

From Ruin to Ruin, From Glory to Glory (Ezra 3)

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- [0 : 0 0] When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem.
- Then Joshua, son of Zosedach and his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel, son of Sheolteal, and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the law of Moses, a man of God.
- Despite the fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.
- Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the festival of tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day.
- After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the new moon sacrifices, and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the Lord, as well as those brought as free offerings to the Lord.
- [1 : 1 6] On the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord through the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.
- Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters and gave food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorised by Cyrus, king of Persia.
- In the second month of the second year, after the arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, son of Sheolteal, Joshua, son of Josedach, and the rest of the people, the priests and the Levites, and all who had returned from the captivity, Jerusalem, began the work.
- They appointed Levites, 20 years old and older, to supervise the building of the house of the Lord. Joshua and his sons and brothers, and Cadmiel and his sons, descendants of Hedaviah, and the sons of Henedad, and their sons and brothers, all Levites, joined together in supervising these working on the, on those working on the house of God.
- 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 symbols, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David, king of Israel.
- [2 : 4 5] With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord, he is good, his love toward 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.
- But many of the older priests, and Levites, and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud, when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.
- No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy, from the sounds of weeping, because the people made so much noise, and the sound was heard far away. Thank you.
- Kia ora, brother, for that reading. And, Yeah, tēnā koutou katoa. It is just lovely to be here with you again. Howie Baptist Church sends their greetings to you, and I want to assure you that we are regularly praying for you guys.

Make sure I've got that up the right way, I didn't the first time. Can we pray? Can we pray? Our Father in heaven, we bow before you, and we confess that, that you are a great God, and we are a little people.

[4 : 29] And yet you have promised, that where two or three gather, in the name of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, you will be in our midst. So come we pray. Open our hearts and our minds, and transform our lives.

We, we beseech you, that we might not simply speak your praise, but that we might declare it in all that we think and do. So be with us now, we ask, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Whoops. I haven't got it the right way, have I? Have I?

Let's try this. No. Ah, got there. We're right.

I'm a bit odd. At my age, I'm allowed to be. But I love ruins.

[5 : 37] And, quite a few years ago, Priscilla, my wife, and my eldest daughter, Robin, and I, stood on the floor of this ruins, and looked around.

Ruins, you see, tell the story of the past, don't they? They have a history. They've got stuff to pass on to us.

Well, as I walked in there, and stood on the floor of what is, if you don't recognize it, the Colosseum in Rome, I shuffled my feet through the dirt. I've been wanting to do that for years.

Because the dirt, included the blood, and the bones, and the bodies of hundreds, of Christian martyrs. And I wanted to remember, I wanted to remember them, in this monument to death, that offered no hope.

Because, when they died, their hope wasn't in the ruins of this world. But their hope was in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. And then I stood there, and I looked around, and I looked at what's left of the terrace seats.

[6 : 50] There's actually no seats left anymore, just the stones. And I thought of the Saturday nights, when dads took their boys along, to be entertained, on a Saturday night concert, or circus.

they'd watched, they'd watched, as the arena was floodlit, with the, Christians who'd been dipped in, dipped in oil, and then set on fire.

They watched, as, children, women, men, were devoured by lions. appalling, unjust, violence, simply for the entertainment, of man.

But then, the ruins don't hold out any hope, but God does. His promise, that there comes a day, when justice, will be seen.

As we've been reminded, when death, will be finished with. A day when, as Paul reminds us, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ, is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[8 : 18] Ruins, you see, promise nothing. They look back, but they hold no hope, for the future. I accept, that there is one ruin, somewhere, isn't there?

Just a little hole, in the rock, an empty tomb. That holds out promise. And because of that empty tomb, you know, every, decaying, gravestone, of a Christian, every cross, above a grave, of a believer, every little mound, of dirt, or even patch, that is completely, unrecognisable.

Every one of those, holds out the hope, of life in Christ, for those who died, in him. Now, we have, a risen king, who's come out, of the ruins, to live, to intercede, to work, and labor for us, that we one day, will join him, in glory.

