

## Hurst Green

19<sup>th</sup> May 19

Ezra 3:1-6

### The price of rebuilding

Last week we looked at the list of names in Chapter 2 and we saw that God is faithful; so that we might live faithfully and committed to worship, serving and giving. Big powerful life changing statements!

And now we come to another chapter showing the dedication of these 49,897 people.

We are still in the first year of the reign of Cyrus and these people have received a decree and decided to do the life changing move to go and rebuild the temple. They have gathered up their belongings and all that was given to them through God's provision and walked 1000 miles to Jerusalem.

When was the last time you walked 1,000 miles? It is estimated this took four months and was through hostile territory with a lot of silver and gold. Risky but God was protecting them.

They have arrived home, although it is a home very few of them had ever known. They gave an astonishing amount of wealth to rebuild the Temple and then

**Ezra 2:70 (ANIV)**

<sup>70</sup> *The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns.*

They settled in their own towns. The towns they had been allocated when they arrived in the Promised Land and they knew where their homes were because they knew their ancestry.

And now it is the seventh month of the year – they had only had a few weeks to settle in to their new way of life and now they assemble as one man in Jerusalem – all 49,897 of them.

But these people knew the correct priorities for life – God seeks worshippers and man was made to worship God and **worship was their number one priority** and so they gathered as one man.

Now the seventh month of the Jewish calendar is a busy month. With the first trumpets, Yom Kippur (atonement), the tabernacles which crops up in the New Testament and a solemn assembly while at the same time the olive and grape harvests finish the years harvesting.

But now they assemble as one man in Jerusalem to worship. But they need somewhere to worship and so in verse 2 they build an altar. Now we could gloss over this. This was no altar like a small table. If it is the same as Solomon's temple this is 30' square and 15' high with a ramp so the priest could get to the top and do the business.

If you don't work in real money then that is 9m square and 4.5m high.

Even if it is only the same size as the tabernacle in the desert it is 7' 6" square and 4' 6" high.

Made with unhewn stone just to make it harder.

But worship is their priority and so they undertake this amazing amount of work despite the fear of the people around them – the same people that will have Nehemiah and his crew working with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other.

So worship is a priority; they have not sorted out their own homes but they know they need this altar in order to **worship correctly**.

Did you notice this in the reading?

- Verse 2 “what is written in the Law of Moses”
- Verse 4 “ in accordance with what is written”
- Verse 4 “prescribed for each day”
- Verse 5 “appointed sacred feasts”

They wanted to do things right. Worship was important to them and they put effort into making sure it was done correctly.

Now we have the freedom we have been given and do not need to follow all the rules and regulations for which I am very thankful – it would get very messy in here with all that blood and fire!

But we are given some warnings

- 1 Cor 1 – Divisions in the Church
- 1 Cor 8 – food sacrificed to idols
- 1 Cor 10 – The believers freedom
- 1 Cor 14 – Orderly worship
- Many warnings against false teachers and testing everything against the word of God
- Worshipping angels in Col 2

There are many things there for our guidance; scripture is for reproof and teaching!!

And then the **focus of worship**

In this seventh month according to Numbers 29 there were 219 sacrifices to be done – Those priests were going to be kept busy.

But the focus has to be right as I said last week.

The festival of the booths celebrates coming out of Egypt and the amazing provision of God. The focus is God.

And all this is about their **new things with God** for these pilgrims. Having reiterated the need for worship to be our first priority, commitment and to be focussed on God the writer turns to how things are with God and us.

And the first thing of course is that it does not matter where you are spiritually; what matters of course is God and your willingness to be part of his plans.

At the end of its captivity Israel was as low as you can go; they had lost everything on the way into captivity and had spent 70 years relying on stories of the good old days.

Then came the chance and 49387 people took it.

If the chance of a major move of the Holy Spirit came to this country would you be ready to be part of it? Could you show that commitment?

It has its price – a walk of 1000 miles and major construction work for the Israelites. Total life change. It would be for us too. Probably where we are now which would make it harder.

Reading about revivals is amazing but when you look at it they all require people – not people who love the status quo but people ready to change.

People ready to spread the good news – usually in homes; both theirs and going into the neighbours' homes to tell them the good news.

Then ready to disciple people. And during a revival to do so quickly because more people are coming through the door.

A few years ago I asked you to think what this church would be like if God brought one new person through that door at the back each week. I have explained to you many times that this will probably happen when you get off your backsides and start inviting people. It did not happen then.

