

Seeking My King & His Kingdom

Lesson #34 - Meet Me At The Water Gate

The altar and the foundation of God's Temple lay in neglect for 16 years while the Jews gave attention to their homes and their lives. They forgot God's purpose for stirring their hearts to return to Jerusalem was to Build His Temple and Restore True Worship.

Haggai's initial message on Aug. 29th, 520 BC, admonished the people to "consider their ways," examine their priorities and begin building the Temple of the LORD.

His initial message included 4 admonitions:

Put God First Believe His Promises Honor God's Name Obey His Commands

Response: ALL the remnant of the people obeyed God's commands. Rebuilding began on September 21st.

Haggai's 2nd sermon [Haggai 2:1-9] addressed their discouragement. LOOK UP

It was delivered on October 20, 520 BC on the last day of the Feast Of Tabernacles, a time of great celebration of God's current harvest, His provision for the children of Israel during their exodus from Egypt and it also looked forward to the Millennial reign of their Messiah.

His encouragement to Keep The Work Going included the assurance of:

God's Presence, His unchangeable Covenant [Word], God's Promises and God's Provision.

Sermon #3: LOOK WITHIN: Contamination - Haggai 2:10-19

About two months later [Dec. 18, 520 BC], the Lord spoke to Haggai again and gave him a message about sin. "Clean" and "unclean" were very important concepts to the Jews living under the old covenant. Haggai went to the priests, who were the authorities on this subject, and asked them two simple questions, for the benefit of the people who were present. Why?

Ps. 24:3-4 They were not drawing near to Him with clean hands and pure hearts.

Question #1—Holiness (vv. 11-12)

"If a garment containing a piece of consecrated meat touches food," Haggai asked, "does the garment make the food holy?" The priests replied, "No." Why? Because you can't transmit holiness in such a simple manner. Even though the garment is holy (set apart) because of the sanctified meat, this holiness can't be imparted to other objects by the garment.

Question #2—Defilement (v. 13) "Suppose somebody touched a dead body and became unclean," Haggai said. "Could that person touch another person and make him unclean?" The answer was obviously yes. Haggai had made his point: you can transmit defilement from one thing or person to another, but you can't transmit sanctity. Applies in the area of health: you can transmit your sickness to healthy people and make them sick, but you can't share your health with them.

Key Point #1: Holiness Is Not Contagious, But Corruption Is

You don't pick up "holiness antibodies" by hanging around holy people.

You can pick up "sin viruses" by hanging around sinful people.

The Application [14-19] The people working on the temple couldn't impart any holiness to it, but they could defile it by their sins.

Key Point #2 Your activity in the Temple cannot clean up your sin. Only repentance and obedience can clean you. You cannot harbor wrong attitudes and sins or maintain close relationships with sinful people or you will be contaminated.

It is important to do His work from hearts that are pure and devoted to God.

Key Point #3: Each one must get personally right with God and cultivate his relationship with the Lord. You cannot catch holiness by osmosis.

Key Point #4: Holy living comes when you are empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Sermon #4: LOOK FORWARD - Haggai 2:20-23 - Dec. 18th 520 BC

Haggai addresses Zerubbabel. He reaffirmed and guaranteed God's promise of a Messiah through David's line.

Temple was dedicated March 12, 515 BC; about 23 years after beginning the work.

Ezra 6:14-16; 19 And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month.

Gap Between Ezra 6 & Ezra 7: About a 60 year gap and insert the Book of Esther. Esther becomes Queen. Her marriage gave the Jews prestige at Persian court which effected Ezra's return and Nehemiah's position. Preservation of the Jews - Takes place in Shushan or Persia.

Group 2 [~2000] left in 457 BC under Ezra [80 years after group 1]. Ezra, a scribe and priest living in Babylon, was to return to Jerusalem. He was given a letter by the Persian King to return and teach God's Law and appoint judges. The King provided him with gold and silver offerings. Ezra set his heart to study the Law of God. He not only read and studied it; he practiced and obeyed it.

Wiersbe: "If our knowledge of the truth doesn't result in obedience, we end up with a big head instead of a burning heart."

Ezra's Purpose: institute many reforms; restore the Law and teaching of God's Word.

Ezra 7:10 Why was God's hand upon him? For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. [taught by example]

1. He dedicated himself to carefully study God's Word.

2. He intended to apply and obey personally the commands he discovered in God's Word.

3. He was committed to teaching others both God's Word & its application to life.

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, the temple had been standing about 58 years. However, he finds the lives of the people in shambles. Intermarriage with foreigners [God's command: do not marry women of foreign nations] opposed to God threatened their spiritual future.

Ezra 9:1-2 Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. ² For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

1. Over 100 civil and religious leaders were guilty of deliberately disobeying the law that Ezra had come to teach.

Lev. 11:44 "You shall be holy; for I am holy."