And over the last, two weeks, you've been introduced, to this book of Ezra. It's a bit of a puzzle, if you've not seen, anything like that before. you've seen, that above all else, there is a promise, in those ruins.

The people came back, from Babylon, some 50,000 of them, I guess, and, they set about, picking up the ruins, gathering up the rocks, getting some new stuff.

[9 : 54] And what did they do? Well, as you read through the book, Pastor William has reminded you, that they see, above all else, God at work. Right?

God was at work, to restore his people, to worship. God, was at work, in the unbelieving powers, of the earth. I mean, have you ever heard, of the king of Babylon, sending believers, back to Jerusalem, to build, the city, and the temple, that had been, defying him?

God was at work. God was at work, to stir the hearts, of his people, in unity, building, the altar, laying the foundation, of the temple.

And God was at work, to have his temple, rebuilt from ruins. And where is it today? I'm still going wrong.

Oh no, thank you. That's all that's left. It's called the Wailing Wall. The only thing left, is the outside wall, not even of the temple, but of the surrounding grounds.

[11 : 05] And as you look there, you can see people, poking, messages into the rocks, hoping that somehow, if they write something, on a bit of paper, and poke it into the ruins, God will hear, and respond.

It's all that's left, of the temple. A temple built by man, by human hands, it doesn't last, does it? It just becomes ruins.

It just becomes ruins. And I hate to tell any of you, who are builders, or engineers, that's where your work's going. Everything man puts his hand to, becomes ruins.

And with them goes, all the glory, all the glory, that they once had. The same trip, I think it was. No, it couldn't have been. It was a different trip.

Robin and I, went to the top, of the Twin Towers, in New York. And just a few days later, my son rings from England, and says, Dad, look at the TV.

[12 : 07] He says, the Twin Towers are coming down. I said, oh yeah, all right, yeah, okay, I'll look at the TV. Lyndon, the Twin Towers are coming down. All that glory, and I'm standing on the top of it, looking around New York, it was amazing.

Gone. Just destroyed in a moment. A moment of the wickedness of man. And even the ruins of the temples have gone.

Ruin to ruin. What's happened to the glory? What was the message of this ruin? Is it only a message of history without hope?

Or was it glory gone, never to be restored? Why did it cause the old men to weep instead of rejoice?

Was it because the glory was gone, and no glory coming? We have the benefit of looking back and knowing that that's all that's left. And that in itself is after it's been rebuilt and refurbished.

[13 : 21] You see, the temple ruins, they were rebuilding. They were rebuilding for ruin. They were putting it together, and God knew in his plan and purpose that that's all that would be left.

They were rebuilding to be ruined. They pointed, those ruins pointed to something else. Something that is not ruined. Something that is lasting.

Something that will be there forever. I had a word for you engineers and builders a moment ago. Imagine if you could build something that would be there forever.

Well, I've got news for you. It won't be you. But there is something being built forever. You see, they were building from ruin to ruin. But the glory that was attached to those stones and to that building that has long since faded and can't be seen.

In all fairness, that's not terribly glorious, is it? That glory pointed to something that is lasting. That building has pointed to something that is eternal.

[14 : 41] Let me... Oh, thank you. I'll let you do it. Let me point out as our first big point that the glory that does last is a glory that begins with sacrifice.

You see, they'd only been back a few months in Jerusalem, commissioned to rebuild the temple and what do they do? They build an altar. An altar that belongs in the temple and it's out there.

They're building an altar. But why? Why build an altar? Well, they saw that to serve God and to worship Him, they had to deal with sin.

The altar was needed to be a place of sacrifice. Let me take you through the verses here as they were read to us earlier. In verse 1, they came together as one people.

Oh, that reminds me of Acts 4. Right? When everybody had everything in common, they were with one mind and one heart. God had moved in King Cyrus even to support these people and sent them back to their work.

[15 : 51] But even more significantly, God was at work in His people and here is evidence of it. They were of one mind. And then in verse 2, they build this altar.

