

Restoration: Facing Our Disappointments

Ezra 3 records the building of the altar, the reestablishment of sacrifice and festival observances as well as the laying of the temple's foundation. Restoration is happening. But as we will see there were mixed reactions to this restoration in terms of the temple. For some there was great celebration. For others there was deep disappointment. In our own journeys towards restoration, it is possible that we might face disappointment as well. Restoration is rarely clean and easy and it at times involves its share of disappointments. As we take a look at Ezra 3, may God help us understand how to deal with our own disappointments on the path to restoration.

Read Ezra 3

1. Verse 1 says that the people gathered together as one man in Jerusalem when the seventh month came. What is significant about the seventh month for the Jewish people (see Lev. 23:26-37)?
2. How was building the altar and the reestablishment of sacrifices and festival observances part of their restoration (vv. 1-6)?
3. Upon completion of the foundation of the temple, the priests and the Levites and all the people praised God for His goodness and lovingkindness (vv. 10-11). What significance did God's lovingkindness and goodness have for the Jewish people?
4. Why did some of the old men weep when they saw the foundation (v. 12; see Haggai 2:3)?

Read Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 4:9-10

5. These words from the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to the people came about 20 years after the foundation of the temple was laid. How do they encourage the people regarding their disappointment in what God was doing in their restoration?

Steve said:

Identify and confront disappointments head-on. Like the people in Ezra's day, there will be times when we are disappointed with the way God is working in our lives. Many times the problem is the same as we've seen in Ezra 3 and Haggai 2: comparison. They compared the new temple with the old and were disappointed. . . As you think about the restoration that God might want to bring into your life, can you identify ways that you are disappointed with God? I'm impressed with the way that the prophets challenged the people to face their disappointments head-on. I think they would tell us the same things that they told the people in their day.

6. Can you identify any ways that you are disappointed with God in how He is working out your restoration? If so, explain. What would it mean to face that disappointment head on?

Steve said:

We need to acknowledge that God has the freedom to do new things in our day. This obviously doesn't justify every new thing that the church attempts; and it doesn't mean that new is necessarily good. But at the very least it means that we should be open to new ways that God is leading us as individuals and as a church. We should admit that God has the freedom to work in our lives in any way He desires through any means He wants to employ. In other words, we shouldn't say to God, "You must work in our lives and in our midst only in these three ways. . . otherwise we aren't interested." If we're not careful, we can end up "despising" something that God is doing - which is a spiritually dangerous thing to do.

7. Why is it hard at times to be open to a new thing that God is doing?
8. Are you willing to give God freedom to work in any ways that He sees fit to bring about restoration in your life? What might help you to trust Him in this?
9. What is the main thing that you sense God saying to you through this study?