

# The Altar of God

## Free to Build

**Ezra 2:70-3:6; Hebrews 10:11-14**

If you have your bibles, go to Ezra chapter 3. A couple of years ago, I had to go to Knoxville for a Partners in Christ meeting. Knoxville is really close to Gatlinburg and it was the end of summer, so I decided to see if my second oldest son wanted to go with me. I had already done something adventurous with Crider, so it was Finn's turn. I say, "Finn, why don't you come to this meeting I have to go to, and afterwards, we will go camping in the Smoky Mountains?" He was all ready to go! We loaded the car and put the tent in the back, and headed up to Knoxville. We got there, did the meeting, and headed straight to Elkmont Campground in the Smoky Mountains. We set up the tent and spent two nights and three days just exploring the Smoky Mountains. We slept in a tent and hiked the next day. There is something about camping that I absolutely love. I love tent camping. I love getting beside a river, especially Elkmont. You have a river beside you, a tent, cots, a fire, and that's about it. There are no plugins, no electronics, and no amenities. It's not like a house; this is a tent, so it's a little different. Finn and I were making breakfast over the fire, taking our baths in the river, and going to the bathroom just however we can. It's different! You're in a tent, not in your home. There are a little bit less amenities, but there is something about tent camping that I absolutely love. After about night two, maybe night three, as much as I love tent camping, I am always about ready to come home. You can only have so much fun in a tent when you start to miss the normal things in life, like a hot shower, a microwave, a stove, a bed, a bedroom, and space. So I love tent camping but I always love to go home.

When we see God in the Scriptures taking people out of Egypt through the Exodus, we see that He takes them on this camping trip, not for a couple of days, but for forty years. For forty years in the wilderness, God is having a campout with His people. They are putting up these huts, moving

around, moving the tabernacle, and moving their tents around. For forty years, they are wandering in the wilderness with God. I can just imagine after forty years, when they finally got to their land and start building houses, they were sure glad to be home. They probably loved some things about camping with God. I'm sure the kids really enjoyed it, but after forty years, I'm sure they were ready to go home.

Every once in a while, I look at Finley and try to remind him of our camping trip. I will bring up a picture and say hey, do you remember when we tent camped? Do you remember when we hike Mount Leconte? Do you remember these things? He will recall them and we will have a memory together when we didn't have the house, or all this stuff, just me and you in a tent, a creek, and a fire. Remember how awesome that was. We remember that, think about it, and hopefully he celebrates a little bit of his time with his father. What God does with the people of Israel is builds in this rhythm in their life where they would remember that camping trip with God. They would remember the exodus. They would remember the wilderness, and the event is called the Feast of Booths. The Feast of Booth is this time where for seven days Israel is commanded to move out of their house and move back to a tent, a shelter, a place that is not like their house. It is going back to just like they were in the wilderness. For seven days, they were to live outside their home in this little makeshift shack or tent. It was supposed to remind them of when they were delivered by God and He sustained them in the wilderness. They didn't have anything but God. They didn't have hard walls or stoves. What they had is God, and God was enough, and He sustained them all through the wilderness. The Feast of Booths is a reminder of that. In Ezra chapter 3, we see the people come out of exile, come into the land, and they once again celebrate the Feast of Booths.

That's what we're going to talk about this morning, the Feast of Booths. What is really crazy is I don't know if you keep up with the Jewish calendar. My mom loves it. She is always reminding us every time something happens in the Jewish calendar. If you've been tracking, last week we had the Day of Atonement. Today, this Sunday, begins the Feast of Booths for the people of Israel. Right now in Jerusalem, people are

moving out of their houses into tents, into these booths, to celebrate what happened in the exodus. This morning, we're going to talk about the people in Ezra who come out of exile and celebrate this Feast of Booths. We're going to see what in the world does that have to do with us today. If you go to the Scriptures in Ezra chapter 3, I want us to listen to their story, to what's happening in the context here. We're actually going through a series called Ezra and Nehemiah, Free to Build. If you're new with us, you can track on our website or podcast and catch up. We're actually going to read the last verse of chapter 2.