Some had even divorced their Jewish wives to marry heathen women. [Malachi 2:10-16]

2. God's law was to protect the nation from defilement. Because of these mixed marriages, the "holy seed" was being defiled by foreign women from the very nations God had commanded Israel to destroy. [Deut. 7:1-6]

3. When they intermingled, they lost sight of God's purpose for them.

4. Results: compromise and unfaithfulness

Ezra's Response: 9:3-4 When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. ⁴ Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.

Note: appalled = to be shocked, horrified, astonished, desolate

Isa. 66:2 But on this one will I look; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Consider: Until God's people show respect for God and His Word, the Spirit of God can't work in mighty power as He longs to do.

Evening Offering:

1. 3:00 in the afternoon: Priests offered the DAILY evening sacrifice. [Num. 28:1-4]

2. People assemble for prayer. [Acts 3:1; Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10]

Ezra 9:5-7 But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God;

⁶ and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.

a. Ezra began to call out to God and intercede for his people.

Like Nehemiah and Daniel, Ezra identified himself with the people and their sins.

b. Like the publican praying, Ezra was too ashamed to look up to heaven. The inability to blush because of sin is a mark of hypocrisy and superficial spiritual experience. [Jer. 6:13-15]

Why was Ezra so ashamed? His people had not learned their lesson from all the trials that the nation had experienced. [Ezra 9:7]

This new generation had grown up in Babylon and became accustomed to the evil around them.

Thus, they had no true fear of God.

They accepted Babylon's sinful way of life, approved of it and enjoyed it. They carried their compromising attitude back to Jerusalem; it was eventually revealed in their disobedience.

c. Remember their purpose: Rebuild the Temple of God and establish true worship
Ezra 9:8-9 Ezra uses 5 different images to picture what God's grace had done for those who returned to Jerusalem. In His grace, He preserved a remnant with whom He made a new beginning.

Ezra 9:10 After all God had done for His people, they responded by disobeying His Word.

"*We are speechless.*" It becomes obvious the Jewish men were sinning against a flood of light. The religious practices of the Canaanites were unspeakably vile and the stench reached to heaven. God's law made it clear that Israel was to have NO association with these nations.

Now over 100 Jewish men had taken the first step by marrying into their families. [Ezra 9:12]

1. How would this affect this future mixed generation of children when it came time to obey God and be a part of the covenant?

2. These Jewish men were sacrificing the future of the nation of Israel.

Ezra asked: "What shall we say after this?"

Ezra 9:13-15 "We are guilty." Guilt always shuts my mouth before God.

Ezra knew God could easily destroy the remnant and start again with another people, but He asked God to be gracious and forgiving.

Note: Before we can untangle the problems of life, we must take time to seek God in prayer.

As Ezra began to pray and weep at the altar, "a very great congregation of men and women and children" came together and they fell under conviction of sin.

Ezra 10:1 They too wept bitterly. Note: This response was not something Ezra worked up in the people. He prayed it down. Their priests had offered a lamb on the altar, but Ezra gave the Lord a greater sacrifice.

Ps. 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart - these, O God, You will not despise."

God's Formula For Revival: James 4:9-10

Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Ezra, along with some leaders, began to investigate the matter so cleansing could take place. Their investigation was completed in 3 months. They discovered over 100 offenders which included 27 priests, Levites, temple singers and gatekeepers [those who you expect to be models of obedience].

God in His grace accepted their repentance and confession and granted them forgiveness.

Thirteen years after Ezra (2nd group), God began to stir the heart of Nehemiah to travel to Jerusalem [444BC] and lead the people in rebuilding the walls and gates of God's dwelling place. God also sent the prophet Malachi to encourage the people.

1. While they rebuild their nation: temple, walls, gates,

God is rebuilding their heart to obey Him and worship Him.

2. Am I a prepared sanctuary for the dwelling place of God Almighty?

3. Temple is complete and dedicated. Walls & gates were restored in under 52 days!
The completion of the wall marked a tremendous victory, but it was no time to let down their defense. The completion of the wall is actually a moment of supreme peril.
They are surrounded by the enemies of God who are eager to attack them in spite of the wall. Jerusalem will be in perpetual danger.

Scripture Bears Out: The great moments of victory are perhaps one of the most dangerous moments in a Christian's life. Ex: Joshua had experienced a tremendous victory at Jericho. This was closely followed by a tragic and humiliating defeat at Ai because the power of the enemy was underestimated. The people of God imagined that their great achievement at Jericho - which was not their own at all, but entirely God's - had imparted to them some peculiar inherent strength for future battles.

Truth: There is no experience in my Christian life, no matter how exhilarating or triumphant, which imparts to me strength for the future battles.

