

“Going Forth To Restore Worship”

Ezra 3:1-7

Worship of God must be the priority of God's people in spite of opposition.

Worship as Commanded

Celebrate God's Deeds

Worship God in Spirit

Worship as Commanded

Ezra 3:1-3, NKJV

And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening burnt offerings.

There are certain times of the year which hold much more significance to people than any other time of the year. Tishri was the seventh month for the people of Israel and coincides with our September and October. The first day of the seventh month was Feast of Trumpets (Numbers 29:1-6), on the tenth day the Day of Atonement was celebrated (Numbers 29:7-11), and on the fifteenth of the month the Feast of Tabernacles took place (Numbers 29:12-38).

These were significant for the people of God for their unity as a nation; it reminded them of God's forgiveness of their sins for the entire nation, while praising God for the provisions He has made for them during the time of harvest. Over time these festivals lost all religious significance and became traditions that were done because they were known as God's people. This was part of the reason the people found themselves exiled in Babylon due to their disobedience to the commands of God.

The people who were with Ezra were the first group of returning exiles with the intention of rebuilding the temple and establishing the worship of God again. Animal sacrifice to God was ceased during the exile and the concept of the synagogue was developed. Study and memorization of God's word temporarily took the place of the temple worship. Now, they were reinstating what had been impossible for them to do over the seventy years they spent in exile.

The phrase “*as it is written in the Law*” identifies that the people made a conscious effort to start over again, making sure it was not a tradition of the past they were practicing but God's commandments they were following. Their “*gathering together as one man to Jerusalem*” signified their unity in the matter of returning to the original plan of God on His call to them on how they were to worship before Him. This was not simply a leadership initiative that the people were going along with in theory, but their hearts' desire to authentically worship God as He had commanded them to do in the law which was given through Moses on Mount Sinai and proclaimed to the people prior to

entering into the Promised Land. There needs to be a rediscovery of what the Lord identifies as necessities for properly worshipping Him.

Jesus shared with the woman at the well what kind of worshipers God was seeking. First, the place of gathering is an important aspect of worship according to Jesus in His interaction with this woman for He says, “...*the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father...But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him...*” (John 4:21-24).

Worship according to God’s command is now and has always been a matter of the heart, rather than a matter of place. The tabernacle and temple were certainly places where God’s presence could be found. Yet, it was the heart of the worshiper that made the difference between who was being changed by God and who was not. Micah was inspired to proclaim, “*With what shall I come before the Lord, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*” (Micah 6:6-8, NKJV).

Obedience to the Lord is the greatest form of worship a person can render onto God. All the ceremonies performed in the tabernacle and then in the temple needed to be done from a heart that was surrendered to the Lord. This was more than a sense of duty; it was a desire and a need for communion with God through the ceremonies. The offerings and festivals all pointed to and called the worshiper to acknowledge God’s holiness, righteousness, justice, and the people’s complete dependency upon the Lord. Gathering together in the sanctuary each week and going through the motions and activities of worship is pointless if throughout the rest of the week God has no authority over a person or He is ignored.

Worshiping God in the twenty-first century is no different from the way it was centuries ago since God does not change (Hebrews 13:8). The form of worship has changed because of Christ satisfying the requirements of the Law which prevented people from dealing with God directly. Hebrews 10:19-22 describes Jesus’ satisfying of the sacrificial system to give those in Christ access to the Father as having, “...*boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*” (NKJV).

Worshiping according to the commands of God is to have a pure heart that is being transformed by the renewing of the Holy Spirit daily and obedience to His commandments in all aspects of life. The reason for the exile the people had to endure was not because they stopped worshipping God; it was due to their losing sight of the fact that obedience to God from the heart is why God is worshiped inside and outside of the gathering of the body of Christ.

God’s call to holiness is an invitation to worship Him with everything we are as part of His family, the body of Christ. Gathering together for worship is singing and telling others about what He has done and is doing as well as rightly dividing the Word of God to instruct in doctrine, for holding one another accountable, giving correction, and

teaching people to live righteously (2 Timothy 3:16). The most encouraging and inspirational thing that can be done is to celebrate God's deeds of the past and what He is actively doing in the lives and hearts of His people now.