### **Scripture**

***"Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns. When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. 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. They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening. And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid."***

(Prayer)

Father God, I pray that You help us to see what You are doing with this people in Ezra who have just come out of exile. God, I pray that You help

us to see how what You do with them, and what they do in response to You has everything to do with us and what we are doing today. We pray this is Jesus good name, amen.

## **The Exiles Waiting for a Temple**

The first thing I want us to really see is we have a people in waiting. The story is the people have rebelled against God's Word. The prophets told them over and over again and they wouldn't listen, so they got taken into exile. The Babylonians took them over. They've been in exile. They've been in slavery. They haven't been free. All of a sudden, God moves on the heart of the leader, Cyrus, and he now brought the people out of exile. They're coming back into their land and now they are free people. The question is what are these free people going to do now? They're free, but we notice in the end of chapter 2 that they're free, but they are sort of waiting. It's almost like they don't really know what to do. I love what the text says; "Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns." Here you have these people, and it names them. They're Levites, priests, temple servants, temple gatekeepers, and temple singers. All these people have their livelihood wrapped up in the temple, yet there is a problem. There is no temple. Of all these people who are called by God to be about the temple, yet there is no temple. So they are free, they're back in Jerusalem where the temple used to be, the temple that Solomon built for God to dwell in, but now the temple has been destroyed. It's rubble. It is stone turned over stone, so the people are just kind of living in their towns. They're kind of going about life. I think we see they are free people but not yet fully alive. They're not yet doing what God has called them to do. They're not connecting their lives to the temple. They're not connecting their lives to the worship of God. They're living. They're in their towns, doing their things, going to soccer practice, doing their jobs, but there is a sense that they're not really doing what they're called to do yet. There is something missing about their lives. All the people are just in their towns.

But then, something happens. Something happens in chapter 3, and we find there is this gather to worship that takes place. It says, "When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns..." doing their thing, living their life; what happened when the seventh month came? "The people gathered as one man to Jerusalem." The people are living, doing their thing, and all of a sudden, there is almost this call to worship. The Bible just says the seventh month came.

## **The Significance of the Seventh Month**

Now we've got to ask what the big deal is with the seventh month. If you go back to the Old Testament in Leviticus chapter 23, you see the significance of the seventh month. What God did with Israel was give them these rhythms, celebrations, these festivals, and a couple of those were the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was supposed to take place on the tenth day of the seventh month. Guess what month it is. It's the seventh month. The Day of Atonement is supposed to happen on the tenth day, but there's a problem. There's no temple, so you can't really have the Day of Atonement without a temple yet. But all of a sudden, on the fifth day of the seventh month, what is supposed to happen is Israel is supposed to celebrate the Feast of Booths. When is the seventh month? The Jews are on a lunar calendar, so sometimes it falls in October, and sometimes it falls in September. This year it is September, and today is actually the beginning of the Feast of Booths. You've have these people who have come out of exile, they haven't gathered as one man to Jerusalem in a really long time, like seventy years they haven't observed these rhythms, they haven't observed these festivals. There were kids who were born and died who never saw these things happen. There are kids who have maybe heard about these things, but they've never seen these things. They are living in their towns, and what my sanctified imagination tells me is somebody is reading the Scriptures, and they run into this..."Hold on...wait, what time is it? It's the seventh month. Really? It's the seventh month? Do you know what this means? No honey, what does this mean? Let me tell you." All of a sudden, they remember what they are supposed to do on the seventh month as the people of God. They are supposed to go and gather in God's place and celebrate the Day of

Atonement and the Feast of the Booths. They don't have a temple yet, so they are going to gather and celebrate the Feast of the Booths. You almost get somebody discovers it and probably sends word to everybody, "Hey kids, go run through the streets. Tell your brothers and sisters. Tell the tribes that you know. Go tell them the seventh month has come. We need to gather in Jerusalem." The kids are saying, "Why? What is the seventh month?" "Just go get them and we will gather and tell you when you get there." I can imagine the people who are watching, the people who aren't part of Israel. All of a sudden, the seventh month has come and they're still just in their towns living their lives, but they begin to notice this migration toward the city, toward Jerusalem, to the place where the temple once stood. You could almost sense the dust is rolling on the streets and the noises of kids as they are running and playing. There are probably songs that are happening. They are digging out the Psalms and they are singing, praising God, "The seventh month is here. We remember what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to gather at God's place and worship Him." You've got all the people of Israel gathered at one man in Jerusalem. Before, you've got a lot of individuals living their individual lives, but when the seventh month comes, it reminds them they are not just individual people. They are actually part of something bigger. They're part of this one man. They're part of this kingdom. They're part of the people of God, so they all gather to Jerusalem.

