

Worship While You Build

Free to Build

Ezra 3:6-13

Open your bibles to Ezra chapter 3. We're going to start on the last part of verse 6 and read through verse 13. Could I just remind us as a church that this is an Old Testament book? When Hardin Baptist Church examines an Old Testament book, we do not read that book and interpret the New Testament in light of that book. Hardin Baptist Church believes the full revelation of God was revealed to us in His Son, Jesus Christ, and through Jesus, we have the full revelation of God. So when we read an Old Testament book, we read it in light of what the New Testament ultimately teaches.

In Ezra, they're building the house of the Lord. The Bible actually teaches that the very reason God raised up Cyrus to defeat Nebuchadnezzar was because Nebuchadnezzar had taken his people into captivity to punish them for their sins. But yet God wanted to punish the Babylonians, so He raised up the Persians. Now, as Cyrus reigns over the world empire, God has moved on his heart and put in his heart to build God a house. In order for him to build God's house, God knows he will have to set His people free. Cyrus actually sets God's people free, believing they would go home and want to do what God had put in his heart to do, and that is build God the house.

In chapter 2, we saw, many of them, not all of them, actually make that journey. When they got back to the Promised Land, some of the people who went into captivity went in as young men, women, and youth. They hadn't been home in years, now they're coming back home. There are some young people in this group now that have never seen the Promised Land, but they've heard what granny and granddad said about it, so when they enter into the borders of the land, it's as if they've already been there.

Just so we understand the intent of why Ezra is writing, at the end of chapter 2, the first place they go is to the site of the temple and it's lying in ruins. The foundation was even destroyed. The Bible ends chapter 2 by saying that each one goes to their own town, their own city. If you remember, chapter 3 opens with it being the seventh month. In the seventh month, because they were afraid of the people they built an altar. They knew if they were going to survive in the Promised Land, as small a people as they were, as weak a people as they were, they were going to have to be right with God, so they restored the altar and began to make sacrifices to God. Then Kory shared with us that ultimate altar. It wasn't a stone, but a tree on which God hung His Son so that we could be right with Him, because we can only approach a holy God on the basis of the blood of the Lamb of God. They keep the feast, and since the first day of the seventh month, the Bible says they offered a burnt offering every day. Now let's pick up our story in the last half of verse 6.

Scripture

"...But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia. Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their kinsmen, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to supervise the work of the house of the Lord. And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers, and Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Henadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers.

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,

"For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel."

And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away."

(Prayer)

Father, it's humbly yet confidently that we approach You this morning, knowing that You did open the way for us to approach You, a holy, holy, holy God, who is our Father, because You put Your Son on that tree, and He laid His life down as the perfect sacrifice, once for all, for us so that we now know that curtain, that veil has been ripped apart, and we can come right into Your presence. So we do that now. Father, we want to admit to You that we need You to do what only You can do, and that's literally anoint us as a speaker and a congregation. Father, I know this congregation, I know these people. There is not one of them that have come this morning to hear what Bro Ricky has to say. They don't want my opinion; they want to hear from You. So Father, I pray that You will guide me and guard me now. You know I can make mistakes and You know I do, but I do not want to err when it comes to proclaiming Your Word. So I pray that You let us see this passage, just the depths of it. It's an historical narrative, but it's just loaded with meat. It's loaded with food for our spirit and for our soul, so let us take our knife and fork and our plate out now,

and let us feast on Your Word. Father, when we feast don't let us go home and take a nap; let us have time to digest and time to let this meal be spiritual strength for our soul/spirit. We want to apply what we hear this morning, so Father, anoint me to preach, anoint our congregation to listen, and don't let any of us be hearers or speakers only, but let us be doers of Your Word. It's in Your precious Son's name we pray, amen.

