

Ezra 5-6—From the Wasteland to Worship

- **Intro**
 - Bible...Christianity...History = God rescuing people from the wasteland and leading them into peace-filled, joyful worship
 - Wasteland of hedonism and sinful indulgence; Wasteland of self-righteousness, earning
 - Read Ezra 5:1 —important to know what they said b/c it WOKE UP the people of God!
- **Idolatry Characterizes the Wasteland (Hag. 1:2-9)**
 - This word from Haggai SHOCKED and STIRRED the people of God to repentance, faith and obedience.
 - Israel's IDLENESS led to their IDOLATRY—idly stopped hearing the Word and engaging it/mission obediently!
 - Chapter 4 = the enemy attack from outside.....Ch. 5 = the enemy attack from INSIDE
- **Mourn Sin and Idolatry with Appropriate Sadness (2:2-3)**
 - Huge question: How do you see it now?
 - Essentially God saying—"do you see this mess!
 - Gospel—for GOOD NEWS to really be good, it must invade dark, sinful, broken places!
 - Appropriate Sadness—there ought to be a sensible sadness in us as we see the brokenness AROUND us and INSIDE us, realizing it isn't as it should be!
 - We are meant to feel the echoes of Eden in our heart. How does it look to you now?
 - Recognize this is because we were made for GLORY! Pleasure forevermore!
 - Have we forgotten how to mourn? We've cozied up in our comfortable worlds and have given ourselves to idolatry and have been lulled to sleep and complacency!
 - WARNING—this is one of THE primary dangers facing you!
- **Fight Sin with God's Word and God's Work (5:1-5; Hag. 2:4-5)**
 - God's Word and God's Work drive out idolatry and bring life where there was wilderness.
 - How do we do this fighting?
 - v.5—from the overflow of BEING God's covenant people
 - When you HAVE BEEN loved, delivered, saved, redeemed there is an APPROPRIATE life that flows out!
 - v.4—in God's strength!—"Be Strong"—God knows these people are weak and incapable; he commands what only he can provide. They CAN'T be strong enough without leaning into him! Really a call to GIVE UP!
 - Application—engage this way in whatever area of your life/heart feels like a wasteland!
 - v.5—without fear—"FEAR NOT"—God anticipates our fear and knows it will paralyze us!
 - Says "FEAR NOT" 365 times—we love to mask/hide our fear and God calls us out!
 - Why Fear not?—MY SPIRIT REMAINS IN YOUR MIDST—GOD NEVER LEAVES US... EVEN IN THE WASTELAND!
 - All of this is about God calling his people out of fear and weakness INTO worship and mission! God meets our frailty and failure with HIS FAITHFULNESS!
 - God's Word
 - **God's Work—apathy feeds idolatry; mission fights idolatry!**
 - A bored man is a dangerous man—you may be "busy" but you are also BORED—disconnected from passion, meaning and purpose! This is fertile ground for idolatry!
 - "WORK"—not invitation to Type A people to try harder; invitation INTO joy and rest.
 - Work...FOR I AM WITH YOU—we engage mission b/c God is there!