It's neat that the same thing sort of happened this morning. You being here is sort of a little picture of that. All week, you've been living in your town and you've been doing your life, but now, this morning you decided to set an alarm clock, wake up, get into your car, and come somewhere. You decided to gather. Why? Because you're part of something bigger than just you, you're part of a kingdom, you're part of a people. You're saying life is not just about me, it's about us together worshipping God, so I'm going to gather. This morning, you got out, opened your garage door, and maybe some of your neighbor's garage doors were still close, their lights were still out, they were in their recliners reading the newspaper, and you are putting on clothes, getting up, and getting out. Why? Because God calls His people to gather and to worship Him.

## **The Gathering in Jerusalem**

So what does the seventh month tell us? It tells us that worship is central to God's people. Worship is central to God's people, not just then, but also now. Worshipping God is central to who we are and it's central to what we do. So they come, gather, and go to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, we are going to see they get to the spot where the temple is. Remember, it's just ransacked. It's broken, not the glorious temple it once was. There are stones and probably graffiti. It's not at all what it used to be. When they get there, we will see three things:

1. The Law
2. An Altar
3. The Priest

### **The Law**

When they get to this place, they decide to do something. It says in verse 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." Here you have a people, the priests come up, and they build an altar according to the Word of God, according to what is written. You have a people that are free, they've been brought out of exile, and now they are free people. So what are free people supposed to do? Right off the bat, they bring themselves under the Word of God. They've been living apart from the Word of God for some time now. That's what got them into exile. They decided we're going to approach God in our own way, we're going to figure out how to live on our own, and we're going to kind of do whatever we want to do. We're not going to worry about what God says; we're going to kind of make it up as we go, whatever feels good. The prophets continue to come to Israel to say, "Repent! Repent of living life however you want to. Come under God's rule and reign. That's what is best." Israel said no. I'm going to do my own thing, and it led them into exile. It led them not into blessings, but into curses. Now the people come out of exile and they remember that living against God's Word is not freedom, it is actually shackles.

It is like the little fish that thinks hey, I want to be free. I want to do my own thing, so I'm going to jump out of water and be free in the air. I'm going to be free on land. The little fish jumps out and lands on the ocean bank. Now it is hot sand, and the sand is not as easy to swim in as the water is. The little fish might flail around a little bit, and just dies. It doesn't have water. It needs water! Fish were made for water. The same is true with us. We were made to live under God's Word. That was the point. We're supposed to live under God's Word, but like the little fish, we jump out and say we're going to do it our own way. We're autonomous, we can make our own decisions, we can determine worship, we can determine how to get to God, and we can determine our lives. So we're going to jump out of water and do it our own way, and it led them into exile. For some of you, maybe you're at that place. You're doing life however you want to, and at first, it felt so good when the air hit your face. All of a sudden, now you're out of water, you're not living under God's good Word, and things are not going good. Things are crumbling all around you. So when the people come to Jerusalem, they get the Word of God, they open it, and they say we are going to do this God's way. God's actually given us His Word, so we're going to come under God's Word as we worship God.

## **An Altar**

What the Law tells us is that we must approach God His way, not our own. We don't decide. We must approach God His way, and then secondly we see there is an altar. What does the altar tell us? We must approach God only through blood. So here, the people gather, and the very first thing they do is not build the temple, the first thing they do is see in the Law what we desperately need is an altar. What we must have is an altar. If we are going to worship God, it's only through an altar and blood. You have the priests begin to rebuild the altar. They put it where it once was. It's been broken, but now they rebuild it, refashion it. Why? So that sacrifices can be had again, so that sacrifices can take place. They begin to give sacrifices on the altar.

