

Together Again

Ezra 3 is the record of Israel's regathering after they returned from their Babylonian captivity. Having been exiled for seventy years from their homeland, they were now coming back to the place where they had once flourished as a nation. Led by Zerubbabel, the nation made the long journey across the waste, barren wilderness, prompted by a surprise decree from the Persian monarch, King Cyrus. It was the evidence of the sovereign unseen Hand of a greater King working for the good of His people. When they arrived however, they soon discovered that they had a monumental task ahead of them in restoring things to their former glory. The temple needed repair, as did the walls and gates of the city that was known for being "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth" (Ps. 48:2). There was a lot of work to do, but at least they were now gathered together as a people, eager to set their hands to the work.

The Timing and the Togetherness

When I think through this passage, it reminds me of what the Body of Christ have recently experienced as they have begun the process of meeting in place after an extended hiatus in a national lockdown. Like Israel, there has been a joyous anticipation of being in the amiable environs where there was once a sense of the power and presence of God (Ps. 84). But also, like Israel, before the power of God would again be felt and seen again, there were a few matters that needed special attention. There was a matter of *togetherness*, a corporate unity to acknowledge dependence upon Almighty God. The nation "gathered together as one man" (v. 1), a critical component if the Lord is going to command a blessing (Ps. 133:1-3). The *timing* was also critical to this national spiritual recovery. Although they had been given clearance to begin the road back, but there still was this nagging fear (v. 3) that some other adversary might interfere with their plans. But regardless, they pushed ahead in their desire to please the One who had put before them an open door. The seventh month was the time of the Feast of Trumpets, a significant event in the life of the nation signaling a divine call to come together (Lev. 23:23-32). This feast was followed by the day of the Atonement, a time in which sorrowed for their sin, the reason their testimony was marred. That event was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles, the joyous feast in which they celebrated that God in their midst, as they enjoyed the harvest. What lessons we learn from Israel's past!

The Truth and the Treasure

But there was more. They demonstrated as the people of God, a dedication and commitment to God's *truth*. Twice we read in this chapter that they worshipped and kept God's Word "*as it is written*" (vv. 2, 4). If there is ever going to be a revival among God's people, it will only happen as we diligently obey "what is written". It has both a personal and a corporate application. To add to this, was a commitment to fund the work. They "willing offered a freewill offering to the Lord" (v. 5) and "gave money to the masons, and the carpenters, and food and drink and oil..."(v. 7). Their *treasure* was indeed where their heart was and their heart on this occasion was with the things of the Lord. Notice also, that high quality cedars logs from Lebanon were floated down the Mediterranean to Joppa, the same process that was used in the building of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 5:9). No expense was spared, and no quality was sacrificed as they attended to the work. May the work of the Lord always be characterized by quality and commitment as a testimony to the best of Masters.

The Thanksgiving and the Tears

Eventually, when the foundation of the temple was laid, a great celebration ensued. Trumpets were blown, songs were sung, cymbals were clashed and praise for the Lord was prominently heard. What a joyous occasion it was. “The Lord inhabits the praises of His people” (Ps. 22:3) and when praise is the order of the day, the Lord is glorified, and God’s people are edified. Tears may flow, especially from the older generation who can always call to mind the greatness and glory of God’s dealing in the past with His people (vv. 11-13).

May the account of the regathering of God people in Ezra 3 serve as a spiritual blueprint for us of the important features that should characterize the Church as comes together again to head down the path of spiritual recovery.

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