

Restoring Part 4

- Last week we studied the first step of God's restoration for the nation of Israel
 - God stirs the heart of the King of Persia to release the Jews from captivity
 - While simultaneously stirring the hearts of nearly 50,000 Jews to answer the call to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple
 - And as this first band of refugees arrived in what was left of Jerusalem
 - They made a crude altar and began to worship God
 - And in last weeks' study, we saw God's wisdom at work
 - In how He took a small, vulnerable band of Jews who were willing to step out in faith and obedience
 - And God brought them back into the land
 - And he showed the heart of worship
 - No frills, no distractions
 - Just the people, with hearts to worship and thank God
 - With a total dependence on God
 - And with the people showing a true heart to worship, God was pleased
 - And we noted that this is the natural beginning for every good work of God
 - He desires our obedient worship before anything else
- So the first step of restoration was the restoration of worship
 - Today we study the second step of restoration for God's people
 - We continue our study in Ezra

[Ezra 7:6](#) This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God *was* upon him.

[Ezra 7:7](#) Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

[Ezra 7:8](#) ¶ He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

[Ezra 7:9](#) For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God *was* upon him.

[Ezra 7:10](#) For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

- The original group of exiles to return to Jerusalem consisted of approximately 50,000 men, women and children
 - That group had been escorted by Zerubbabel and Jeshua along with other men
 - There was no clearly defined leader within the nation
 - No king, no judge, no prophet
 - Just the people who had chosen to follow the hearts back to the city
 - So they could worship God there
 - Then about 63 years goes by
 - During that time, the original ragtag group of Jews manages to finish rebuilding the temple
 - Though it's nothing like the magnificence of Solomon's original temple
 - It still demonstrated the obedience of the Jewish nation to answer God's call and rebuild his house in Jerusalem
 - And at this point, God is ready for step 2
- Before we look deeper into the second step of restoration, we need to pause long enough to note one detail
 - God waited 46 years before taking step two

- That's a long time
- The events of the book of Esther take place during this period of time
- In fact, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the last events of the Old Testament chronologically
- God waited patiently while the refugees set about the work of rebuild the temple
 - And if you know the story, their work didn't go smoothly
 - At one point, the encounter objections from the surrounding people who protested to the new king of Persia
 - That resulted in a delay until the new king verified that the rebuilding was authorized
 - Another time, the nation of Israel because lazy and complacent in building their own homes rather than God's house
 - We studied a little bit about that when I taught here last November
- All in all, it required 20 years to rebuild the temple
 - And then God waited another 43 years before sending He began to work again
 - God is looking for sustained performance
 - He had set this nation back on a course of faithfulness
 - And He began by establishing a new heart to worship
 - But He wanted to ensure it was true and lasting
- It's so important to remember that God doesn't measure our faithfulness to His commands in moments but in lifetimes
 - It wasn't enough that the temple was rebuilt, even though that was the basis for God calling them to their return to the land
 - God waited another 40+ years to know if their hearts were still true to Him in worship

- Were they task-oriented or God-oriented?
- But now God is ready to send Ezra
 - Ezra we're told decides he too must join the rest of the nation that has returned to the land
 - So Ezra receives permission from the new king of Persia, Artaxerxes to accompany the latest band of refugees to return to the land
 - Ezra is a fascinating character in scripture
 - His full name is Azariah, which means Yahwek has helped
 - He was a descendent of Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel
 - He's a scribe
 - A scribe was a person who copied or wrote or communicated documents
 - It was specialized skill in that day, since most men didn't write
 - Scribes were usually important people, in that they held important roles in the king's court
 - They were often secretaries or messengers for the king
- Ezra however established an entirely new role for scribes in the nation of Israel
 - Verse 10 says that Ezra set his heart to study the Law of the Lord
 - More specifically, Ezra has a heart to study God's word
 - To practice it
 - To teach the statues and ordinances to Israel
 - Wow...would that we could be like Ezra
 - Wouldn't' it be a fantastic note for our headstone if it could read
 - Dear old Dad set his heart to know God's word, to live God's word, to teach God's word
 - Our sweet mother set her heart...

- That was Ezra
 - And the way Ezra made God's word a priority in his life made him the perfect man for the job when God was ready for step two of Israel's restoration
 - God wanted a teacher
 - Look at the commission that God gave Ezra through the king of Persia
 - It comes a little later in chapter 7 of Ezra in verse 25

[Ezra 7:25](#) ¶ "You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in *the province* beyond the River, *even* all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant *of them*."

[Ezra 7:26](#) "Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment."

- Like He did earlier with Cyrus, God places a burden on the heart of the new king of Persia, Artezerxers
 - And this king gives Ezra a mission
 - Ezra is to return to Israel
 - But this time the commission is to do tow things
 - First, Ezra is to appoint magistrates and judges to judge the people of Israel
 - But if there are to be judges, then the people must know what is expected of them
 - They need to be taught
 - And so Ezra's second purpose
 - Teach the people who are ignorant of God's laws
 - And the king is so serious about seeing God's law observed, he grants Ezra the authority to impose capital punishment against anyone who refused to obey the laws