That brings us to the question: Why do we need an altar? Why did Israel have to have an altar as the centerpiece of their worship? Remember, here is a people that are coming out of exile. Some of the kids might never have

seen an altar. They've never seen a sacrifice. This hasn't been happening. They've been in exile, but now they're back in Jerusalem, back in the right place, and now they're having a sacrifice. I can just imagine the kids are asking questions. I've got four kids, and whenever we do something that seems a little odd, they start asking questions. So I can imagine you've got dads and moms who are coming and leading a little lamb up to this altar, and you have this guy who is dressed kind of funny. The mom and dad are giving this guy a lamb, and he is taking the lamb, putting it on the altar, and then killing it. I can just imagine little kids, who are watching mom and dad, have all sorts of questions in their minds. "Mom, what's going on?" "Dad, what's going on?" "That was my little pet lamb. I bottle fed that lamb. He stays in my bedroom, and now you just brought the lamb and that guy just killed it!" "What's going on Daddy?" "What's going on Mom?" "I'm not sure that I'm ok with this. I don't know what's happening here." You've got a people that are having to tell another generation of people why we do the things that we do, why God prescribes an altar, and why God prescribes a sacrifice. You have moms and dads who are having to tell their kids, "Son, here's the reason why." "Daughter, here's the reason why; because mommy and daddy are that bad. We deserve that. See, God has given us His Word, and the thing you need to know about God is He is holy, holy, holy. He's not like us. He doesn't have good days and bad days. He always has good days. He is completely righteous. He's completely perfect. He's completely holy. He never tells a lie because He is truth. Because He's truth, and He loves the truth, when we tell a lie, God can't just say that's ok; I'm going to feel nothing towards that. No, God feels wrath and indignation towards lies because they are completely against everything that He is." See, when God sees murder, He has to completely oppose it and have wrath towards it because God is the giver of life. You have these things that are opposing God. They are unholy things, and the people of Israel were walking in those unholy things. So you have moms and dads explaining to kids that this is why an altar is necessary, because God told us if we break His laws, we must surely die. He told Adam that way back in the beginning, and He has also, repeatedly, in the New Testament. "The wages of sin is death." If we sin, we die. That's the wage. That's what we earn. That's what we're supposed to get is death for our

sin. "So, little kids, what you see on this altar, this lamb dying, that's what dad deserves. That's what mom deserves." You've got Israel, who are walking towards this sacrifice, they are seeing this sacrifice being made, and they're remembering the things they did last night. They're remembering the thoughts they had this last week. They're remembering the short words with their wives. They're remembering the way they yelled at their kids when they shouldn't. They remember that false dealing they did that nobody really found out about. They're remembering all of their sin, all of their junk that separates them from a holy God. Now, an unholy people, a people who are not clean, but completely dirty and sinful, are approaching a holy God. So the question is how do an unholy people approach a holy God? The answer is in the altar. They only approach God through blood because this party, man, deserves to die and only deserves wrath, but what God has ordained in His Word is that there can be substitute. That substitute is a sacrifice that though Israel deserves to die, a lamb can die in Israel's place, so that God can judge that lamb who is innocent and blameless. That lamb can take the wrath of God for their sin, so God's wrath and justice can be satisfied. Then the Israelites, the moms and dads, the sons and daughters, can actually go home. They can be free. They can worship God even in their sin and junk because someone has died in their place for their sins. That's what the altar is about. The altar is absolutely central to Israel's worship because a holy God can only be approached by sinful man through blood.

### **The Priest**

We've also got a priest. "I mean Dad, why don't we just do this? Why does this guy have to do it? Why is there a priest with a funny looking hat? What's this about? Why does this have to happen?" So the lamb is going to a priest and he is prescribing how it should be done, and taking care of it because what God has ordained is that a priest must stand between God and Israel. Israel can't come to God on their own; they must come to God through a mediator, and mediator is the priesthood. Israel can only come to God through a sacrifice and they can only come to God through a mediator, and that is the priest. So all these people haven't done this in a while, but they're coming to worship God, and they're worshipping God

through blood and through a mediator that is a priest. What does all this ultimately point to? We have an altar; we have a priest, the mediators, and the blood. What does all this ultimately point us to? It points us to a better altar, and it points us to a better priest. Ultimately, His name is Jesus Christ.