Celebrate God's Deeds

Ezra 3:4-5, NKJV

They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord.

Praise the Lord that Jesus satisfied the sacrificial law through His atoning death upon the cross. The worship God prescribed for His people in the Old Testament was to teach them about their sin, the true cost of even the slightest infraction of the law, and the justice and righteousness of God. All the festivals required considerable cost to individuals and to the whole community of God. It was also an investment of time when it came to the festivals and feast. They would last for days and often a full week. Each of these festivals and sacrifices reminded the people and taught the next generations about what God had done so there would be an expectation of things God could do in the future.

The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths can be found recorded in Numbers 29:13-38. This would last for a period of seven days with specific offerings offered up to God on each day of the celebration. This was one of the three times a year all males were to travel in order to appear before God at the place He would later choose (Deuteronomy 16:13-17). They would not be dwelling in their homes. They made temporary living arrangements and gathered with others to share the great things God had been doing the past year in their lives.

The New Moon Feast happened at the beginning of every month since their calendar was a lunar based calendar where the modern calendar is based on the solar year. This was established in 1582 by Pope Gregory the XIII. This specific calendar he authorized is still in use today in much of the world according to Encyclopedia Britannica (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gregorian-calendar>). Every first of the month there would be rejoicing and praising God for what He had done in the previous month and their expectation of what God would do in the coming month.

The free will offerings were also something that could be offered at anytime of the year and was a praise to God that was shared with family and friends (Leviticus 22:17-23). These festivals were all celebrating God's provisions and helped the people to be able to look forward with expectation of how the Lord would bless and care for them in the future.

The importance of celebrating the deeds of God as part of worship cannot be overstated. The sharing of testimonies, offering up words of praise to God for His faithfulness, and His bountiful provisions as His people walk through trying times assist people to understand the value of worship. Grasping the value of worship is the first step in restoring authentic worship within the body of Christ.

The people were doing more than reviving the form of worship God had given them. They were rediscovering what it means to engage with God as Master over them. Jesus was in essence resetting worship rather than beginning a new style or method of worship during His ministry upon earth.

Worship had become a profitable business for people in and around the temple. This is what Jesus became so upset about and caused Him to clear the temple (Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22). Jesus made it clear that worship was a communing with God when He proclaimed, “...*Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.*” (John 2:16, NKJV); and, “...*It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves’*” (Luke 19:46, NKJV).

The passage of Scripture that has become known as the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5-7 is a restoration of the original meaning and intention of the Law God gave Moses which had become distorted over the years to mean something it was not meant to mean. This is why Jesus says, “...*You have heard it said...But I say to you...*”, each time He states a command (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). Jesus said, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil*” (Matthew 5:17, NKJV). Jesus was restoring the law to correct the corruption that had infiltrated the interpretation of the law over the years.

There has been much that has crept into the worship service that was simply not part of the worship of the first century Christians. Authentic worship is seen in Acts 2:40-47,

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (NKJV)

The worship of the first century Christians was not confined to the home, temple, or any other physical structure. The people were worshiping by being obedient to God in every aspect of their lives, encouraging one another with material things when they were lacking, gathering strength from one another as they shared what God was doing, learning about God with one another, and rejoicing from their hearts. Worship was their lifestyle rather than an event they attended.

No one can create or manufacture the kind of lasting joy, peace, and strength that comes from worshiping God according to His commands and through rejoicing in sharing about what He has done and is doing in the lives of His people. The reason it is

impossible to artificially bring this about in life is because worshiping God is something that is spiritual and must happen between the Holy Spirit living within His child and the spirit of His child. Worship can never occur corporately unless it is first taking place personally.

Worship God in Spirit

Ezra 3:6-7, NKJV

From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, although the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

It must be noted here that worship began prior to the foundation of the temple being laid. The temple was still in ruins. The people restored worship in their hearts first and moved forward spiritually before they moved forward physically. Preparations were being made to acquire the materials and make payments to purchase what was needed. This process took time. Their desire and need to worship God simply could not wait. They communed with God without a building in which to meet and worshiped God from their spirits that yearned to praise God, sing to Him, and present themselves before Him in humility.

