of the peoples around them (3:3)?
- What are some of the symbolic correspondence between the OT sacrificial system and the death of Christ (see Hebrews 7:27, 9:11-14, 13:10)?
- Read Romans 12:1-2 - are there any parallels between the exiles rebuilding the altar and what Paul urges us to do here?

Following the rebuilding of the altar and the restoration of the worship followed obedience to God, seeking to follow His ways, to learn from Him and be apprenticed to the law of Moses. It was the restoration of wholeheartedly following God or we could say the restoration of discipleship.

- Read Leviticus 23:33-44 where the Lord instructs the people to observe the Feast. What are the key elements to the Feast?
- During the Feast of Tabernacles God's people would live in booths as a powerful reminder of the exile. What else might they have learnt / reflected on during this time?
- What (if any) are the similarities between OT Feasts and our NT observance of the Lord's Supper and Baptism?
- Compare Deuteronomy 28:1-14 where Moses describes the blessings for obedience (which the exiles would have been aware of) and Jesus' words about following Him (Luke 9:23-24)? What stands out to you?

Stu pointed out that flowing from the restored worship and restored discipleship came overflowing witness. Although they did not go out telling people about God, their worship, their obedience to Him and their celebration at all God has done among them was a powerful witness (And the sound was heard far away 3:13b).

- Why do you think there is such contrast between the two groups in 3:12?
- Read Isaiah 43:18-19 - do you think these words have any relevance here?

- Stu quoted a commentator who remarked on vs.12: *'the backward look which discounts present activity is always a peril. Regrets over the past which paralyse work in the present are always wrong. Moreover all such regrets, as in this case, are in danger of blinding the eyes to the true value and significance of the present'* Do you agree / disagree?
- The everyday worship, work and obedience to the Lord was a powerful testimony to the people around them, who then came to Jerusalem to frustrate the work (see 4:1-5). In what way is your worship, work and obedience to the Lord a powerful testimony?
- What are the challenges of living for Jesus where He has placed you? How might you overcome these challenges?

Stu close by making the connection that the priorities of God's people in Ezra 3 mirror the priorities outlined in the 4Ps: we are a place to grow in encountering God (worship), living for Jesus (discipleship) and making space to lead people to Jesus (witness).

- Prayer: take time to pray ahead of the church meeting when we will be deciding on adopting the 4Ps.

Response

- Is there anything from the preach and passage that you will be taking away to reflect on or work on?

Prayer pointers

- Take time to share prayer requests and pray for one another.
- Pray that God would help us to live a life of worship, discipleship and witness for Him.
- Pray for one another that we would be bold in our witness.
- Who are you praying for to come to faith - lift their names before the Lord once more.

Additional resources:

If you need some additional resources the below websites are useful:

- <https://www.gotquestions.org>
- <https://enduringword.com>
- <https://www.biblica.com>
- <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/>