We don't know exactly how much time has passed, but since the first day of the seventh month, the children of Israel, after building that altar, have offered burnt offerings to God daily. It's just my personal belief as I wrestle with this text that possibly several months of time has passed. All of a sudden, Ezra says this in the narrative, "...but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid." Here is the context. When you read Zachariah and Haggai, you get the full story of what was going on in this story that Ezra doesn't tell completely. The children of Israel have been set free for one purpose. There was no doubt in anyone's mind when they left Babylonian captivity, set free by Cyrus, that they were going home to rebuild God's house. They knew why they were free. Can you just see them as they make that nine hundred mile journey, probably three to four months in time, and they are now in the Promised Land? Before they ever start building the temple, they start building their own house. They start going to the altar to make sure they're right with God, but before you know it, instead of building God's house, they're only building their house. They're not doing what God's called them to do. it would be one thing if you didn't know why God set you free, but it's clear in the text they're set free so they can rebuild God's house. I wonder how many of us at this very moment in our life have a clear vision, a clear purpose, of why God set us free. It's one thing if we're not doing what God has called us to do because we don't know what He's called us to do, but it's another thing if we know why He set us free. Many of us were raised to believe the reason God saved us is so we wouldn't go to hell. Because He so loved us, He didn't want any of us to go to hell, and while waiting to die so we can go to Heaven, because that's why God saved us, we don't have a clue about knowing what we're supposed to do now. I want you to believe what I

believe. I do not believe it was Ezra that sat down and decided to write an historical narrative to his people to remind them of why God set them free. I believe the Holy Spirit of God moved on Ezra's heart and he wrote this narrative. When the Holy Spirit of God authored this narrative, he wasn't writing this narrative just so Israel would know what to do when they got home, but he penned this narrative because he knew there would be a Hardin Baptist Church, and he knew there would be a need for us to be confronted with the truth and that's why God has set us free. We are free to build God's house. But many people, just like Ezra, get so caught up in building our house that we forget to build God's house.

Now here, in the midst of the children of Israel coming to the altar because they personally want to be right with God as a person and as a nation, and they're afraid of their enemy so they need God's protection, but after coming day after day after day, watching this animal be offered to God and it be completely consumed in God's presence, all of a sudden, they get it. They're not doing what they're supposed to be doing. How do they know they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing? It is because the foundation of the temple hasn't been laid yet. Ezra doesn't go into great detail because this is just common knowledge. When you start to build a building, where do you start? You start with the foundation. Is this fair? You can't say you've started building until you've started laying the foundation. You may want to build, but you can't say you are building until the foundation starts being laid. So get this picture. All of a sudden in the story, they get it. They get it. Let me tell you what I think caused them to get it; they're going to the altar, and daily, sacrifices are being made. One day it dawns on them as a people that through the sacrifice of another, we have been made right with God, and we are right with God and have been set free. We are here because God has a plan and purpose for our life, which is to rebuild His house, and verse 7 says, "...so they gave money." Did you catch that? "But the foundation of the house of the Lord was not yet laid, so they gave money." Why are they giving money? They are giving money so the foundation of the temple can be laid. They give money to the masons, money to the carpenters, and then they bring food, drink, oil, and they send this to some foreign governments so they can bring in the best building materials known to that part of the world. That

was the cedar of Lebanon, which they had shipped, floated down the river into the sea, unloaded at Joppa so it could be brought to Jerusalem, so they could begin to do what God called them to do. That was rebuild God's house.

Here's my point...I pray it is Ezra's point. When you and it read chapter 3:6-7, we need to know that God uses our resources to build His house. When He set you free from sin, you didn't just get Him; He got you, all of you. He set you free from sin so that you could begin to build His house. In order for His house to be built, He wants to use what you have. He doesn't want you to give it out of obligation. He doesn't want you to give because you think you have to; He wants you to give it because your eyes have been opened and you want to. What would cause you to want to give your resources to be used by God to build His house? I think you need to come to the altar. I promise you that if you come to the altar, (the cross) on a daily basis, and it begins to dawn on you what God gave to set you free, it will humble you that for me and you to be brought into a right relationship with God, God didn't lay down the life of a goat; no, all of those goats in the Old Testament sacrificial system just pointed forward to today when God would send the perfect Lamb of God. He would trade places with you and I. He would take all of our sin and suffer eternal punishment for us on a cross. He would bring His blood into the very presence of God and offer it so that you and I could be made right with Him. When that dawns on us, you won't just write checks, you won't just wait until the offering plate is passed and do this. No, it will dawn on you that He did that to bring me into a right relationship with Him so that He could use me and all I have, and all I am, to build His house. Do you get it?

