

## What is Good & What is Better! The book of Ezra

**Ezra 1** – “Are you kidding me?!?”

- Cyrus, king of Persia, king & conqueror of the known world, **submits himself under the authority & command of the God of Israel!**
- Prophecies spoken from 3 different prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel), Isaiah’s spoken over a century before, are being fulfilled in Cyrus’ decree!
- God’s people were not only allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, **they were also given all the supplies needed from their neighbors!**
- All the spoils of war, that were taken from the temple when it was destroyed by Babylon, are returned to God’s people by king Cyrus!

If it’s hard for us to believe at times that our God can do **“immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine”**, remember this story!

It’s more than just words we sing in a song, it is an eternal truth - *“Forever God is faithful, forever God is strong, forever God is with us, forever!”*

That doesn’t mean life will be easy! It doesn’t mean things will always work according to our timetable! It doesn’t even mean that we will be able to see & understand God’s faithfulness in the moment, but He is faithful – forever!

**Ezra 3:1-4 – Vs. 1 - “The people gathered as one man to Jerusalem.”**

What a beautiful thing, when the people of God are united, and one, in purpose, in hope, and in living in response to the faithfulness of God!

It’s been said, **“There is nothing like being a part of the Church, when the church is functioning rightly!”** That is so true – & this is a great example.

But the function of God’s people is so much more than just building a structure for worship, it is to be a people that bring glory to God in all of life!

Rebuilding the temple did bring glory to God, but it was never intended to stop there! God wanted to rebuild His people, in keeping with His covenant promise!

**God’s solution to rebuild His people, was the raising up & sending of Ezra!**

In this book that bears his name, Ezra doesn’t show up until chapter 7 of 10!

Ezra – **“He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.”**

Ch. 7 Vs. 10 – **“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his (God’s) statutes and rules in Israel.”**

This was the greatest work of rebuilding that needed to be done in Israel after the exile, and it’s also true of the Church we are all a part of today!

Building programs are exciting, and we get to see immediate & tangible results! **The work of discipleship**, on the other hand, is a long & tedious process that involves much pruning before the evidence of good fruit is ever seen!

Ezra was the leader God used to move God’s people from just focusing on the good work of rebuilding the temple, to an even better work of spiritual growth!

Have you ever made comparisons between **“what is good, & what is better?”**

- It’s good to have 2-3 days in a row of 60-70 degrees in March in Ohio! It’s better when winter is completely behind us & Spring is fully here!
- It’s good to be a Cleveland fan! **It’s better to have a second team to cheer for as well**, so you still have someone to cheer for in the playoffs!
- It’s good to go on a diet! It’s better to eat healthy & exercise more often!
- It’s good to give a fish to a person who’s hungry! **It’s better to teach that person how to fish, so they will never go hungry again!**
- It’s good to walk down the aisle on your wedding day! It’s better to experience God’s glorious intent for this covenant we call marriage!
- It’s good to build a temple for the Lord! **It’s better to be a temple that the Lord chooses to reside in!**
- It’s good to read through the Bible! It’s better when what you read in the Bible gets through you!
- Going to church is good! **Being the Church in this world is far better!**

**Ezra’s name means help.** He helped the people of God to choose not just the “good” of returning to Jerusalem, but “the better” of returning to God, and to the everlasting covenant relationship that was established between them!

Ezra helped point out the sin of God’s people, that which caused their exile, and the destruction of Jerusalem in the first place! Most people/of us would not receive such rebuke as “good”, **unless we see the “better” that comes thru it!**

When the people of God acknowledge their sin, confess it, repent & turn from it, & re-establish their covenant relationship with God, they are choosing the “better”! There is a lot of “good” that comes from being here & being a part of “the Church”, but don’t miss out what is better!

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