- Remember the way brought discipline to the nation of Israel?
 - First he removed leadership, then instruction , then worship
 - And so far, God has restored worship
 - And now He is restoring teaching
 - But with teaching comes accountability
 - Ezra will travel back to Jerusalem bringing God's word
 - But he also comes with authority to hold the nation of Israel accountable should they fail to hold to it
 - As we see God's purposes play out in Jewish history, give a moment to consider how God will bring this same pattern to bear in your own life
 - We've already said that God will discipline His children so that we might be rebuilt in a new way according to His desires
 - And that God's first priority is to seek a heart of worship within His people
 - That God will place us in a position where we can fully appreciate our dependence and reliance on Him
 - Then as our heart seeks Him, we come to appreciate what worship looks like in our lives
 - We understand it's not just a weekly gathering with singing and study
 - It's a daily life of living in praise and service to God
 - Then comes step 2 in our lives
 - At some point after we return to a heart of worship, God is ready to engage our minds
 - In other words, our desire to worship God must be matched with a commitment to know God
 - And not just know Him according to our own desires,
 - But truly to know Him according to how He has revealed Himself

- If you want a simple picture of how God's call to worship is always followed by a command to know and follow His word, consider your own salvation
 - When God called you into faith and gave you the Holy Spirit, I'm willing to bet that brought the expected response in your life
 - You praised His name
 - You called out to the Lord in repentance and thanks
 - You began to understand and appreciate the amazing work of the cross, where God would bear your punishment in your place
 - And your heart responded in worship and thanks
 - And this state may have been the extent of your Christian walk for some time
 - But then God placed new expectations on your heart
 - Having come to faith, you were then challenged to study God's word
 - Perhaps you were taught this or discovered yourself while in the Bible

[Eph. 5:15](#) ¶ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,
[Eph. 5:16](#) making the most of your time, because the days are evil.
[Eph. 5:17](#) So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- The proper and expected course of development for any Christians is a careful disciplined study of God's word
 - Combined with a diligence to obey that word
- And it's no different for the nation of Israel
 - God is bringing Ezra to educate them on His word and then gives him authority to ensure it is followed
- A knowledge of God's truth combined with a commitment to follow it are essential to a godly life that pleases God
 - What if God hadn't sent Ezra to Israel?
 - They might have continued to worship for a while longer

- But it wouldn't have lasted
- In time their hearts would grow cold, their worship would be silenced
- This happens a lot in the church today
 - Too often Christians depend on emotion and feels for their Christian experience
- They seek experiences
 - Dynamic worship
 - Power messages from the pulpit with just enough humor
 - The emotional rush of a compelling testimony
- None of those experiences are wrong or bad in and of themselves
 - The problem comes when that's all we have to show for our faith
 - When the meat of God's word isn't a staple in our spiritual diet, we are subsisting on junk food, and eventually it will catch up with us
- When God send Ezra to teach, the expectation is that that nation of Israel would learn
 - And here's the lesson for us this morning
 - God restores his children patiently, carefully
 - And once the heart is has begun to worship, it's time to work on the mind
 - And so God will send us teachers
 - But the teachers can't learn for us
 - We must decide for ourselves that we will engage upon a life of learning in God's word
 - Because consider what's still remains in God's plan for restoration
 - There is still no leader within the nation
 - Ezra isn't the leader

- He is at best the caretaker
 - Ezra will appoint men to enforce the laws of God, but judges and magistrates are hardly leaders in the true sense of the word
 - The nation is still waiting for the last step of restoration
 - Which suggests that like the first step of worship, God is waiting to see if His people are faithful in their commitment to Him
- Perhaps this is where some of us remain even now
 - Perhaps some of us have gone through the valley with God
 - We've experienced His discipline in our lives
 - Then He called us back and we restarted our walk with Him
 - We returned to church or a small group
 - We turned away from things in our life that pulled us way from God
 - But then God was ready to take the next step in our lives
 - He brings us to a place where we can be taught His word
 - Maybe we received an invitation to a Bible study that we turned down
 - Or perhaps someone gives us a self-study course, but we tossed it aside
 - Maybe we just had a chance to hear the Bible taught at church on the Sunday service, but we never seem to make it
 - We seem stuck at step one
 - Remember how long God waited for the nation of Israel to be ready to move beyond step 1
 - Do you think you can outlast God in your life?
- Brothers and sisters, the Bible says we all face God's discipline as a child of God
 - And therefore we all will experience His restoration in some form and to some degree

- But when we fail to mature forward as God directs, you can be sure that God won't give us a free pass
- And if we don't devote ourselves to the step of maturing in the study of His word, we are going to slip and fall back eventually
- Consider the warning the writer of Hebrews offered his readers when they failed to mature in their study of God's word

[Heb. 5:12](#) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

[Heb. 5:13](#) For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

[Heb. 5:14](#) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- These readers were mature enough in their faith that they should have been prepared to teach other Christians
 - Instead, they were still babes in their own spiritual understanding
 - They needed to be retaught in fact
 - They were partaking only of milk, and so they weren't accustomed to the word of righteousness
 - They hadn't graduated to solid food
- If we fail to take up the challenge to study and know and live God's word, we cannot discern good from evil
 - We are ready for a new fall
 - And sooner or later, that fall will happen
- God is restoring the Israel in a patient and wise way
 - Before God brought Ezra the teacher to the nation of Israel, God called them to worship Him with a pure heart
 - Because what good was knowledge without a heart to follow and obey it

- And before God will bring Nehemiah the leader for his people, God called them to know and follow His word
 - Because what good is a leader if God's people remain ignorant of right and wrong in their spiritual walk
 - No leader can lead a group that won't follow
- But if they will worship God and follow His commandments, then God will do great things with that people
- And so it is with us
 - God waits for us to show a heart to worship Him and not our idols
 - Then God waits patiently for us devote ourselves to a study of His word
 - And if we do these things, God will delight to send us leaders to direct us into great works to His glory
- And in a few decades, God will raise up a man by the name of Nehemiah
 - And as we study next week, Nehemiah will arrive just in time to contend with a people who still show signs of a wandering heart
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