

CIC 10-4-26
Ezra-Nehemiah series #4

We already heard there was a first return led by civil and religious leaders named Zerubbabel and Joshua, a second return led by a scribe named Ezra and a third return led by Nehemiah.

Now, what you'll notice is that their experiences are very reflective of our own Christian walk.

The Jews returned.....

In the same way, God still calls us to return and rebuild.

This stirring is something Pas. Randal laid out early in this sermon series.

*There is a God **moment** that leads to a God **movement**. That's what stirring is. CIC is at a prophetic moment. Are we going to rise and rebuild?*

We've been discouraged, disjointed and doubtful long enough. But in Ezra and Nehemiah,

GOD orchestrated the MOMENT, the people participated in the MOVEMENT.

And this is the genuine tension of the Christian walk. On the one hand, I have to get up and build. God won't magically do it FOR me. And yet, it is GOD who does it IN me and THROUGH me. And therefore, ultimately, it is GOD who does it. That's why Psalm 127:1 (GNT) says, "If the LORD doesn't build the house, the work of the builders is useless".

*So, as you heard last week, God's Word through the prophet Haggai stirred them up. It's a prophetic moment. **His contribution to the rebuilding was Passover - a picture of Christ.***

*This week, let's look at ANOTHER prophet who stirred things up around the same time.. Zechariah. Another prophetic moment. **His contribution to the rebuilding was PERSPECTIVE - a picture of the Holy Spirit.***

Haggai's contribution - PASSOVER - picture of Christ
Zechariah's contribution - PERSPECTIVE - picture of the Holy Spirit

Haggai and Zechariah are prophetic moments in the story because they point to what was to come...

Today we're going to sit in the last 4 chapters of Ezra, but we're going to do something that may make Pas. Randal a bit nervous.

We're going to look at Ezra through the lens of Zechariah - in other words, through the PERSPECTIVE of the Holy Spirit. This is a Pentecostal church?

Let's turn to the book of Zechariah, chapter 4 (v. 1-6, ESV) and read from one of the visions God gave him about Zerubbabel.

*4 And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. 2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. 3 And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." 4 And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." 6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: **Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.***

Not by might, nor by power..... BUT BY MY SPIRIT!!

Why does Zechariah use "might" and "power"? Well, the Hebrew word for MIGHT is used to refer to military strength - that's why vs. 6 ends with "Lord of hosts" - the Lord of armies. The Hebrew word for POWER refers to organizational capacity. Together, they point to the human effort that can successfully complete a project.

The project that GOD has for you or CIC - whether it is your individual spiritual formation or this church's collective revival - this is NOT an ambitious project that can be completed with human hands or wisdom. BUT BY MY SPIRIT!!

Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:4 - he did not come to the Corinthian church with plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit.

SO, in these verses in Zechariah, you'll notice there is a lamp stand or menorah in the middle and two olive trees on either side. Most commentators say they represent Zerubbabel on the one side and Joshua on the other.



We're going to come back to this and tie it up in spectacular fashion at the end and it will all make sense to you. So let's look at what this Holy Spirit PERSPECTIVE is all about in Ezra.

1. The Holy Spirit STIRS

“Ruach” is the Hebrew Word for “stirred”. “Ruach” is also the Hebrew word for “Spirit”. And in the opening verse of the opening chapter of the opening book of the Bible the “Spirit hovered over the waters” and over the chaos.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah God stirred the hearts of Kings, Priests and People. He did what only HE can do. Anything to do with people taking action is directly related to the STIRRING. It's the same Hebrew word for the Holy Spirit - so we can safely associate the two.

In chapter 7, Ezra comes back from Babylon in vs. 9 (NKJV)

- and it says the pagan King granted everything Ezra asked for, “according to the good hand of his God upon him”. This is a picture of the stirring.

Again, look at vs. 27 (NKJV) -

“Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart...” This is also a picture of the stirring.

Folks. it is the sovereign, stirring work of God that causes a return to rebuild. HE is the one who arranges the pieces.

So then, our prayer should also be, “Lord, please STIR UP the hearts of the people”.

ACTION ITEMS:

Who are the folks in this place who need to wake up? Who needs to rise up? Who needs to sit up and take notice of what the Holy Spirit is speaking within their hearts?

Connect up like Ezra.... Don't just do your own thing. Don't just act independently. Team up.

Why? Because the Holy Spirit STIRS but He also STRUCTURES.

2. The Holy Spirit STRUCTURES

Ezra 7 and. 8 are fast-moving chapters where Ezra brings structure and health to the work.

Zechariah already told Zerubbabel that ALL aspects of the work are to be done with the help and direction of the Holy Spirit, and nothing would succeed without the Spirit.