Do you know what it says? Do you see what it says there? Keep your Bibles open, please. It says they built the altar so that they could sacrifice according to God's law. They were working, they were living, they were laboring in the light of God's word.

Verse 3, despite their fear, I don't know whether you've ever known real fear, but around them were these people who they feared, and rightly so.

There's a real threat that there would be disaster at the hands of these people. What does it mean then that despite their fear, it's not that they said, ah, we're not worried.

They weren't Kiwis. They weren't people who said, oh, we've got nothing to worry about. But, they were people who put their trust in God and said, he will cover our sins and therefore there's nothing left for us to fear.

[17 : 03] And then verse 3, they carefully built on the original correct foundation. They were building what God had revealed that they should be doing. Both in the tabernacle and the temple, they were building a copy of and shadow of what was in heaven.

This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle, see to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. And do you see where this is leading?

There was a temple that already was perfect. There was a temple that although it would cease to be useful, it was never going to be a ruin.

And they had to build according to that pattern so that they would always be looking past the stones and the timber to the heavenly temple. And then verses 4, and 5.

They did all this, the sacrifices and the celebrations, again, according to what is written. That is according to God's word. Note, there's quite a few of the sacrifices are listed, aren't they?

[18 : 09] But you know from chapters 1 and 2 that the writer of Ezra loved lists. And he doesn't keep on with the lists today. He stops and he says, all the appointed sacrifices and festivals of the Lord.

And notice too that this isn't just a mere formality. They continued in the sacrifices, they continued in the celebrations, and they continued with their freewill offerings. This was from their heart.

And then verse 6, if you've been following it carefully as we read it, you'll see that in verse 2 it seems that they started rebuilding the altar on this day.

And in verse 6 they're offering sacrifices on it as if it's finished. And in a literary sense, verses 2 and verse 6 form a sort of continuo, *inclusio* we call it.

It means that everything between those verses sums up something that's happening together. In other words, when it says they built the altar on that first day of the month, they completed it.

[19 : 20] How do we know that? Well, in verse 6 we start to see that they're using it already. On the first day they offer a sacrifice. Fifteen days later they're into the Feast of Tabernacles.

Yes. And what was the first day? Rosh Hashanah. New Year. The very first day of the Jewish New Year. Fifteen days later it's the festival of the Tabernacles.

And yet one day the sacrifices would also become a sort of a ruin. They no longer have any meaning, do they? Not that the Jews sacrifice anymore because the temple's gone and they no longer sacrifice, but if they could it would be pointless.

Why? Why? Because one sacrifice was made at Calvary. one sacrifice forever.

You know over the last little two weeks Pastor William's been reminding you to watch out for repetition. Well there's repetition here. Did you see it? Verse 2 what is written?

[20 : 26] Verse 4 what is written? Verse 10 isn't quite the same but the idea is a repetition. Praise as prescribed by David. Do you see what's going on here?

As we're looking at the rebuilding of the temple God is wanting us to see that his word is what we should be basing our lives and our labours on. So there was one sacrifice offered for sin once and for all and then what did Christ do?

He sat down at the right hand of God perfecting making having made perfect forever those who are being made holy and there he intercedes for us.

What an amazing thing. Actually do you want the old temple? Do you want the old stones? Do you want the old altar? No they all point to something better.

Some of you have probably managed to improve your life at some stage you've moved from a flat to a house maybe even some of you have got a really nice house.

[21 : 32] you move from one but that's going to go. I'm old enough to know that the houses that were once built as the new modern houses are being bulldozed over those that haven't fallen down.

It's no use using these things of this world as our focus. The things that matter all point to the fact that in heaven there is a sanctuary in which Christ is interceding for us no longer offering sacrifice for sin because that one sacrifice was made and never to be repeated.

So our second point is the glory that lasts ends with a living temple. Do you see that? It ends with a living temple.

But wait a minute. Let's look at Ezra 3 and verse 7. They bought the best and paid for it. Do you see what's going on here?