This concept of worship is easier now that Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial laws. There is no need any longer for an animal sacrifice since Jesus was the ultimate, perfect sacrifice for sins once and for all (Hebrews 10:1-10). Those who place their faith in Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins have become living sacrifices before God (Romans 12:1). A living sacrifice is a freewill offering of a person before the Lord who willingly surrenders themselves to God's commands, His design for their lives, and whatever He calls them to do and be to reflect His glory in the world.

The exiles who returned with Ezra to Jerusalem had their hearts stirred by God from the beginning. They continued being receptive to His desires as they willingly worshiped Him from their spirits in spite of the lack of visible buildings or furnishings. People who do not worship God from the heart and are there for the physical things which have become part of worship are missing out on the joy, peace, and strength which only comes by worshiping God in spirit.

Those who worship God in spirit do so regardless of their surroundings. The style of music is irrelevant, but the words being sung are what holds meaning. Furnishings and decorations become unimportant, while gathering together with brothers and sisters in Christ to praise Him fills them with excitement and joy. The style of building or the complete lack of a building is not a hindrance to their worship because the Lord is with them wherever they are gathered.

King David asked, *“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the*

darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You" (Psalm 139:7-12, NKJV). The worship God desires begins in a person's spirit and is revealed through the words, actions, and attitude of the worshiper of God. This means a person can worship God anywhere in the world, under any circumstances, and with or without anyone else being present with them because God is always present.

The people of Ezra's day returned to a temple and city that were in ruins. What they saw would have caused many today to lose heart. Their worship of God allowed them to see past the physical and grasp the spiritual reality that God had brought them home when many gave up on ever seeing Jerusalem again.

Imagine seeing pictures and hearing the news that the building and property where the congregation gathers for worship has been destroyed by fire or tornado. Would there be anyone showing up to worship together? This is basically what the exiles returned to knowing Jerusalem had been destroyed and the temple dismantled. They came to worship rather than for the material things of the building itself. The necessities of worship were there even if the material things were missing. God supplied the law to follow, the animals needed for sacrifice, but the people had to willingly give their hearts to the Lord in worship.

Worshiping God is a spiritual thing a person engages with God in their spirits first. Music, furnishings, and buildings assist the body of Christ to focus attention on Him, but must never be the reason why a person worships God. If worship is dependent upon the style, instruments, and volume of the music, what a person is doing is not worshiping but receiving personal gratification from a performance. If worship is dependent upon a structure, furnishings, or decoration, what a person is doing is not worshiping but surrounding themselves with things that bring them personal pleasure.

Worship is something that satisfies the soul, brings joy to the heart that lasts more than a moment, and inspires life change in a person. These things are possible because the one worshiping God is coming into direct contact with Him who created them specifically for that purpose. We are created to worship God, "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*" (Genesis 2:7, NKJV).

People have been hand crafted by God and it is His breath that made them living beings. The connection with the Creator does not get any closer than having His breath within them. Disobedience which is sin separated mankind from the intimate communion with Him we were created to enjoy. Jesus restored worship and relationship with His death on our behalf and resurrection from the grave. Those who reject God and His Son must still fill their need to worship they were created to participate in to bring fulfillment to their lives. Therefore, "*...they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things*" (Romans 1:21-23, NKJV).

Worshiping God must be done according to His commands, remembering what He has done, and submitting our spirit to His Spirit is the only way to experience true worship. Christ restored true worship through His death and resurrection. There has been much over the centuries that has caused peoples' understanding of worship to be

skewed. It is time for God's people to go and restore true worship that is centered in Christ and honoring to God and not honoring of the one worshiping. If worship is unsatisfying, then God is not at fault. Let us repent of and shed all the things that have gotten in the way of worshiping God from the heart, and desire to commune with God personally so that we can collectively as the body of Christ worship God in spirit and in truth.