So we feel uncomfortable talking about altars and talking about sacrifices, yet the whole time I've been preaching, the background has been a big cross. It looks pretty, but that's not how it looked in Jesus's day. It was bloody. We have a cross in our Christian worship; right at the center, there is a cross. There's been a substitute made for our sins. That's what all the Old Testament sacrifices were pointing to. Unholy people can't approach a holy God, except through a sacrifice. A death has to occur, and all these lambs and all these bulls died for Israel, but they could never get rid of their sin. It had to be continually done over and over again, but it was all pointing forward to the Lamb of God who would come, the Passover Lamb who wouldn't just sort of cover our sin, but would completely take care of it and cleanse it and erase it, so that we as unholy people can be made holy before a holy God. Here is what Hebrews would say about this perfect altar and perfect priest. Hebrews chapter 10 says, "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." That's what that altar is pointing to. That's what the priests are pointing to. See, the trouble is that Israel would gather and do this, and they would come and do it again, and again. The priests that are doing it are also making sacrifices. They also have thoughts that are impure. They also messed up, even on the road to the temple. But here we have Jesus who is our perfect High Priest. He is the priest who doesn't need a sacrifice for Himself. He is completely blameless. He is perfect. When it comes to the law of God, He always obeyed it. He completely obeyed it and fulfilled it. The one who fulfilled the law is the priest, the mediator between us and God, so Jesus stands in between you and God as the only mediator now. He is your priest that you come to Him to get to God. What does He do?

He makes a sacrifice for you. But a sacrifice is not a lamb, it's not a bull, the sacrifice is His own body. The priest becomes the sacrifice. The priest who is perfect and holy and blameless, who is also the King becomes the sacrifice to die in our place for our sins so that we who are unholy can approach a holy God through His cross. See, the altar, it's the first thing they built. It's the only way to get to God. It was the very center of their worship, and for us, the very centerpiece of our worship is a cross. It's only the cross of Jesus Christ that we can be made right with God. That's what God says. That's what God has ordained. They're following under His law because we can create of all sorts of different ways to get to God. We, in our flesh, can create--I'm just going to be good, I'm going to go to church, I'm going to try to do this and create this, and we can become very religious. We can do a whole lot of things, but what the people did was brought themselves under God's Word and they said what God says is we need blood. For you, you can have all sorts of different ways that you think you need to get to God, or you can come under God's Word and approach God through the way He says to approach Him. It is through your High Priest, who is your mediator, His name is Jesus, He died for you, He rose again for you, and He says He is the only way back to the Father.

### **Fear Forward**

So we have Israel, they are gathering and they want to worship, but they can only worship God through an altar, and it points to the cross. It points to our great mediator who is Jesus Christ. The only way that we can worship our God is through the person of Jesus Christ. As they're doing this, there are all these fears that creep up in their minds. I noticed reading through this that the people actually fear forward. I want to explain exactly what that means. In verse 3, it says, "They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening." It's amazing to have fear. They're afraid of the people around them. They're looking around as they're building this altar, as they're making these sacrifices. They're afraid of the people of the land. It takes you back to Israel's history. Do you remember when Israel was supposed to go into the Promised Land? They sent out spies, and when they went into the land in

numbers, they saw the people of the land and were afraid. They said they're like giants, and we're going to go back. So the people of Israel in their history have been afraid of the people and they were fearful and went backwards. Here, the same thing is happening. They're gathering; they're looking around saying these Babylonians are a lot tougher and stronger, and they could probably come and take us. We're a little bit afraid, but instead of backing down, they actually fear forward. In their fear, they move forward. That's what courage is. Whenever we get a moment of fear...and in our culture, we can have those moments when building the kingdom of God, when building His church. There can be opposition. There are going to be fearful times that we run into. So what do you do when you're afraid? What do you do when you look around and it looks like everybody is bigger and everybody is coming after you? There are two options. You can either fear the people more, or you can fear God more. In Israel's history, they feared the people more and it led them not to see the Promised Land. In this moment, they see the people, and they have fear of them, but they fear God more. Do you know what we're going to do even though we're afraid of the people around us? We're more fearful of God, so we are going to listen to Him, we are going to obey Him, and in fear, they trust God and it actually propels them forward.