They're actually paying to build this temple. They wanted to make it glorious. Verse 8. But they had been there over a year. You probably didn't pick that up.

[22 : 42] They built the altar. They made the sacrifices over a year before they start building the temple which is what they were there for. The first month was Passover so they didn't start building the temple on the first month after they had been there a year.

But the second month was the anniversary of the laying of the original temple's foundations by Solomon. What a great omen to start with.

And who did the work? Verses 8 and 9. The leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, yep, they did the work. Oh, but so did all the priests and the Levites. Oh, and it says so did all the people, all who had returned from captivity.

Excuse me. Still, we see one united people laboring for the Lord under Ezra's leadership. I'll look at verse 8.

I'm looking at a largely young congregation. Young people were not only included, they were called to leadership. Why does it mention specifically that the Levites 20 years old and older had to supervise the building work?

[23 : 57] Well, originally, you had to be 30 to be a serving Levite. Then after a while, they dropped it down to 25. And now, as they rebuild the temple this time, it's if you're 20.

Hey, that means there's quite a few of you here, should be stepping up. There's work to do. But look at verses 10 and 11. Wow.

The foundations were laid and the celebrations began. They shouted, they sang, the whole neighbourhood. I mean, we're not told how far away people were aware of it, but they heard it from a great distance.

This was some party, wasn't it? And they had the Asaph music group in. Special Concert Group, leading the singing, and they led the people a song of praise with cymbals and trumpets and a loud shout.

I think it's a great verse for the church to have been memorising over these last three weeks. Put it in your heart there and know it. But was this sort of self-induced spontaneity?

[25 : 08] It was worship as prescribed by David, verse 10. Possibly, even with the words of Psalm 100. It looks as if that's where they were singing from.

And this was almost word for word, an instrument for instrument, a match for what happened when the first temple was opened. See Chronicles 2, 5 to 13. By the way, this was outside.

Remember, they hadn't built the temple. If you want to pack this place out with cymbals and loud shouts that are heard over the neighbourhood, I'm going to be missing the next service.

It was a magnificent performance, wasn't it? And they shouted and they wept, stirring up the whole neighbourhood and yet the old people were crying because they had seen the former temple.

Oh, now why would they be sad? Why would they be crying? Well, if you go to the library and you get some books on this, there will be lots and lots of reasons explained. They'll tell you, oh, they wouldn't see the same glory or it was going to be smaller or there were so many years they'd missed out from when the temple was destroyed to when it was being rebuilt.

[26 : 29] Where was all the glory and happiness? Some people turn to Zechariah 4 and 10 where it says that the people despised the day of little things but I don't think there's any reason to make that part of what was happening here.

But you know, we don't have to guess when we read the Bible. Why were they weeping? What did these old people do? They were looking back despairing that things weren't what they used to be.

You know my generation don't you? Oh, you know in my youth it was like this. Things aren't the same as they used to be. You're mostly young people.

No, you don't even bother with that. Yes, we're going to get there and you'll sing the songs and you'll take part in our service. service and then what happens when you're finished?

Well, tomorrow study, work, money, car, house, clothes, fun. And you begin to lose sight of the very thing that excited you today.

[27 : 38] I want to suggest to you that there's not much difference between saying oh, it wasn't like it was when we used to be young to saying oh, it's going to be fantastic, I get it in my bones, I feel it.

But we're both as lost as the others. But there's a spoiler here I want to give you. You know what, when you've got a series and someone says oh, don't spoil it, I'm going to spoil it for you.

The whole enterprise would soon come to a halt. And the young people were forgetting what they were there for and no progress would be made for 16 years. 16 years after that day of excitement.

Wow. You know, us oldies, we say it isn't like it used to be.

But then the writer to Ecclesiastes, the teacher, said this. Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. What do people gain from their labours at which they toil?

[28 : 45] when we're truthful, when we're honest, we say actually it wasn't all fantastic. And then what about you youngsters?

