



Sermon Notes, 6 June 2021

Term Summer 2021

Series Preparing for ... the New Start (Ezra & Nehemiah)

Gatherings: the 11, the 5

Title The Return

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Reading – Ezra 1:1-6

Context

Please see separate sheet for the chronology of the Exile from and Return to Jerusalem

Introduction

God is calling his church to Return, but also to rebuild. Much will be familiar, but God wants to do a new thing among us.

FAMILY: Everyone counts and everyone's together

Chances are you've heard of Ezra and Nehemiah ...

First exiles return in 538 : they're named in 2:2 ... who's heard of them?

Ezra doesn't appear til chapter 7, and doesn't arrive in Jerusalem til 458, 80 years after those named in 2:2.

Doesn't matter whether you have a name or a title or a salary or a position. Everyone counts

Read Romans 12:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

FAMILY: UNITY

3:1 the people assembled together as one ... why? Common purpose. Compelling vision ... to build the altar ... to worship ...

FAMILY: INTER-GENERATIONAL

3:8 everyone over the age of 20 ... (previously had been 30)

Not without its challenges – 3:10-13

Why were the older ones so upset? Presumably because the foundations were so much smaller than the previous temple ...?

The fact that joy and grief mingled to the point that they were indistinguishable is a powerful symbol of a people working through things together.

Read Haggai 2:1-9 (Haggai prophesied during the period of the Return, alongside Zechariah and Malachi)

A DEVOTION TO WORSHIP

Broadly ... the book of Nehemiah is about the rebuilding of the City, esp. walls

Book of Ezra is about the rebuilding of the altar and temple

This does not make sense: the context was hostile (see 3:3). The common sense approach would have been to build the walls of the City first, to keep the people safe.

But they pursued God's priority ... to worship

2:64-70 lists those who returned, along with servants and animals.

It also mentions 200 men and women singers ...some worship team!

3:2-6 building the altar

3:7-9 building the temple

The structure of worship had to be rebuilt from scratch. Why is worship such a priority?

- It's in worship that we encounter the living God
- It's in worship that we are transformed
- It's in worship that we experience the Holy Spirit and are sent out

Our priority for worship will need to increase ... resource, honour, space, time ...

Note the first words sung in worship as recorded by Ezra:

¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. ¹¹ With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord:

'He is good; his love towards Israel endures forever.'

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

When we find it hard to sing or declare that 'God is good' it's good to remember that we are declaring scriptural truth in the face of whatever circumstances confront us. May God give us grace to continue speaking this truth ...

CONCLUSION

We're about to Return ... to a place that's familiar in many ways, but where there's so much work to be done to see the lost found, the sick healed, a City transformed into one of Hope ... to continue the ministry of Jesus until he returns ...

QUESTIONS

- How could Christ Church become more of a family? What practical steps could you take to make that more of a reality?
- Why is unity so important? The pursuit of a common purpose, a compelling vision? What does disunity do to the Body of Christ?
- We are blessed that Christ Church is a multi-generational church. How could we maximise the potential of this reality?
- How could we make our worship even more of a priority than we currently do?