

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2020
EZRA 3 – Good to Great

I want to begin today by asking you a question. ***Are you content?*** As Christians, a biblical definition of contentment might be:

“Knowing and believing that God will provide for all you need no matter what.”

Paul gave us his definition in Philippians 4:12-13:

“¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”

Being content is a great place to live. God’s peace allows you to weather the storms of life knowing that He is in control and that He will provide. There is no anxious need to acquire “stuff” to prove that you have made it in life. Dave Ramsay, the Christian financial expert teaches that the problem with young people getting married today, is that starting out, they want everything their parents have, forgetting that their parents worked 20 years to get it. Ramsay also states that many people go into debt trying to keep up with the Jones family – and they don’t even like them.

Did you know that there is a type of contentment, that if practiced, will drag you down in life, and worse, when Christians live in this type of contentment, it can hamper your spiritual growth! That is the contentment to be “good.”

In his classic book on leadership “Good to Great,” Jim Collins explains to leaders that just being “good” at something can be a pitfall. WHY? Because ***“good is the enemy of great.”*** He explains:

“Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don't have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.”

– Jim Collins, Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't

He continues with this observation:

“Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline.”

– Jim Collins, Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't

Today we dive into Ezra chapter 3 and see that the “remnant” have some decision to make and it will set the tone of how they follow God. Let’s read Ezra 3:

3 In early autumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled in Jerusalem with a unified purpose. ² Then Jeshua son of Jehozadak joined his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his family in rebuilding the altar of the God of Israel. They wanted to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed in the Law of Moses, the man of God. ³ Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its old site. Then they began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to the LORD each morning and evening.

⁴ They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed in the Law, sacrificing the number of burnt offerings specified for each day of the festival. ⁵ They also offered the regular burnt offerings and the offerings required for the new moon celebrations and the annual festivals as prescribed by the LORD. The people also gave voluntary offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began, the priests had begun to sacrifice burnt offerings to the LORD. This was even before they had started to lay the foundation of the LORD’s Temple.

The People Begin to Rebuild the Temple

⁷ Then the people hired masons and carpenters and bought cedar logs from the people of Tyre and Sidon, paying them with food, wine, and olive oil. The logs were brought down from the Lebanon mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, for King Cyrus had given permission for this.

⁸ The construction of the Temple of God began in midspring, during the second year after they arrived in Jerusalem. The work force was made up of everyone who had returned from exile, including Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his fellow priests, and all the Levites. The Levites who were twenty years old or older were put in charge of rebuilding the LORD's Temple. ⁹ The workers at the Temple of God were supervised by Jeshua with his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons, all descendants of Hodaviah. They were helped in this task by the Levites of the family of Henadad.

¹⁰ When the builders completed the foundation of the LORD's Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise the LORD, just as King David had prescribed. ¹¹ With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the LORD:

"He is so good!

His faithful love for Israel endures forever!"

Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the LORD because the foundation of the LORD's Temple had been laid.

¹² But many of the older priests, Levites, and other leaders who had seen the first Temple wept aloud when they saw the new Temple's foundation. The others, however, were shouting for joy. ¹³ The joyful shouting and weeping mingled together in a loud noise that could be heard far in the distance.

After a 4-month, 1500 km (900 mile) journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, the people were now home! What had only been prayed for, hoped for, and dreamed about, was not a reality. Now they have some choices to make!

They had arrived back in the homeland...what next? No one would fault them if they built their houses, re-established their businesses, basically got their lives that were stolen by Nebuchadnezzar. It would have been "good enough."

There was one problem...the job that Cyrus gave them to do. His instructions were for the people to rebuild the temple. Not only was it a direct order from the king, but the Hebrew people had been given a calling early in their existence to be 'holy priesthood and offer spiritual (and literal) sacrifices acceptable to God' (Ex. 19:6).

The people knew the importance of setting up an altar to God. It was foundational to who they were as God's people. The altar was the place where, in Exodus 29:43 God said:

⁴³ I will meet the people of Israel there, in the place made holy by my glorious presence.

At this moment the people need the presence of God. Jerusalem was in ruins. The walls had been destroyed. They had many enemies around them that would have loved to see this remnant fail and be destroyed. The people new what they had to do in vs. 3 of our scripture reading:

³ Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its old site. Then they began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to the LORD each morning and evening.

After deciding to follow God's will and make a priority out of building God's Temple, another decision had to be made...***Where do we start!***

Logically you might begin with the framework for the temple. Get the structure in place. If you can get the outside structure up, then, regardless of what is happening, you can work on the inside.

As we mentioned last week, now was the time to re-establish God's temple and God's children properly...as God wants it done. The only logical place to start was for them to build the altar first! Not only did they build God's altar first, they chose to do it the proper way, the great way, the way God had originally prescribed. They placed it in the exact spot that it had been in previously. They did not build a makeshift alter that was "**good enough**," but they built the altar to the original specifications, using all the materials that the original was made up of. They built it to the specific dimensions and immediately began worshipping God.

You might think that the people could justify starting with one sacrifice and offering a day or even a week. After all, there wasn't even a temple. "Let's get something in place, that would be **good enough!**" But it wasn't good enough. Right from the beginning of the rebuilding, the people made all the sacrifice required, in the proper way, at the proper time. Worship of God was central, and they were going to give God 100% of what he required.

ARE YOU CONTENT TO BE "GOOD ENOUGH" FOLLOWING JESUS!

Ezra 3 tells the story of setting priorities. It is a story of literal and figurative foundations. The people started laying the foundation for the new Temple, but first they set up a spiritual foundation of worship – making this a priority in the process.

As we apply Ezra 3 to our lives today, stop and ask yourself "**What are your priorities in life and where does the worship of God place in these priorities?**" Are you content with a **good** relationship with Jesus or do you desire to have a **great relationship?** Do you want our collective ministry to be **good** or do you desire to **great** things for Jesus and see His kingdom grow exponentially?

The Westminster shorter catechism tell us that our chief purpose in life is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." Truly that is what we will make our "first

things first.” Worship and glorifying God must be your priority as a Christian. If you feel like your spiritual life is lacking or feels hollow in some way, then revisit how, or even if, you are worshipping God. Your relationship with God will exist on a fairly shallow level if your worship is shallow.

If you ever leave a service and all that is on your mind is critique and complaint...about music, content, length, change....if you walk away with a list of things you don't like...you need to reconsider what it means to truly worship God. Worship is an attitude of the heart. Worship is not what you get out of going to church, but rather, what you give to God!

True worship is at the heart of the Christian life that has a vibrant, living faith. Worship focuses on the one who deserves all the glory, honour, and power. True worship is the strong, sure foundation that we build the rest of our lives upon.

Are you willing to move from good to great!