Can I call you youngsters? Yeah, I'm going to call you youngsters. What about you? Do you look at us and say, oh, yeah, we'll pray for them at least? Do you try and live on your own immature wisdom and skill?

Do you turn that into a hope for the future? That's exactly what they did when they were singing. And when an Asaph concert party packed up, they went back to 16 years of doing nothing for the service of this temple.

But God was working and God is working. Next slide, please. firstly, God even brought the heavenly temple on which the earthly one was being modelled to an end.

Once Christ's sacrifice was made and completed, there was no place for an altar or a temple of sacrifice, even in heaven. Be careful though, the sanctuary in heaven continues.

[30 : 01] The temple had two main parts to it, remember? There was the altar by which we were able to approach God. and there was then a sanctuary by which God approached us and that is still there and it still functions in heaven.

Yes, as I've said before this afternoon, Jesus Christ is now set down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven and he serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by mere human beings.

So God has replaced the ruins of the stone temple on earth. Ah, not with the sanctuary in heaven because that's already there. He's replaced it with a new temple on earth.

Have you seen it lately? Slide six. God was and is working his purposes out. He's building his living temple on earth as Peter describes it.

You also, church of Christ, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[31 : 13] And Paul, in the same way, describes it this way. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your minds? Don't think, therefore, of yourselves as ruins.

Right? You are the people God has redeemed in Christ to be built up as living stones. living stones.

You, renewed in the life of Christ to be a block, a lump in this building that functions together for the glory of God.

Maybe you don't like being called lumps, but take it on board. He shaped you to fit in with these other people around you to be that temple.

But it gets even better than that. Because in the new creation, there is no physical temple. Why? Because the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

[32 : 13] Remember the second function of the temple? For God to come and be with his people and when we get to heaven, he will be there. Well, if the temple is about where God is, that's where he is.

And we will be presented to be with him and fellowship with him. So there will never be need for a temple again. God is the temple we go to.

So slide seven. God was and is working his purposes out. He's building his living temple on earth. And God is our heavenly temple. What does that mean for us?

He will dwell, we will dwell with him. Even as he dwells with us. That is eternal life. God dwelling in his perfect presence in himself with us and calling us to dwell with him.

But there is a temple now, isn't there? The ruins of God's temple of stones on earth was rebuilt, yet it is now forever in ruins. But the glory of God's temple of stones on earth that was restored for a while, that has now faded forever.

[33 : 28] ruin to ruin. But there is a temple now. We believers are it and there is a temple promised. Because God says come out from among them and be separate.

That glory, that glory of being separated to God, that glory of being his people, is a glory that is surpassing everything that has gone before.

Would you have loved to have seen the temple on the mountain in Israel when it was rebuilt? The third time, I think. It was faced with white limestone.

And on a sunny day from miles around, you could see it shining as a beacon, the glory of the Lord. Or when Solomon opened it, the glory filled the temple. Would you love to see that?

You are being transformed from glory to glory in a way that puts that stonework to ruin. look at you. Right?

[34 : 28] Just have a look. This is more glorious than that stone ruin, even when it was rebuilt. So how should you respond? Slide eight, please.

Just as the people in Ezra's day laboured to complete the altar and serve God through sacrifices, Paul says, I urge you, brothers and sisters, Romans 12 and 1 and 2, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Or as Paul put it to the Corinthians, in a city that really looked then very much like Auckland looks now. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

You see, out of that history of ruins that threatens to look backwards, we have the promise of something so glorious that God says, stop being part of this world and live as a citizens of heaven for his glory.

[35 : 58] What would stop us? Let's pray. We thank you, our Father in heaven, that the Lord Jesus Christ is risen and that we have a hope, a hope that surpasses ruins and buildings and the work of hands, that we have a hope because Jesus died and lives and intercedes for us.

We have a hope because you have promised that one day we shall be with you. So help us, our God, we pray, to live today as the living temple of the living God.

Help us to set aside the ruins of our lives, of our labours, and instead worship you as you call us to worship, walking with Christ, being transformed moment by moment to be like him.

And we ask that in his name. Amen.