

Restoring His Testimony

Ezra 1:1-5 says, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem. Then the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.”

Ezra 3:1-4 says, “And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening burnt offerings. They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.”

Oh, Heavenly Father, we look to You this morning. Only You can open Your word to us. Only You can show us who You are. Only You can say, “This is what I am doing.” Lord, only You. And we turn to You this morning. We thank You that You have brought us to Yourself, that we might be Your people. And Lord, that is our desire. We do want to be Your people, walking with You wherever You lead. Take Your word this morning, I pray and feed us from it. May there be real food for our hearts and our spirits. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction

Just to give you a little idea of how I came up with what I am going to speak about today: Jerry Aman gave a word out of Haggai, and it was about building the house. I started to think, “Well, Lord, how do You build? Or how do You take part in building a house?” That is what made me look to the Lord, and wonder, and ask Him about these things.

And the other thing is, we use big concepts, and they become to me—not saying to you—they become just keywords, talking points. And they lose, to me, they lose their edge because I have heard them and I have heard them and I have heard them. And I

want to say my own heart has not responded. That is what makes things go cold if you do not respond.

But in looking at this, there cannot be any building or rebuilding of the house without people returning to Jerusalem. And we have to remember, when Ezra started out, the people were not in Jerusalem; they had been in exile for 70 years. What is happening is that the Lord—if you recall from reading Ezekiel, or as you might have come across in Ezekiel—the Lord left the temple and departed.

There is nothing there. The temple has been destroyed, the ark has been taken away, and the walls have been broken down. All those things have happened. What is the Lord doing?

The Lord's Initiative

That is really the key here. This is something that the Lord is doing. It is not something where we say, "I think it is about time we went back." There is nothing that comes out of our own hearts or our own minds. We study the Scriptures and we think, we try to ascertain, "I think this is what the Lord is saying." But it is the Lord initiating everything because the Lord always initiates. He initiates salvation. It was in His heart first.

And how many of us know—we look back on when we got saved. I think Jack Cox talks about how there are layers of things that happen before we get saved, things that lead up to it, but it is always initiated by God. God initiates it because He created us for a purpose. He created man for His own pleasure, His own purposes, and it is not for man, but for His own sake that He redeemed him.

And it is for His own sake. If we remember, I think about a year ago I shared some messages on the exile. And when it came to the part about bringing them back—when He was promising to bring them back—He said in Ezekiel, chapter 36, "I do this for my own sake, because you have destroyed my testimony. Everything that I have—people blaspheme because of you. They blaspheme my name because of the way you act, because of what you do. And I am taking you and putting you into captivity. I am going to judge you and discipline you." But there is always that little promise in the end: "I will bring you back."

He says that to His people—you cannot be brought back if you are not His people. But you can be brought to Him initially. Anyway, the whole point is that what He is doing here is restoring His testimony. And these are big words. I just want to say—in another way, if we look at His restoration or His actions, it is His work.

God's Movement in Ezra

We looked at this in a different way: what we are seeing in the book of Ezra is God moving. God is moving to bring about His own ends, His ends for Israel, His ends for His people. It is not just that He is working outwardly, moving all these puzzle pieces. In doing this, He is not only moving globally or nationally, but He is also moving in my life

and in our lives. This is not separate from us. God never wants to work apart from His creation, which is us.

Another thing that is happening is that they are going back. There is a change in the hearts of the people because they are starting to listen. Actually, I listened to Ed Miller—this is the end of Old Testament history: Ezra and Nehemiah, the end of that history of Israel and the Old Testament.

And I want to say that it is during this time that we have the promise of the new covenant. Jeremiah was speaking to those who had already gone into exile when he talked about the new covenant in chapter 31: “And I will forgive your sins, and I will remember them no more.”

And in Ezekiel, who was in captivity, the Lord was there. He was speaking to them even in captivity, and He said, “I will give you a new heart, a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. I will put my spirit in you.” If we want to look at this, it is kind of like the transition between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, which will begin about 450 years later, when Christ comes. Here we have these things that are happening.

A Different Kind of Captivity

Now this is a different situation than in Exodus. In Exodus, the people were slaves. In other words, they were held against their will. They were held against their will under a cruel taskmaster. And God redeemed them with a mighty hand. He pulled them out of their slavery, defeated the one who held them captive, and led them out with a mighty arm into the promised land.

The people in Ezra and Nehemiah are a picture of being restored. These people were actually not slaves, or at least not many of them were slaves. Remember the prophecy in Jeremiah, chapter 29: God says, “You are going to be there 70 years. This is what I want you to do—go ahead, build houses, have children, do these things—because it is going to be 70 years, and then I am going to bring you back.”

They are in captivity, all right? And that is a good way to put it. I was a basketball player in high school and college. I was in captivity to basketball, and it was wonderful. Do you understand that? It was wonderful. Slavery is not a wonderful thing. Captivity does not have to be bad, and I loved it. Even after my days of playing in college, I kept playing in (recreation) leagues and all sorts of things because I loved the game, I loved the competition. I loved it. That was captivity.

And the Lord brought me out of that captivity because I got old. It was naturally supernatural—the Lord was getting me out of that. I like college basketball, but I do not like the pros. But I will tell you, I liked being captive in that. In the same way, a lot of these people liked being captives. We will get into that.

God's Testimony and His People

God is working in men and through men to restore His testimony. His testimony is not about the way they get together and meet, because they were meeting in captivity. We will get into that in a moment. It was not about the way they met; it was about who they were. They were His people. That is the key.

His testimony is His own. He has brought us to show forth who He is. When I studied the law a few years ago, I realized that the law was not given just to say, "Do not do this, do not do that, and do not do the other thing." It was not just given as a set of rules to separate one set of rules from another. It was a picture of who God is.

This was just a picture of who He is. Do not commit adultery because I am faithful. Do not steal because I have everything; I do not need anything else. Do not steal. If you have Me, you have everything you need. It is a picture of who He is—not who He was—who He is.

Four Actions in God's Recovery

God is going to restore His testimony. I just want to point out that there are four actions here in chapters one and three, in the verses I read. From the first chapter, we see the hearing of His people and their movement. In chapter three, there are three things: they gathered together as one man, they rebuilt the altar, and they observed the Feast of Tabernacles. We want to look at this as God's way of recovery. When God is recovering things, things happen in our lives. We are brought into these things.

Hearing and Moving

The first thing that happened is it says they heard and they moved. Notice it was not just that they heard. And we are great hearers—we are just good at hearing. But some of us are just not that good at moving. We like to hear. I was a history major. I loved lecture classes because I enjoyed hearing stories about what happened and putting things together. But I did not like writing papers. I did not like taking what I was learning and putting it back on the page to be evaluated. My senior project, I thought, was the role played by the Russian Revolution; but it was role-playing the Russian Revolution. All of a sudden, I was in deep, deep trouble. At the end of it, we had to write a 20-page paper. It was rough for me; I got a C+. That is fine, I passed. Basketball player. I passed. That is good.

But the whole thing is this: it is about hearing and moving. Let me say one thing about hearing. "I heard you." Have you ever said that to your wife? "Yes, I heard you," which means what? It means, "But I am not doing it. But I heard you loud and clear." It is more than just discerning a voice. It is more than just understanding the words. When the Lord talks about hearing, "He who has ears, let him hear"—The Lord is not just talking about hearing with the ear; He is talking about hearing with the whole body. You hear with your whole being, and hearing is heeding. I take in what I hear, and I respond to it. I respond to what He is saying. It is about heeding.

Hearing Before Cyrus

This hearing—to give you an idea of what we do when we hear—this hearing started before Cyrus. It was not just the edict that was put out there. Mac used a chapter in Daniel last week, Daniel chapter nine. It says at the beginning, “when Daniel ascertained the years from the prophet Jeremiah,” he realized they were about to be fulfilled. He did not just say, “Wow, that is great.” No, it says he prayed, there was a hearing, and he felt that this was the time the Lord was saying, “I want to do this. Are you with me?” Daniel never returned, but he was one who brought about the return of others, and he prayed.

Sometimes the Lord shows us something, and it is not just for us to enter into, but it is to pray for others to enter into it. I am not saying this as if I have some great knowledge and others need to enter into it; but rather, it is more like what Moses experienced. The Lord said to Moses, “You are not going into the land, but you will lead My people to the border.” I do not get to go in; I do not get to do this. But I am still an integral part. This is how it is for some of us older saints. We are looking to the whole generation, not just our own part of it. As older brothers and sisters, we are no longer the tip of the iceberg—we are the base, the unseen part. The visible part is those whom we are supporting and praying for. We are holding them up before the Lord through our prayers, by our fellowship with younger brothers and sisters, and by sharing what the Lord has given us from our experiences and our walks with God.

That is what Daniel did. He was an older brother, probably in his eighties or close to ninety. That means there is hope for some of us, does it not? I always look at things and say, Abraham was seventy-five before he really started to move. There is hope for me.

Then there was the edict of Cyrus, or the proclamation of Cyrus. The point I want to bring up about this is that it is not just that he made an edict, but who it was that made the edict. That is the important part, because sometimes we read scripture—and I will use this analogy of the edict being like the word of God, spoken to us, revealed to us, or brought to us, telling us to act on it. It is that rhema; this word is for this moment. This is it. But we do not take into account who it is that is speaking that word to us.

The first youth retreat I ever spoke at; I gave a message on “Who do you say that I am?” Not who do men say, but who do you say I am? I went through a number of things, and that is the whole point. Some of us do not know who is speaking to us. Some of you younger saints might say, “God is so gracious.” When He revealed Himself to Jacob, do you know how He did it? He said, “I am the God of your fathers.” Because for some of us, that is how we see God—He is the God of our fathers. But is it not gracious of the Lord to come and say, “I know where you are, and I am coming to you where you are. I am the God of your fathers, but I want to be your God.”

Here is the difference. We have all these ideas—these images—of who Jesus is: Shepherd; the Way, the Truth, the Life. We sometimes sing about Him being King. But I do not know if we really see Him as King. That is who He is today. He is King—He is

sitting at the right hand of Majesty on high as King, as King over us. It is not like, someone—like my friend Jerry—saying something to me that I can just blow off. If I really realized He was speaking to me, I might straighten up and say, “You are talking to me? You are talking to me. You are the One on High. You are speaking to me.” I do not think—even, for example, the disciples really understood that the Lord was King while He was on earth. I do not think they really understood who He was. “You are the Christ, You are the Son of the living God”—sometimes that is just a good religious summary of Him. But in reality, He is the King. He rules overall. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” It is an awesome thing to think about, to ponder.

John was the one who leaned on Jesus' breast. I just wonder, do you ever wonder why he fell at His feet in Revelation chapter one as though dead? Because Jesus appeared in a whole different light—it was not the same Jesus on which he had leaned. He was now an all-powerful King.

The whole idea is that it is the King speaking to us. The thing is, not many—most people did not respond. He was saying, “I want you to go back; I am sending you back. Everything you need is provided for you. I am sending you back; I want you to go there, and I want you to build My house.” All of a sudden, people said, “Ah.” What happened is, they were no longer captives, but they were captivated. They were captivated by where they were. A lot of these Jews had prospered during this time. Whether it was business, farming, or whatever it was, they prospered.

Religion in Captivity

Another thing happened, and this is really, really important: they got religion, because it was during the time of the captivity that the synagogue came into existence. I do not know exactly when it came into existence—I kind of think it was halfway through. But the thing is, it did come into existence, and you started to get a class of scribes. When you read the Old Testament, especially in Kings and Chronicles, you might wonder, “Why are they doing this? Do they even read their Bible?” The thing is, no, they did not. As a matter of fact, remember in Josiah's revival— “Hey, look what we found! My gosh, it is the law!”—and then they realized, “Oh man, we are in trouble.” The whole point is that now they have these two things with them. Now, not only had they prospered monetarily and culturally, but now they had a meeting place and a law to guide them. What else do they need? This is all we need. Why do we need to go back there? We do not know what is going on back there. We have all we need right here, we will stay. But you brothers who want to go, we will pray for you. As a matter of fact, here, I have a couple of dollars—this will help you out on the way down. That is what was happening. They had the best of both worlds, and they were happy with that.

The Responders: The 50,000

There was a group of people who not only heard but moved—they responded. There is nothing better than having someone you love to respond to you. There is nothing better than that, humanly speaking. I could give you examples, but I would get

mushy, so I will leave it at that. You had the people who responded, they got up and they went. It was only about 50,000. I do not know how many Israelites, or how many Judeans, or how many Jews there were at that time. They had 70 years to propagate, so there must have been a lot of Jews by then. Just to give you some examples, it is not that they were not getting into the word. One of the biggest books that Jews today look to is the Talmud. There are two Talmuds: one that comes out of Jerusalem and one that comes from Babylon. Do you know which one they look to more? The Babylonian Talmud. That just shows you that these people did study, and they looked at these things, and they had an ethic. This is what it is. This is what life is about: ethical monotheism. There is one God, and He gives us a set of rules to live by. We live by those rules. We have the day of the Sabbath. God gave us the Sabbath so we could give it back to Him. That is what they did. We have enough. This is all we want.

Then you had about 50,000 people go. The American Standard version says that Zerubbabel and Yeshua and all these people, and “even all who were moved by the Spirit,” went. If you read chapter two of Ezra, you know it only mentions about thirteen individual names. It names a lot of families, but only thirteen individuals. Those are the important figures. What does that tell you about the people who went back? Not many were noble, not many were skilled. But God is glorified. God is glorified in the ones who return—nameless people. Is it not a wonderful thing that the Bible talks about people, but there are a lot of them it just does not name? Why do you think that is? Because I think sometimes, we feel like we are nameless people. It is wonderful to know that God uses nameless people, that He calls out nameless people to Himself.

Gathering as One

The next thing that happened was they gathered as one man. They came together and gathered as one man. I just want to say that God always moves in individual lives, but that is never His ultimate goal. That is not the end of His work in you. When you come to the Lord, it is not that you become a Christian and stand alone by yourself. You have your own testimony, and you stand before men in your own testimony. God never meant for that to happen; He meant for us to be in a body. God moves individuals, and He moves them to gather together because they are of like mind. By “like mind,” I do not mean that they all believe exactly the same things or agree on every detail, but they all believe this: God has called me to be here. God has called me out, and I have obeyed Him.

Just to give you an example, when Jerry Linnebur and I were young Christians and we got saved, we were just doing what Christians do—going to church. But there was something missing, and we could not put our finger on it because we were doing the right things. We were going to church; we were going to Bible study. We did not go to prayer meeting because, that seemed like too much. We were at a church that met in the park, and we were just wondering, what do we do with ourselves? Is this what being a Christian is? Is there more to being a Christian than just going to these meetings and being told this and that?

Then one of the guys—there was Jerry and Eddie, I had two brothers with us, and Lou Police, Floyd's son, said, "I think my dad will teach us a Bible study." And we were thinking, "another Bible study?" But this Bible study was different, because all of a sudden, we were like-minded and brought together. I did not know Jerry Linnebur except by name in school because he played football and I was basketball, and we did not really interact. I did not know Ed very well, and I knew very little of Lou except that he drew a lot. But we were like-minded. It did not matter that we did not know one another; all of a sudden, we were drawn together, to be together under the Lord. That is what it was—we were like-minded. We wanted to know Him, we wanted to serve Him, and we were asking, how do we do this? The Lord brought us together, and all of a sudden, He gave us what we needed. He gave us what we were seeking. I am not saying He just gave us a Bible study—He opened the Word to us in a way we had never experienced before. Part of that was because of the way Floyd taught. It was not just that he sat up front and talked to us; he got us involved. You do not just go to a Bible study, open the Bible, and listen to someone—you have to read your Bible. What are you studying? You should read that. Do you have questions about that? All of a sudden, there was dialogue. It became not just dialogue at the Bible study, but also dialogue between us, and between us and the Lord. All these things were happening, and all of a sudden, we were gathering as one man, and the Lord was bringing us into something bigger. It is not just my own walk with Jesus—I am related to each one of you. I am not as closely related to some as to others; I am probably closest to Jerry, Bob Dorotich, Mac and Stella. Those are the people to whom I am most closely related. But that does not mean I cannot be related to all of you. We show our relationship by being together, and it is not just being together in a meeting.

We are called to be together. When we have this breakfast on Saturday morning, that is a call from the Lord, saying, "I want you to come together and have fellowship, because that is what you do when you eat. Come. You hear Me knocking—open the door and sup with Me."

Rebuilding the Altar

The third thing that happened was they rebuilt the altar. I just want to say a couple of things about the altar. The altar does two things. Number one, it represents judgment. Number two, it is a place of offering. When I say it represents judgment, that is really, really important. The altar was really just a box of wood, and wood represents humanity, but it was overlaid with bronze. Bronze is a metal that signifies judgment. It was covered with bronze, and that tells you what God's view of humanity was: it had to be judged.

The wonderful thing about it is that we are bronzed. We are bronzed. We have been judged. We have been judged in Christ. That is a wonderful thing to open with. I no longer have to worry about being judged for my sin. I have been bronzed. Remember back in the fifties, people used to bronze baby shoes? We have been bronzed, and when we come here to the Lord's table, it is a good thing to remember: I have been bronzed. I come in the good of being bronzed.

The other thing is it is a place of offering. In Babylon, there was no altar. There was no altar. Let me just say why this is important. When they came to this altar, they did not come for atonement. This was not about atoning work. This is a place of offering, and the offering was themselves. That is what it was. This is a place of offering. What shall I render to God for all His goodness to me? What shall I render? In Babylon, there was no altar, but there was a Sabbath. I give God the Sabbath. What does God want? Does God want a day? No.

When they set up this altar, its purpose—if you read Ezra chapter three—was to begin or reinstitute the daily offering. This daily offering was an offering of oneself. It was meant to restore this daily offering, something the people in Babylon did not have. There was no restoration of that offering of giving oneself. Giving myself is that sacrifice. The daily offering means this. People might say, “This is Romans 12:2—present yourself as a living sacrifice.” But I want to use a couple of other verses instead. Romans 6:13 says, “Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Present yourselves as being alive from the dead.

Let me just put that into a real form. Brothers and sisters, especially young brothers, and sisters, it is so hard to come to the Lord when you have experienced failure in your life. It is just hard—you feel like the Lord is not happy with you. You think, “I cannot. How can I come to the Lord like this?” Remember, this is the whole idea. You are bronzed. You are not only dead, but you are also alive. When they put the altar on its foundation, the foundation was solid—it could not be tipped over. In other words, if I were a little bit lighter, I could stand on this. That is the whole point about your offering: when you come to that altar, you can stand on it. You can stand on it and know that your sins are forgiven, because the foundation of that altar is Jesus Christ.

What I mean by the foundation being Jesus Christ is this: it means His incarnation—He became a man so He could relate to you, and you could relate to Him. It means He sacrificially died on your behalf. Because He sacrificially died sinless, He was raised from the dead for your justification. Finally, He gives you a hope because He has ascended into heaven as a man. That is important—He ascended into heaven as a man. That gives me hope because I, as a man, can now go into heaven. That is a wonderful thing to know, something to grasp hold of.

The other one is this, because this is really what that daily offering is. Psalm 40:7-8 says, “Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God.” In Hebrews 10:9, it uses this verse, but it says, “Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” Brothers and sisters, this is where all our service and everything else comes from—it comes from this altar being set up. That altar is my daily offering of myself to God, where I come before Him. This is the thing: when I come to the Lord, I present myself. But I do not present myself based on what I have done, who I am, or what I have not done. That is not what the altar is for. The altar is to lay yourself on Jesus Christ and let that altar take you to God, because He is the One who brings you to God. God is satisfied with Him, and that is why He has put you in Him—because He is satisfied with you in Him. That is what the whole death of Christ is about. That is why we do not

want to shirk that, because when we do, we are making little of His death. His death was to make us free so that we could present ourselves before God to do His will. Present yourself as alive from the dead to do His will.

The thing is it is not just me doing it. Since we gather together as one group, we all do it, and we are all coming to the altar. That is why we are gathered together as one group—because we see others coming to the altar and re-establishing that daily walk. We are encouraged to re-establish our own daily walk before God in newness of life. That is the bottom line: it is not your old life that you are presenting to Him anymore, it is a new life. It is the life of Christ in us.

Observing the Feast of Tabernacles

Finally, they observe the Feast of Tabernacles, which follows the Day of Atonement. It is about a week after the Day of Atonement. What I mean by that is their sins have already been atoned for. That is the whole attitude during the Feast of Tabernacles: our sins are already behind us. Because my sins are behind me, the Feast of Tabernacles is one of the most joyous of all the feasts, because there is nothing left to remember. “I have separated your sins as far as the east is from the west. I have forgotten about them because I have dealt with them. They are off the ledger.”

Each feast has its own focus. Passover focuses on redemption—being set free from Egypt and deliverance. First Fruits carries the idea of resurrection and what lies ahead of us. Tabernacles are about the full harvest. There were two aspects of Tabernacles: one was as a remembrance of the journey in the wilderness and how God provided everything. People would stay in tents, cover them with tree branches for shade, and remember their exodus and how God provided for them. It was a great way of acknowledging that God provided for them throughout their time in the wilderness, and they could rejoice in that. The other aspect was that it took place at the time of harvest, serving as a celebration of what the Lord had done—how He blessed them with His harvest.

Tabernacles, in a way, is a way of saying to us, in the booths—the making of the booths—I am sorry, I am kind of losing my train of thought right now. When we travel in booths, we can tritely or trivially say, “This means the world is not my home.” That is true. The thing is you do not come to that knowledge just by repeating a trite saying. What gets you to the place of saying, “This world is not my home,” is your time of presenting yourself to God. If you do not present yourself to God, you do not see what He has done for you. You do not see what He is doing in you. You do not see the full effect of everything there is. This world remains your home, and you look for your satisfaction here. But when you start having that time, that daily time, all of a sudden, He brings you into things that you had never seen before. You come into a love that is so precious.

The hope—the harvest was the hope of the farmer. Why does a farmer plant grain? It is in the hope of the harvest. The Lord Jesus planted Himself. Unless a grain of corn

falls to the ground, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. There you have the whole idea of gathering together again—the idea that there is a harvest to be made. This harvest for us is a hope of glory. I think we do not think about this often because we look at the world outside and see the things going on in Iraq, or we see the disarray in our own country, and our eyes are everywhere except in a place of saying, “There is a hope that I am going to be complete.”

What do you picture? What do you picture as far as what the hope of glory means? Have you thought about that? What is the hope of glory for you? I know what it is for me. It is a body where Jesus says, “The enemy has nothing in Me.” That is part of what I see. I am looking forward to that transformation where the enemy has nothing in me. I am looking forward to that place where I am not overcome by the flesh, but my spirit is so strong that my flesh is in check. I am looking forward to no death—I do not mean physical death, but no separation from God. Never separated. I think sometimes so little of what I have in Christ.

It says in Colossians 3:1, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above.” What are the things that are above? You might think, what is it? Do they have new kinds of fruit up there, new modes of transportation? Is that what I should seek? No. The first thing I think of now, when I think of the things that are above, is the fellowship between the Father and the Son, and that I can have that fellowship with Them. That is what it talks about in I John, is it not? We have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Seek that. Seek that fellowship. While you are on earth, you are raised with Him. Seek that fellowship. Seek that kingdom. Seek that rule in your life where it says, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That harmony with the mind and heart of God is something to seek after. It is not just spiritual things; it is realities that the Lord has put before us and said, “These are yours if you respond to Me.” Now, I have done a poor job, but that is fine because the Lord has grace.

Conclusion

I just want to end with this. The Lord starts things in our lives, and the Lord finishes things in our lives. But do not take it for granted and use that verse from Philippians, “He who began a good work will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus,” if you are just going to sit and say, “Amen, let it be, Lord;” because then it is not going to happen. But when He says, “What I have started,” when He called those brothers and sisters out of Babylon and brought them to this place—He took them step by step. “I brought you here so that you could restore My testimony.” Little by little, He brought them here, here, here. When they laid the foundation of the temple, it says the older saints wept. We get to a point of saying, “I am looking for big things. I was hoping the Lord would do something much bigger in my life,” because it is not the way we wanted it to be, or people do not see what you want them to see. But the Lord said in Zechariah, who was one of the prophets from this time of restoration, “Do not despise the day of small things.” The Lord says, “little by little, take steps to get there. Come and gather as one. Come, rebuild the altar, set it up on its foundation. Offer that daily sacrifice. Then look at

what I have provided for you. I have provided you with glory. I have provided you with a home that is not on this earth.”

Oh, Heavenly Father, I know that You are a great God. Now I just want to thank You. You are able to do the things that You want to do, and I want to thank You that You want to include us in doing them. Lord, I pray for myself first, that these things I am talking about will not just fall to the ground in my life, that they will not just be straw on the ground. But, Lord, I pray that You will bring life out of them. I pray, Lord, that when I see it, and You say, “Can these bones live?” I can say, “Lord, I do not know, but You do.” You breathed on the bones, and You brought life to them.

Lord, for my brothers and sisters here, I do not know where they are (spiritually), except that, Lord, they are in You. I pray for them. I pray that everything You intend for them to be as a testimony to You; You will bring about in their lives. I pray, Lord, wherever they are lacking, that You would bring in that which fulfills—not fulfilling their lusts or their desires to be spiritual, but fulfills Your desire for them as Your testimony. I pray for us as a group, Lord, that we would be a testimony to You—not like those who are just here for a meeting and a set of rules, but that we would be a living testimony to You and truly bring You that daily offering: that morning offering that says, “Lord, I am here for You,” and that evening offering that says, “Oh Lord, thank You for keeping me.” Lord, we want to give ourselves afresh to You. We want to be those who not only hear but also move. Lord, we thank You for Your Holy Spirit. We thank You for Your desire. We thank You for Your plans. We thank You for including us. Lord, we want to be restored into that testimony. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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