For you and your Christian walk, there are going to be moments of fear. Fear is either going to lead you backwards because you fear everyone around you, or fear is going to lead you forward because in fear you trust God, and then you walk with Him because you believe Him and you trust Him. Here were a people who feared forward, and that should be an example and encouragement to us. Then we see this moment of where they remember and they celebrate, this moment of the Feast of Booths. They've build the altar, they have come to God through blood, and then they're remembering one of the things He told them to do was to celebrate the Feast of Booths, so let's do that. It says in verse 4, "And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written..." the place where it is written is Leviticus chapter 23. So the people come into God's place, they've got the altar, and they begin to celebrate the Feast of Booths. Remember, we talked about what that is, they move out of their house and move into tents or booths to remember what happened in the exodus, to remember what happened

in the wilderness. Leviticus 23 says, "You shall dwell in booths for seven days knowing that I brought you out of Egypt and I am your God." So for seven days, move out of your house, move into tents, to remember I rescued you, I brought you out, I am your God, and I delivered you. The point was for them to remember the goodness of God...that God provided for you in the wilderness, and now, He provided for you in the exile. You just went through an exile, and you are all still here. Now, in this time, in this moment, God is still going to provide for you. So remember, you are a rescued people, you have a redeemer, and what you need to do is ultimately trust in Him. So it is reminding them of these things.

### **Celebrating Harvest**

It wasn't just a reminder celebration; it was also to celebrate God's provision right now. It was actually the time of harvest when they were supposed to do this. In Leviticus 23:39, it says to gather the produce of the land during this feast. It's harvest time. I don't know if you've been paying attention, but if you've been driving out in the county, out on the four lanes, you've been seeing a lot of eighteen-wheelers pulling big trailers full of corn and beans. You've been seeing, all throughout the county, combines, tractors, and implements because it's harvest time right now. We have a couple of weeks here of harvest where everybody is mad dash. If you look up in the cabs of the combines and trucks, you see farmers with big smiles on their faces. They're just pumped. They're excited because the whole year has been about this moment. There has been planting, worry, and praying for rain; all these different things are happening, and now you finally get to harvest. There's celebration, there is excitement; it's harvest time. That's what's going on in Israel. The seventh month was a month where they just picked the harvest. They've just got all the bounty that God has given them, so they're celebrating. They're excited. They're bringing all the things that they've grown because God has given them rain and the ability to farm. They are going to have food that's going to sustain them for the next year, so there's a celebration of the harvest. I was thinking about it; these people are celebrating the Feast of Booths, they're remembering the exodus, and they're also being thankful for the harvest, but here are a people that just came out of exile. They

haven't planted yet. They have had a harvest yet. So they're coming to God thanking Him for a harvest that hasn't happened yet. They haven't had a harvest. They've been slaves. They've been unfree people, but now they've finally been freed, and they're coming to a harvest festival with no harvest! Imagine all the farmers in the community get together for a festival and there hasn't been a combine run because we forgot to plant the crop! It's a little awkward...what are you celebrating? What are you bringing before the Lord and rejoicing for? I think it shows us that here we've got a people that have come out of exile and they're realizing though we didn't plant, even though we didn't pick, God still provided every step of the way. It's exactly what happened in the exodus. We didn't plant, we didn't harvest; instead, manna came from Heaven and water came from rocks. God sustained us every step of the way, so this Feast of Booths, as they're coming with empty hands, they are saying thank you God for all You have given us because the truth is You are enough. You have satisfied in the wilderness, You have satisfied us in the exile, and You are the God who's going to satisfy us even today. They have a faithful God, a God who is faithful no matter where they are. That's the same God that you serve. If you are His, if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're in the wilderness, if you're in the exile, if you're right smack dab in God's will, God is behind the scenes providing and sustaining you because even when we can be unfaithful, God is still faithful to us. We can look at those times when we've wandered a little bit, and just say, "God, You were still faithful to me!" What does that do? It doesn't cause us to run away from Him; it causes us to run to Him. Like the prodigal son who realized that even when he got to his lowest point, the father was still there, and he runs back to his father.