- **Respond to God's Deliverance with Joyful Worship (6:14-18; Hag. 2:6-9)**
 - Into the wasteland of God's people's hearts and land, God speaks this MIGHTY Word of power and action!
 - Operative Pronoun = I (GOD)—does this sound like “partnership”—like God saying, “HELP! I really need you to get busy!” NO! GOD DECLARING THAT HE HIMSELF WILL DO THIS!
 - 6:14b (read)—God's decree directed the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes
 - Rejoice, for in the wasteland, God's DECREE DETERMINES OUR DESTINY!
 - God's decree (his eye and heart) are on us (Harvest) to move in and USE us!
 - Truth—all of this screams to Israel...”I'm not done with you yet and I ALWAYS FINISH WHAT I START
 - v.15—the temple was completed
 - Irony—in this story as in now, as God works among his people to accomplish his will, he is not only building his Kingdom, he is also building his people!
 - We are both the PRACTICIONERS AND THE PROJECT
 - **Gospel Truths:**
 - Israel—stood in the rubble of sin/failure wondering how anything great could ever happen.
 - God—enters into that rubble and declares a coming, UNSHAKEABLE Kingdom of grace!
- **Continue Celebrating God's Deliverance by Feasting on Christ (6:19-22)**
 - Unreal that this section (Ezra 1-6) ENDS with Passover—centered on slaughtered Lamb!
 - HUGE MOVEMENT—answering the question, “How do you see it now?” by beholding the ruins and wasteland of failure and idolatry to answering the, “how do you see it now?” by beholding the victorious, conquering, unshakeable KING Jesus!
 - Celebration of this meal = remembrance that God NEVER QUILTS in his endeavor to save, deliver and complete his people! Israel did this with Passover...the Church does this with Communion.
 - Each week, this same celebration is our communion! May we come, feast on Christ and then share this feast with others!
 - Application:
 - In Gospel—What you see now is not weakness, fear, ruin, sin, idolatry but CHRIST, in our place, overcoming and conquering all our weaknesses, fear and sin and cloaking us in His perfection and giving to us his complete victory!
 - **Glimpses of Christ:**
 - 6:15—the temple finished on 3rd day and Jesus (greater temple) raised on 3rd day!
 - 6:16-18—they installed priests...we are a kingdom of priests with ONE great High Priest
 - 5:1—Israel had prophetic shepherds in Haggai and Zechariah...we have the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep!
 - 5:2—They heard the word of human prophets and obeyed...we have Jesus, who IS the Word, who gives us words of eternal life.
 - 6:16-18—They celebrated a momentary temple that lasted 500 years and we celebrate an unshakeable, eternal Temple that will NEVER end!
 - The remembered the exodus from Egypt with the sacrifice of a sheep...we remember and celebrate restoration from wasteland to worship by feasting on the sacrifice of a Savior!
- **Conclusion:**
 - Worship erupted up out of the rubble and for Israel, so WORSHIP is God's heart for us.
 - God is powerfully, faithfully building his temple, not in Jerusalem, but in our hearts...in our city! May we receive his provision, rest in His promises and behold His Lamb!

Parent/Child/Church Dedication

1. Call parents/children up front. Ask parents to introduce themselves and their children.

Parent's Names

Matthew and Ashley Poole
Michael and Holly Whiting
Evan and Chelsea Taylor
Jonathan and Ashley Holliday
Thomas and Kay Pinckney

Child's Name

Iris Gabrielle Poole
Knox Emmaus Whiting
Piper Faye Taylor
Levi Thomas Holliday
Caroline Harper Pinckney

2. Challenge by the Church Covenant:

At Harvest Church our vision is that we desire to see lives changed by the gospel. We also believe that that the way we order our families, the way husbands and wives love each other, and the way that parents raise their children is a way to put the Gospel on display.

Our Covenant Says...

As parents, we will raise the children under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

3. Challenge to the Parents:

Parents, this not as much a dedication of your child as it is a dedication that you as parents will raise this child unto the Lord, and that as a covenant family we will commit to serving and aiding you as you raise this child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is a commitment on your part to put on display for neighbors, friends, and future parents the love of God the Father who cares for and disciplines his children, and that as your brothers and sisters we will help you meet this commitment.

So if you commit to raise this child "as unto the Lord" and with the care and aid of the Harvest covenant membership, please answer me with "we do" to the following commitments:

- *Do you recognize that this child was a gift of God's grace from the moment of conception and do you receive this child with thanksgiving?*
- *Do you promise to raise this child under the authority of the Bible, with the help of the Holy Spirit's guidance, and with the encouragement, exhortation, and support of the pastors and fellow brothers and sisters of your local church so that you may bring up your child in the discipline and admonition of the Lord?*
- *Do you promise to raise your child in a home and local church that seeks the glory of Christ revealed in the Scriptures and seeks to lead your child to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus?*
- *Do you promise to seek for your child whatever may please the Lord in His mission, praying continually that God would bless your child so that God himself might be brought glory through your child's life and eventual death?*

4. Challenge to Church Body

Harvest Church, now I'll ask you to commit to help these parents, to help them care for and love these children and to assist these parents in raising their children. As elders we specifically ask you to commit to pray for these children and for those of you in their Community Groups to know you have a special responsibility to come along side them as parents. You are to be like aunts and uncles to these children.

So church family, if you commit to help these parents raise this child "as unto the Lord," please answer me with "we do" to the following commitment:

- *Do you promise to come alongside these parents and to provide support and encouragement to them as they strive, with God's grace, to fulfill these promises?*

5. Charge of Scripture:

Mark 10:13-16: And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

6. Elders lay hands on parents and pray.