Consider: It seems that the higher the peak of victory, the deeper the fall a believer can sustain.

Ex.: II Sam. 11:1-5- Darkest hour in the life of King David - He gave way to selfish desires that left a blot on his name that time has not erased. David's sin of adultery led him to commit murder. He sank into spiritual deadness with no apparent thought of repentance until God shook him to the very depths of his soul. THEN he returned to his senses and sought God's forgiveness.

Truth: To be careless in spiritual things and to underestimate satanic power is not a sign of "spirituality" or extreme bravery, but of complete folly. Every alert soldier of the cross will always be prepared for the possibility of a counterattack from the devil.

A principle of my life should be to: WATCH and PRAY. [Luke 21:36]

The material needs have been met. Time To Address Spiritual Needs:

The people of God needed to be brought to an intelligent understanding of the Word of God and realize the secret of their strength for the future.

Problem: When God's people get away from loving, reading and obeying the Word of God, they lose the blessing and power of God.

Truth: If I want to be a fruitful tree, I must delight in God's Word.

Ps. 1:2-3 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

1. Ezra and Nehemiah hold a "Bible Conference" at the Water Gate.

It will be a restoration of hearing God's living, prophetic Word. (Neh. 8)

The Spiritual Ministry of Nehemiah for the people included:

1. Instruct the people in the Word- Ezra and the priests explained the Scriptures to the people.
2. Confess Sin
3. Dedicate the walls
4. Cleanse the Fellowship

Note: Ezra & Nehemiah put the Word of God FIRST in the life of the city. What happened in Jerusalem (God's dwelling place) from that point on was a by-product of the people's response to the Scriptures.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones "The primary task of the church is the preaching of the Word of God. The decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching the Word had declined."

Truth: The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to cleanse and revive the hearts of people.

2. Timing of the Conference

- a. 1st Day of the 7th month (Tishri) - Jewish equivalent of our New Year's Day
 - b. This is the day they celebrate the Feast of Trumpets. It is a call to prepare to stand before the judgment of God. 2nd most solemn day on the Jewish calendar
 - c. It marks the beginning of 10 days of Repentance - Days Of Awe
 - d. 10 days of introspection to prepare for the Day of Atonement on the 10th day of 7th month.
 - e. They will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles from day 15 -21.
- Perfect time for the nation to get right with God and make a fresh new beginning.

3. Place of The Conference

The Water Gate led from the old City of David to the Gihon Spring located adjacent to the Kidron Valley. The Bible does not say that this gate was repaired, but only that the workers repaired the walls adjacent to it.

This suggests that the Word of God stands forever and will not fail.

Ps. 119:89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

Matt. 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

"The Bible does not need to be repaired or improved." (Warren Wiersbe -Be Determined)

4. Ezra was an excellent choice to conduct this outdoor Bible conference.

- a. Ezra 7:10 He was a priest and scribe (skilled in the Law of Moses) who had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel."
- God raised up Ezra to rebuild, cleanse and fill the Temple with the Worship Of God.

5. Ezra performed 3 ministries for the people at the Water Gate.

- a. *Ezra Brought the Book of the Law* [Neh. 8:1-4]

He stood on a platform above the people so they see and hear him. (13 other men)

Neh. 8:1,3 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to Bring The Book Of The Law Of Moses, Which The LORD Had Commanded To Israel. [desire to hear and learn]

And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

Note: They stood and listened for 5-6 hours. This continued for a week.

Ponder: In some parts of the world, believers stand for hours in crowded churches to hear Bible teaching. In the western evangelical churches, the shorter the sermon, the better.

b. *Ezra Opened the Book of the Law* [Neh. 8:5-6]

Neh. 8:5-6 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, All The People Stood Up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And All The People answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

I Thess. 2:13 ...when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also Effectively Works In You Who Believe.

c. *Ezra Read and Explained the Book* [Neh. 8:7-8]

v. 8: So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

- Distinctly > explained in a language they could understand - could apply it to their lives.

At the Water Gate in Jerusalem there was no eloquent preaching, no sensational sermon.

Ezra preached straight from the Scriptures, reading for hours on end.

As the people stood and listened to God's Word, they grew excited as the Word "came alive" in them.

The Work of the Word of God + Spirit of God = 3 Immediate Results

1. They Thanked God
2. Prayed with uplifted hands
3. Bowed down before Him and worshiped Him

True revival can never take place without an all-consuming hunger for God's Word.

When God's people grow weary of hearing His Word preached, a spiritual death begins - and the joy of the Lord departs.

Prayer of Spurgeon: Lord God, let the words leap out of the page into my soul, Thyself making them vivid, quick, powerful, and fresh to my heart.

Prayer: Increase my desire & thirst for Your Word.

May Your Word occupy my mind so I meditate on It day and night.