### **Already/Not Yet**

For you, I don't know where you're at, maybe you are away from the Lord, or maybe you're running from the Lord; just take a moment and realize you're still here. He's still been providing for you. That's what the booths told Israel. So why not come home. In Israel, they are in this tension because they have an altar but no temple. They're kind of in this already/not yet predicament. It says in verse 6, it says, "From the first day

of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid." There is this tension. They've got a sacrifice. They've got an altar. They can approach God through blood again. There is this already sense where they're in a right relationship with God, but there's also a not quite yet sense where God is not fully dwelled with them through the temple because it hasn't been built. We also live in the same tension. We are an already/not yet people. We already live in the Kingdom of Christ. We already live under His rule and blessing through the cross. We have been made right with God, but there's also this not quite yet moment where the kingdom has not come in its fullness. Heaven has not married the earth yet. The presence of God has not covered the earth like the waters cover the sea quite yet. It's coming. So what we do, just like Israel, they are worshipping, but they are also waiting. They're worshipping through an altar, but they're waiting for a temple. We worship through a cross, but we are also waiting for our King to come back where we see Him face to face. We're worshipping God. We're right with God, but there's a sense where it's not quite already happened because God is going to come and dwell with His people, so we worship and we wait. That's what the booths are about. They're worshipping but they're waiting. They're celebrating the past but they're also looking forward to the future.

### **Are You Thirsty?**

In the New Testament, Jesus, during the Feast of Booths, is with the people. They're all out of their houses in these booths, and in John 7:37, Jesus says, "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'if anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Here is Jesus at this feast. Everybody is in a booth and they are remembering when they were hungry in the wilderness, God fed them manna. When they were thirsty, God brought water when they did not secure it for themselves. Jesus is saying the God who sustains you and met your needs in the wilderness, and in the exile, and right now...guess what...are you still thirsty? Is there still something missing? Have you still not quite got satisfied? I want you to know that here I am. I am actually

the only way to fully be satisfied in God. Are you thirsty? Come to Me. I'm the bread of God. I am living water. If you come to Me, you will be satisfied. This moment of in our houses, we can feel like we're satisfied. I've got everything. I've got plugins, I've got indoor plumbing, I've got a hot shower, I've got meals, and I've got everything I need. If you move into a tent, you suddenly evaluate your needs and your wants. I've just got a tent. So as these people have moved out of their houses, as they've moved out of their luxuries into these little tents, Jesus is saying hey, are you thirsty? Your house is not going to satisfy you. Moving back in is not going to completely do it for you. What you ultimately need is to come to Me. Are you thirsty? What you need is an altar. What you need is a priest. What you need is a cross. What you need is Me is what Jesus is saying to the first century people. I think He is also saying the same think to us. Hey Hardin, are you thirsty? Do you still have longings? Do you still have desires? Have you still not quite found that rest? It is only found in Christ. It can't be found in coming to church and trying to do good, and reading your Bible a lot. No, it's only found in Jesus, coming to Him. Jesus cries out during this week of the Feast of Booths, and says is anybody thirsty. If you are, come to Me and drink. What do those booths ultimately tell us? They tell us to remember back. Remember God's faithfulness. But they also tell us to remember forward. Remember that God is faithful now, and He is going to be faithful always. God is telling us to remember.

Sometimes when I tuck Finley into bed, I will put the covers over him, and about once a week, I lean over to his ear and say, "Hey Finley, when are we going to sleep in the tent again?" Fin, always with a little grin, looks back at me; he kind of pauses for a moment, and says, "How about tomorrow?" I say, "Great Fin, let's go! Tomorrow sounds good!" What I'm doing is I want Fin to look back. *Hey, just remember as you're going to sleep in your bed, in your house, in your room, and all these things; do you remember the tent? Do you remember when it was just me, you, a river, and a fire? We didn't have all this other stuff. It was just me and you. Do you remember that? Do you remember that sweet moment we had? Think back to that.* But I'm also calling him to remember forward. *Hey, we're going to do that again.* That's what God calls Israel to do in this Feast of Booths. He's saying, *do you remember back, but also remember forward.*

*He's whispering in Israel's ear; hey, remember the tent. Hey, remember the booths. In that booth and in that tent, you had everything you could ever need because you have Me. He is ultimately whispering to us, hey, you remember the cross. Because in the cross, you have the altar, you have the priest, and you have everything you need in the cross of Christ. Jesus is where true satisfaction is found. He's telling us that in the cross, you have all you need. He's also whispering in our ear, and we're going to do it again. I'll see you soon. I'm coming back.*