

Ezra 6:13-22 (New International Version)

Completion and Dedication of the Temple

¹³ Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence.

¹⁴ So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the **temple** according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.

¹⁵ The **temple** was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

¹⁶ Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of **the house of God** with joy.

¹⁷ For the dedication of this **house of God** they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁸ And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

The Passover

¹⁹ On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover.

²⁰ The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their relatives the priests and for themselves.

²¹ So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel.

²² For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on **the house of God**, the God of Israel.

Good Morning, First Baptist Church members and friends. I greet you this morning with a grateful heart: grateful that the God of heaven and earth decided that we could be included in the plan for salvation; grateful that I had someone in my life who introduced me to that God; grateful that someone continues to have me on their mind and pray to God on my behalf. If you have something to be grateful about today, something that you need to acknowledge that God has done for you then I invite you to praise God this morning. Praise Him for it is good and appropriate. Praise Him because you love and adore Him. Praise Him in this sanctuary. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

This morning we continue with our third lesson from the book of Ezra. At this point in the biblical story we have considered Ezra 3:1-7 where we are told that the altar has been rebuilt on the old foundation and worship according to the Law of Moses has been restored. I raised the question:

WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN YOU GOT HOME?

Last Sunday we continued with the third chapter of Ezra with a focus on vv 8-13. We learned from the scripture that the people were shouting because they had laid the foundation of the temple. I raised another question:

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SHOUT ABOUT?

Today we jump from the 3rd to the 6th chapter with a focus on vv. 13-22, which we have just read. If you have read the book of Ezra as I suggested then you know that vv 1-12 tell us that some folks got to minding some other folks business, and believing that they know **what was what** they sent a letter to ask if the folks who they were bothering were speaking the truth. I love God. When the answer came back that the people were indeed speaking the truth and had been granted permission to build the temple the letter also told them what they had to do: pay their expenses out of the royal treasury, give them what they need for the burnt offering and do it with diligence (vv 8-11)

In today's verses we learn that foreign kings were used by God to help in the rebuilding of the temple; the temple was completed and dedicated and Passover was celebrated. That is the history of the chosen people of God. A history of God blessing, people disobeying, God punishing, people repenting, God restoring and blessing again. I suspect if we were honest we could say this is our story too.

God blesses us, we get comfortable with the blessing, we forget it came from God and begin to believe we did it all by ourselves. And as soon as that happens we begin to disobey, God punishes us, we seek forgiveness and God forgives. The cycle is repeated until one day hopefully, we finally get it. There are several sermons within the passage:

- Praising God for the things He allows us to do
- Praising God for how God works in the world
 - taking what some mean for evil and turning it into good
- Praising God for allowing the Children of Israel to get home.

Any of these would "preach". But I wonder if you will pray with me and for me as I work from another point of view? I want to focus on just a single word in the passage, the word **temple**.

In order for this sermon to make sense you will have to move out of your comfort zones and think about the word temple in several different ways. For the note takers here is your advance organizer. We are going to talk about **Temple** as being a place and/or building. Then we are going to talk about **Jesus as Temple**. Finally, we will talk about us, **individually as being a Temple**.

With that as introduction I have two serious and interlocking questions to ask:

WHO IS THE GOD IN YOUR TEMPLE?

HOW ARE YOU TREATING THE TEMPLE GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU?

SHALL WE PRAY!

Father we need you. As a matter of fact we cannot make it without you. So we come into your house this morning asking that you will allow us to draw near. Allow us to hear your voice. Allow us to experience your love for us. Allow these words prepared and delivered by your servant to feed us, help us and guide us. This is our prayer in the matchless name of Jesus. AMEN and AMEN.

WHO IS THE GOD IN YOUR TEMPLE?**HOW ARE YOU TREATING THE TEMPLE GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU?**

The church at the end of the block has a sign that says something like:

“I am happy to meet you at my office,
but I am willing to meet you anywhere signed God”.

Now maybe when you were young you were smarter than me, but I can honestly say that I think God was somehow more accessible when I was at church. I am not saying I think He lived at church, but somehow when I got to the church building, wherever it was, God was there for me. How can I be so sure this is what I believed?

- I wore my best clothes to church
- I did not cuss in church
- I spoke softly and respectfully to everyone in church
- I did not write on the walls in church
- I respected “church time”

When I got to college, church, as I had known it, was not accessible to me so I found myself in a Sacred Heart Chapel. And even in Lake Forest, IL God seemed more accessible in the back pews of a Catholic Chapel than He did in the dorm, the library or walking the grounds of the campus.