Now it's the second month of the second year, verses 9-10. It's a new paragraph. Now, if I'm correct, the Israelites did not have a solar calendar; they had a lunar calendar. Their lunar calendar had thirteen months, so if it's the seventh month, (our last date) and now we go to the second year, second month, then eight months have passed. Eight months have passed! For eight months, they have been coming to the altar, and then the Bible says, Zerubbabel and Jeshua (notice it tells who their daddy is, except it says "the son of") made a beginning. Zerubbabel, he's the

governor. He's the governmental leader of the nation. Jeshua is the priest. He's the religious leader of the nation, so to speak. They come together. Did you ever imagine what would happen in a nation if the government and the spiritual were in agreement? Somebody say wow! They made a beginning, and I think you get that the beginning is they are getting ready to start building God's house. Can I just say this? You will never experience a true start until you start building God's house. I can't tell you how many people, looking back, can go back and pinpoint when their life changed as a Christian. It was when Christianity quit being about them, and started being about what it was supposed to be about, and that's God's house. They began a beginning.

Then the Bible names the sons, and it specifically says the Levites, twenty years and up in age, supervised the work of the building of the house of the Lord. Verse 9 says that certain men and their sons started supervising the workmen of the house of the Lord. I want to slow down just a minute because I want us to get this. This paragraph is teaching us this principle. The first principle was God uses our resources to build His house, but the second is God wants His priests to supervise the work and the workers who build His house. Can I make a comment here? God not only wants the work of His house done right; He wants those who are doing the work to do right. God is not just concerned with the building, and everything being square, level, and smooth; God is concerned about the builders who are building the house.

Now the application is this. In the Old Testament era when God ordained Israel to be His people, there were twelve sons of Jacob who become the twelve tribes of Israel. Out of one of those tribes, God chose the Levites to be the priest tribe. When they went into the Promised Land, the priests didn't get an inheritance of land. They just got cities because their whole responsibility as a tribe was to minister to the tabernacle, the temple, and the worship of God. According to the New Testament, we live in a different era. As God is building His New Testament temple, the church, God has not ordained some of the family to supervise the work and the workmen; God has ordained all of us to be priests. It took some of us a long time to recognize you are a saint. I hope you recognize you're not only a saint;

you're a priest of God, if your daddy is God. This paragraph is about identity. Who are you the son of? Who are you the daughter of? Wow! Pinch me! Yeah, I'm a priest of God! Peter wrote a letter and he said if we are a living stone who comes to the Living Stone, which was rejected by men but chosen by God, we are a spiritual house, a holy priesthood that offers spiritual sacrifices to God! When you get to verse 10, he not only says we're a holy priesthood, he says we are a royal priesthood. The reason we're a royal priesthood is not only do we offer spiritual sacrifices to God as a holy priest, but as a royal priest, we proclaim the excellency of Him who called us out of darkness into the light of His Kingdom! Wow! We are priests of God, and we are holy, and we are royal. Do you know what we do? We not only make sure that the work is done right; we make sure we're right while we do the work. I don't just make sure I'm right; I make sure that part of the family that I'm accountable for is right too. Tell me you understand that. I don't know about you, but it makes me sick at my stomach when I read in the USA Today about the abuse in the priesthood among a certain denomination, not just in our nation, but around the world. I think, oh my God, how could someone do that as a priest of God who represents God? Do you know what I know? Somebody this past week looked at you as a man or a woman of the cloth and couldn't figure out how you could do what you did and claim to be a child of God. I want to ask you...how could you do it knowing you're a priest of God? How can we go to a ballgame and act the way we act? How can we say what we say in a breakroom? How can we engage in what we engage in on the internet and be so meticulous in making sure that the church is build right, but think it's ok for it not to be right with me in my life? God is not just concerned about the work; He's concerned about the workers. You and I have to recognize this. There is a principle that teaches if you are going to be part of God's family, there is an accountability you have to the family. From time to time, there will be one of your fellow believer priests who will step into your life and say, cut it out! Quit it! How can you think that's ok? It's wrong, and it's not about what we think; it's about what they think. As believer-priests, we're not representing each other to the world; we represent God to the world.

Do you know what the workmen started doing? They started laying the foundation, last paragraph. When they laid the foundation, (and I'm assuming this is the masons and the carpenters and they were now starting to build the house of God as a nation) the Bible says while they were laying the foundation, now if you read in the English, it sounds like they had finished laying the foundation, but if you read verse 12, the action is still going on, and all of a sudden, the priests show up with their vestments. I'm from Dexter, and we have never used the word, vestment in my fifty-seven years at Dexter. I thought I knew what it was, but I looked it up to make sure, and I was right. That's a fancy word for the clothing and wardrobe of the priest. So get this picture. All of a sudden, the priest show up and you could look at what they had on and know who they were. If you go back and read Exodus 28 and 29, you'll know that when they went into the land, God said take Aaron out of the house of Levi and set him aside, and his sons. Put the ephod on him, the breastplate, and the robe, the coat with the checkered work, the turban, and the sash on him. I just want to say that when he showed up decked out you knew who Aaron was. Then his sons had priestly garments that signified who they were. So the priests show up decked out in their priestly wardrobe. Is this cool, or is this cool?

You don't know this about me, but for years, I wanted to preach in a robe. I really did! When I used to wear a suit, I wanted to put a robe over my suit because I thought that would look so dignified. I knew other churches where their preachers preached in robes, and it kind of set them apart. I thought that would be so cool! You say why didn't you? My wife would never let me! So praise her! 😊 Some of you that know me know this; I'm struggling in this modern culture as we get more casual. I still have to put the coat on over the shirt and jeans. I don't know if I get it because if you were a priest you were supposed to look different, dress different, stick out, and be set apart. Are you priests listening to me? In the New Testament, we have vestments. Colossians chapter 3 says when we got saved the old passed away, we put on the new, we recognize we were chosen by God, holy, and loved, therefore put on a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another when necessary, and above all put on love because

love just kind of holds the whole outfit together! If you read Exodus 28 and 29, the priests had to wear undergarments from their waist to their thighs so that when they went into the temple their nakedness was not exposed. Can I say this to my people and you hear my heart? Some of you are exposing way too much flesh. How dare you think you can say and do what you do and that be ok because it's just who you are. No, that's your flesh. Cover it up!

I tell this story because it happened yesterday. It's about me, but it's not bragging about me. I had a wedding yesterday. My family was on the farm, and something happened on the farm and they called to tell me what it was. I was going to the farm to deal with it and two of my grand boys were there. Celisa told me later that Crider looked at her and said, "Memish, when Papaw gets here, he's going to be mad!" It was bad what happened. I didn't know this until after, but Memish said to Crider, "Have you ever seen your papaw mad?" He said, "No. But he's going to be mad about this!" So I drive up to the farm and see what it was. Celisa told me last night, "You don't know the impression you made on your boys because that didn't make you mad." Can I just say this? The world expects certain things to happen to us and us to expose our flesh. That's not who we are. Let's just get down to it. Building God's church is not about you just teaching a Sunday school class, putting money in a plate, praying, or coming to worship service, doing an inductive Bible study, or you ministering to someone. Building God's house isn't done here; it's done out there. If somebody is going to show their flesh, I had rather they show it in here than to show it out there because we'll get over it in here. But there are some people out there that will never get over it. You're making an eternal difference in somebody's life.