Some people tend to think of structures and systems as unspiritual things. The same God who brought order to the chaos in Genesis is the same God who inspired Paul to write to the chaotic church on Corinth (1 Cor. 14:40 AMP), saying, “But all things must be done appropriately and in an orderly manner.”

The story goes on in Ch. 8 to show us how meticulously Ezra measured out the resources and tracked them. There was a system in place. There was structure. And where there is structure, there is safety. You'll see this in vs. 21-23. Their prayer for safety was undergirded by their belief in structure.

Look at all the STRUCTURE actions that Ezra takes.... Last verse in Ch. 7 - "he gathered". Ch. 8, vs. 15 - "I gathered", vs. 20 - "designated by name", vs. 23 - "fasted and prayed", vs. 24 - "separated out leaders".

He didn't scatter - he gathered. No one was doing their own thing, or running a parallel system. They were jointly, together, gathered and focused.

In the coming weeks, we may consolidate, restructure, reorganize and redeploy. You'll see some changes.

Ezra 7:1 (NKJV) says he was a SKILLED scribe. He had the training. He ran the practice. He worked on sharpening his toolkit.

Now here's the most exciting part of the story..... The Holy Spirit brings in the right people with the right skills, but He is also the One who GIVES people the skill.

*Look at Exodus 31:2-3 (NKJV) for example, where it talks about the tabernacle..... this is again, in the **context of building** the place of worship -*

"See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship

Friends, you may think that a Holy Spirit infilling happened in the New Testament at Pentecost, but here it is... right there way back in the Old Testament.

And this is so critical because He uses vessels that are sanctified to build something that is sanctified. In Ezra, part of the work the "Ruach" does is to bring conviction and sanctification.

3. The Holy Spirit SANCTIFIES

In the New Testament, look at what Paul writes about his ministry in Rom. 15:16 (ESV) -

"Grace has been given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

As we wrap up, we have to examine a difficult and troubling portion of the story in Ezra 9 and 10. In the middle of the work, they've discovered there is leaven in the camp. A mixture. This is

not about allowing foreigners to live. It's about allowing corruption in worship. What gives gold its purity is the absence of other metals, the absence of contaminants.

People bring Ezra the news that those involved in the work are living double lives. Even the leaders were involved (v. 2).

So what does Ezra do? Even though he himself was innocent, he identified with those who sinned, and repented on their behalf. He follows the Levitical instructions to the T.

*For Christians, **the Holy Spirit's sanctification isn't just a personal thing. It's an incarnational thing.***

It's not just about ME getting right with God. I need to travail for God to move in the lives of OTHERS!! We are never sanctified so we can stay in a corner and be holy!!

But the people had to do drastic things to demonstrate they were serious about sanctification. You can read all about it in Ch. 9.

When the Passover was first instituted by God, God said to leave out the leaven from the bread. The Jews ate unleavened flat bread that they were told to eat in haste. It didn't have time to "rise", it didn't have time to build a flavor profile or shape.

This leaving out leaven, this omitting of contamination within the life of a believer is going to seem flavorless. Young people, telling your friends, "hey guys, I can't join in on that" is going to be difficult.

The greater the purity of your vessel, the greater the gravity of your ministry!

Let's look again at this image from Zechariah's dream.



There was a lamp stand in the tabernacle. Lamps need oil to burn. But this is different. In this dream, there's a reservoir on top. There were seven spouts going down to each of the seven branches of that menorah. 49 spouts. And there are two olive trees bowing down over this bowl. This is an untarnished golden gleaming lamp stand made of pure metal.

You begin in confession and repentance like the people did in Ezra 9. That you want to be a pure vessel. It's a tough message, but it's the right message.

Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Lamps need oil to burn bright.

But in this dream, there is no need for a human refilling. And without any harvesting of the olive trees, without any pressing of the olives, there's a perpetual supply of golden oil. No human effort. It's abundant. It is always flowing. If you want to know fresh oil, with a perpetual supply..... C'mon now.

No gold lamp can do anything by itself, even if it is polished but it cannot make light by itself. THAT'S WHY Zechariah says, it's not by "might" nor by "power", but BY MY SPIRIT.

At the point of repentance, the spigots are turned on. The Holy Spirit is not rationed.

But, Zerubbabel still had to build. He had to rise early, organize the workers, source materials, push through opposition, keep going when the enthusiasm waned and the obstacles multiplied.

Pentecost was a small group in a borrowed room. Great periods of awakening in church history often began in the most underpromising circumstances with the most unremarkable human instruments. This is not accidental. It is how God consistently works. He gets the glory when what is accomplished is out of proportion to what the human resources we bring.

What changes is not the presence of effort but the location of confidence.

You work hard, but you trust the Spirit rather than the work.

Get ready.

Keep working.

CONCLUSION: