

## **Live as One of God's Redeemed**

Ezra 3

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Everyone has moments in their lives that change their reality, events that cause a paradigm shift in their thinking. But as Christians the main life-changing moment should be that of our redemption. Those who are redeemed live a completely new life. Today we will find out what it means to live as one of God's redeemed.

Recall from last week that after decades of exile in Babylon, the Israelites from the kingdom of Judah finally returned home to rebuild the Temple, which symbolized a right relationship with God. In Ezra 3 the work of rebuilding begins. First the altar is built so that they could, as soon as possible, worship God once again. They construct the altar despite the fear of the peoples around them, the foreigners who were made to occupy the land while Judah was in exile, and who were charged with maintaining worship of Yahweh, but not according to the Law. They are understandably offended when the Israelites return, set up their altar, and start proper worship, invalidating these foreigners' worship practices. And after rebuilding the altar, the Israelites celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, during which they live in tents to commemorate the exodus from Egypt. Finally, the Israelites lay the foundation of the new Temple.

From this passage there are two aspects of how to live as God's redeemed. First is that God's people live in light of His word. A few times in this passage phrases like "according to the Law of Moses," "according to what was written," and "as prescribed by David" are used to indicate that the returning Israelites are in obedience to the Law. This is in contrast to the behavior of Israel (2 Kings 17) and Judah (2 Chronicles 36) in the past, which led to the exile in the first place. Throughout history Israel disregarded and disobeyed God's commands, but after experiencing God's redemption, they now follow His word. And they do so with a focus on worship and remembrance. The building of the altar, the sacrifices, and the celebration of the festival are all acts of worship. The Law details the procedures for proper worship of the holy God, which must be strictly followed. These instructions didn't make the Israelites worthy of God's presence, but by obedience the Israelites finally acknowledge God's complete holiness and the fact that God can only be approached in the way He provides and commands. And they also focus on remembrance by celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. They remember how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt, as they are presently experiencing deliverance from exile

in Babylon. The parallels between the two deliverances can also be seen in Ezra 1:6, where the Israelites are given treasure to take back to their homeland, just like in Exodus 12:35-36. And in both cases they were set free so they could worship God, for God redeemed them for Himself, not for themselves. Likewise we are redeemed to God. We are set free from slavery to sin, so now we belong to God, who purchased us with the blood of Jesus. Live as those who have been freed from sin (Romans 6:14). And live a life that glorifies God (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Second, God's people live in light of God's character. In Ezra 3:11, the people sing a song of praise. They sing of God's goodness and steadfast love. This goodness is more than just moral goodness, but it means benevolence, kindness, and generosity, by which He forgave, redeemed and restored them. Let us glorify Him by declaring His goodness. Remember how He has been good to you even when the world or our circumstances make it hard to see His work or thank Him for His blessing. For though our circumstances and the world may change, God's goodness is constant. In addition to goodness, let us praise God for His steadfast love, His loyalty and faithfulness. In 3:2 we see that Jeshua and Zerubbabel, who are in the lines of Aaron and David respectively, return to Jerusalem. Just like in Ezra 2, the return of these two speaks of God's preservation of the priestly and royal lines, as promised in Jeremiah 33:14-22. God is faithful to His people. And He is loyal to us. He is always for us, so that nothing can stand against us. No matter our situation, God is always good and loves us steadfastly.

Finally, in v. 12-13 we see that some older Israelites weep, not just because the new Temple is less magnificent than the old, but because the rebuilding brings back painful memories of the destruction of the old Temple. But even in grief, they are among all those who praise God (v. 11), because although God's goodness doesn't nullify their grief, neither does their grief nullify God's goodness. We must be honest that not everything in life brings joy, yet acknowledge still that God is good. While we grieve, we praise God, and lift up our sorrow to Him. And just as we do with our grief over the past, we should do with our anxiety about the future. Continue to trust and praise God, being sure of His unchanging character. Praise Him and lift your concerns to Him in prayer. Ask Him for comfort and in all things glorify His character.