Even now for the rest of this year that would mean 28 new people – the Church would double in size and we would need to be the same loving and welcoming church that we are now. That would be different wouldn't it!!

Smith Wigglesworth once said “it is better to live ready than to get ready”. Are we ready?

What if God surprised us? Actually we would be surprised at 28 – we shouldn't be but we would. What if he surprised us and brought one per day? That would be 196 people.

Would you remember their names? Our Birthday list would go crazy! We would need many new small groups not just in the evening but at different times of the day.

That was actually one of the things from our Church workshop – different groups but we can't find enough people to match up the times but this will come. God has not brought us out this far to send us back again.

New things with God require commitment – commitment to worship, service and giving.

But all because **new things with God has to focus on God.**

This sounds obvious but the tendency is to start with the administration. Places to meet, new building, musicians, courses for people to do.

When God is moving he will supply these things; the important thing is God. All activities have to point to God and for us that means Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers because it is not the Fathers will that anyone should be lost.

These pilgrims knew that and the first thing they did was build this ginormous altar which stood on the hill, the highest point in their capital so that everyone could see it. No visitor was going to miss this and all the activity around it.

Do visitors see the Church as the centre of our community and the reason for our community? They should and they will when the focus of the community turns back to God.

When you pray for our community pray that they do not have to be totally broken before they turn again to God. We do not want to be destroyed as Israel was before we can make God the focus of all we do. When we remember the sheer privilege of pointing someone to Jesus and seeing God move in their heart we should want that now not in the future.

### **New things also focus on the Word of God – the bible.**

I have mentioned already the number of times these pilgrims turned to the word of God to see what they should do.

Do we turn to and rely on the word of God? The title for this series is “Love of the Word” because it is all about listening to God and our main source is the bible. We are told to test everything against the bible because God will not contradict himself and if someone is saying things contrary to the Bible then quite simply he is a false teacher.

Do we believe the bible? We of course quickly say yes!

What about that bit about doing greater things than Jesus? Do we believe that?

What of healings and deliverance – do we believe that?

There is so much in the bible that we do not see in our communities and all too often we come out with a glib comment about our culture or some such thing – No!!! It is not our culture – it is our unbelief!

Do you remember the story of the boy with an evil spirit in Mark 9?

How well do you know your bible?

The boy was being thrown onto the ground and the disciples could not drive the spirit out, Jesus comes out with some life changing quotes here – if only we would believe him.

One of them is in Verse 23 *“Everything is possible for him who believes”*

But I love the Fathers response *“I do believe; help me in my unbelief!”*

We may need to go there because God wants to stretch us – he wants new things and he wants them here in this Church. Are we ready to believe the bible and see these new things?

If we want new things we must start with Jesus and walk in obedience to his word.

### **New things must focus on building Gods house.**

Our pilgrims in setting up their altar put their focus squarely on the temple they had come to build. They needed the temple as the place where God touched earth.

We know that we are each the temple of God. Do we see ourselves as the place where God touches earth? Why not?

This building, as great as it is, is simply the place where God's temples come together to do our primary focus – to worship God. We need to remember that the place is not sacred; it is the people who are sacred. We can get together anywhere and that is where the temple is. Where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus that is sacred because Jesus is there with us.

Now **building God's house requires courage**. I have never said it would be easy and as our pilgrims met despite their fear of the people around them so must we. We do not meet 50,000 strong but we meet and God touches earth.

He is looking to do so much more if we are willing. But it will require us to stand firm. In this place, in our homes, at work and in the market place. Where ever we are we must stand and stand firm.

We have already seen that building God's house is going to require **commitment** to worship, service and giving.

**Building God's house will require unity**. Our pilgrims came together as one man and so must we. We can discuss different points of view but we must decide to move forward together. I have seen churches paralysed and manipulated by factions and it must never happen here – it is a terrible thing to see.

God is a God of new things – his mercies are new every morning and remember Isaiah

**Isaiah 43:18-19 (ANIV)**

<sup>18</sup> "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. <sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

God is calling us to new things just as we have done new things over the years but I am convinced these new things are going to be even greater, more spectacular and will show God at work in this place.

We know we need commitment to worship, service and giving and today we have seen these new things will require us to remain focussed on God, focused on his word, – the Bible, and focussed on building God's house – his people.

I don't yet know where God is taking us but are you ready to follow God into the new things he is laying before us. It will be so much more fun than the old things as we see the Kingdom of Heaven touching earth and changing hearts.

Come with me – enjoy the journey.