I know I should be done, but I'm not. You'll hear the foyer crowd, but that's ok. You can stand it at Disney, so you can stand it in here. They came forward with their vestments, and they had their trumpets and cymbals to praise the Lord! The Bible says they sang responsively. That's another big word! It means the people on this side started saying, "For the Lord our God is good. His love endures forever toward Israel." When the other side heard what this side was saying, they said, "For our God is good

for His love endures forever toward Israel." When this side heard that side, this side said, they kept outdoing each other over again. It was an antiphonal response back and forth of them singing the praises of God. All of a sudden, they're not singing anymore they are shouting. Not Baptists, amen...please tell me you got convicted! We're seeing people's lives being changed, and we can't get above a whisper. We can't get the frown off of our face! Why can't we gather together as God's people and so see what God is doing around us that we can't help but break out in praise to know that His love endures toward His church forever, and He is good?

The next thing you know, the decimal level rises. In Louisiana, one hundred thousand people can gather together in Death Valley in a football stadium and it register as an earthquake, and the church gets together and nobody even knows. That's unreal! That's wrong! That's a travesty! Then, when Ezra gets down to the nitty gritty, he said this shouting was so loud that it was heard far away. He lets us in on a secret. He said there were some who were old. Ok, are you ready for this? Here's old...fifty-five and older is old. Let me see the old people here. I'm proud to be old ok, but I'm old. I'm fifty-seven. Get this picture. I've dreaded this my whole life. I've seen the narrative. I saw the movie. I saw the second movie: Grumpy Old Men. Let me tell you how you know when you're old. You're old when you wake up one morning and you really think that the best was in your past. Did you catch that? All of a sudden, the old men, some were Levites, some were priests, saw this foundation being laid and they started weeping uncontrollably to where it sounded like they were shouting. In the midst of their shouting, there were some young people, but the young people were shouting for joy. So don't see this as the old men being emotional because the temple had been destroyed and now was being rebuild. That's not what they did. If you read Haggai and Zachariah, the old men saw this foundation being laid and thought back to Solomon's temple that they saw destroyed, and they realized this temple was not as grand as that temple was. They saw the past as greater than the present. There are some old people that long for the glory of the church twenty years ago, and thirty years ago, and ten years ago. I've been here thirty-five years at Hardin. I saw what started in downtown Hardin and have to build and build to have three services. We finally moved to the four lane and started to have to

have three services. Now I'm living in a generation that all of a sudden realizes that what I value, our church doesn't value anymore, and that's gathering together as the body of Christ. We think nothing about Sunday being for everything else, and only if we don't have anything else do we come to church. I've got to be honest with you, I can't tell you how many times I get humbled as a fifty-seven year old pastor when we have an assembly and in my mind I go, *oh man...it wouldn't have been that way ten years ago*. I'm talking about right after I finish preaching and standing in the foyer, and somebody young comes to me and says, "Bro Ricky, I've never been here before. This was absolutely amazing! This was absolutely awesome! I've never felt the Spirit of the Lord like I felt in this congregation!" I am thinking, *God, don't let me be old! Don't let me believe that the past glory of the church is the greatest!* What do you believe? What you believe about us building God's house will determine what kind of house we build.

We had a beautiful song planned to worship with and an invitation, but we've just got to stop. But the Holy Spirit won't stop, and I pray He is convicting you. I pray you understand that what God ordains us to do is while we build is to worship. As we build, He wants to use our resources. He wants to use us to supervise the work and be concerned about people's lives. He wants us to put on patience, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, forbearance, love, and bring out the trumpets and the cymbals, the drums, the guitars, and let's worship our God so that they hear about Hardin's worship of God far, far away, as we build His house.