Temple, church, chapel, or House of God by whatever name it was called it was special. The God in my temple, the God in my church was the same and for many years He was at best a two-fold God:

He answered prayer with comfort

He wanted the best for me

That "church God" had my attention but He did not have for whole life. For if you caught me on a bad day, a Friday night, after a round with my parents, after being dumped by my fiancée, when I ran out of gas. You might have wondered if I had ever heard about God. The God of my youth and young adulthood spent a lot of time in the temple, but not enough time in me. In other words my life was not being changed as the result of saying I know God and I follow God.

God cannot be limited to the building by whatever name. At some point God has got to be visible in you wherever you are.

The temple was important for the Children of Israel for it was the place that God had allowed them to build and it was the place that God had told them He would meet them. The temple however, was just not the place to go and hang out it had a purpose and the purpose was praise and worship. The temple was also where the people offered sacrifices for their sins. The temple was the anchor for these people of God.

Our church building is just as important, but for slightly different reasons. Our church building, our temple is to serve as a light shining in darkness for those who do not know God. Our church is a place where those who are naked, hungry, and broken can come and expect help. Our church stands as the hands and feet of Jesus until He comes again. And since the building cannot do those things it means that we the congregation are the hands and feet of Jesus until he come again. We are the light shining in darkness; we are those who help the naked, the hungry, the poor in spirit and broken. We are God's Temple here and now. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

WHO IS THE GOD IN YOUR TEMPLE?

If this building, our church is the first type of temple under consideration this morning then my second question **HOW ARE YOU**

TREATING THE TEMPLE GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU is a question you need to consider. This question has both individual and corporate implications. In other words, there are some things we each should be doing and there are some things we need to plan as a church how to do. The church should always be clean and one person working part-time cannot do the job.

- SS and BS teachers need to clean their rooms
- Choir/Baptism team needs to clean the rooms under the choir
- KS need to make sure Bibles/Hymnals/Pencils are in Sanctuary
- Tables, chairs, fans and all other items borrowed should be returned

This is God's House and it ought to be clean and you ought to care about it. This house ought to have what is needed to do the work God calls us to do.

Jesus taught us the value to the temple. It was in the temple that His parents found Him at the age of 13 studying with the elders. It was in the temple that He read scripture and taught on the Sabbath. It was in the temple that He healed the sick. But it was also at the temple where Jesus declared the temple to be a place of prayer and His Father's house.

HOW ARE YOU TREATING THE TEMPLE GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU?

Jesus also taught that He was a temple. When He declared that there were those that would destroy the temple, but He would raise it in three days. He was talking about himself. All power had been given to the Son, Jesus by the Father and therefore Jesus could declare that He was a temple, for the Father dwelled in Him and He dwelled in the Father. But after the death and resurrection Jesus left and sent us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter to be with us. That is what Jesus was promising in The Great Commission. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b)

We don't need a temple for the purpose of sacrifice for Jesus was and is the last Passover Lamb. Jesus is the sin and the guilt sacrifice.

Jesus paid the price for all of our sins. That same Jesus desires for us to recognize that by his blood and power we too are temples.

Paul writes to the church at Corinth and tells them

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

If I had a bit more time I might really raise some uncomfortable questions, like

HOW MUCH TIME DID GOD GET THIS WEEK
HOW DID YOU SPEND YOUR DISCRETIONARY TIME

HOW DID YOU USE YOUR TALENTS THIS WEEK
DID GOD GET ANY OF YOUR TALENT

HOW DID YOU SPEND YOUR MONEY THIS WEEK
DID GOD GET ANY OF YOUR MONEY

HOW DID YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY THIS WEEK
WOULD GOD BE PLEASED WITH WHERE YOU TOOK YOUR
BODY, WHAT YOU WORE, AND HOW YOU PRESENTED
YOURSELF

But, I don't have the time so I will simply present the challenge for the week.

My challenge for this coming week is simple, but I want you to do it every day before you leave the house. It has two parts.

Ask yourself:

Will anyone be able to see God within my temple today?

Is there anything I can do to make my church shine brighter?

WHO IS THE GOD IN YOUR TEMPLE?

HOW ARE YOU TREATING THE TEMPLE GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU?