

City of God Part 3 - "First things First" (4-26-26)

Introduction: Reminder of Key Themes, Review Series so far, then introduce today's topic

Key Themes

- **Temple** (Where God meets with us) - embracing what God is building and doing now, let go of expectations
- **People** (Who we are as God's people) - coming out from another culture that we are too intertwined with
- **City** (How we live as the people of God) - set apart, invite the people around us, but oppose the culture

Series Review

- **Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6):** 1st wave of exiles return, rebuild the altar, lay foundation, and rebuild temple
- **Ezra 1-2:** The proclamation has gone out, and the people have gathered and moved back to Israel . . .

Main Text: Ezra 3:1-6

Ezra 3:1-6 (ESV)

[1] When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, **the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem.** [2] Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and **they 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. [3] **They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.** [4] And **they kept the Feast of Booths,** as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, [5] and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at **all the appointed feasts of the LORD,** and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. [6] From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. **But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.**

1) An Altar - They Gathered as one and Built the Altar

Ezra 3:1-2 (ESV)

[1] When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. [2] Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they 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.

Note: **Altar** is a noun, formed from the verb **sacrifice**. **At the altar** - we give a sacrifice as an expression of worship and gratitude, and for an atonement for sin.

Noah

Genesis 8:20 (ESV)

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Note: First appearance of altar - an expression of gratitude and worship for what the Lord has already done!

Abram / Abraham

Genesis 12:7 (ESV)

Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Note: An altar built as an expression of faith in God that He will keep His promises

Abraham / Isaac

Genesis 22:9 (ESV)

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Note: God stops Abraham, and provides Himself a ram

Genesis 22:14 (ESV)

So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Note: This passage (vs. 2) - first appearance of the word love. Describes the love a father has for his only son.

Moses

***Then after Noah and Abraham, comes Moses and the Exodus** - God describes the altar that is to be built at the tabernacle (and later temple) for all the various sacrifices prescribed in the law (Exodus 27)

The Altar - Promise fulfilled, Expression of Faith for Promises yet fulfilled, Expression of Worship in Love, Atonement for sin. **The place of sacrifice and provision!**

2) A Sacrifice - they set the Altar in place and offered Sacrifices

Ezra 3:3 (ESV)

They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

Note: Where do they go in the midst of fear, where do they gather as exiles returning home and becoming a people? They come to the altar! It's time to rebuild, and the first thing the Lord wants to rebuild is not the Wall. He wants to realign His people with the proper placement of their Trust and Priorities!

- What we prioritize, value, and rely on is what we worship.
- They were still very aware of the risk and danger around them, but they got their priorities straight.
- All Burnt Offerings and Sacrifices point to The Ultimate Sacrifice . . .

Hebrews 10:1, 10, 14 (ESV)

[1] For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. . . [10] And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . [14] For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Hebrews 10:15-18 (ESV)

[15] And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, [16] "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," [17] then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." [18] Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Note: Interestingly enough this is quoting Jeremiah 31:33-34, proclamation of what God would do post-exile!

This re-establishment of God's people at the altar was an act of trust and worship in the midst of their enemies, but it also was a sign of an altar and sacrifice yet to come. Where we are forged as a people unto God as He writes His law on our hearts and minds!

3) A Dwelling Place - The Feast of Booths

Ezra 3:4-5 (ESV)

[4] And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, [5] and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD.

Note: They start with the **Feast of Booths** (Lev. 23) A reminder of protection, and ingathering of the harvest.

Leviticus 23:33-34 (ESV)

[33] And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [34] "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the LORD.

Leviticus 23:42-43 (ESV)

[42] You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, [43] that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

This Feast is a reminder of Our true Dwelling Place - Rescue from Slavery, God's provision in the wilderness, and the harvest!

Conclusion: An Altar, The Sacrifice, A Dwelling place

May we be defined as a people who come to the altar as One, worshipping and relying upon the Lord. Not in the absence of Fear, but even in the midst of Fear, we can come before Him in trust and worship!

Ezra 3:1, 6 (ESV)

[1] When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. . . [6] From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

Hebrews 13:10-16 (ESV)

[10] We have an **altar** from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. [11] For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as **a sacrifice** for sin are burned outside the camp. [12] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. [13] Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. [14] For here we have no lasting city, but we seek **the city** that is to come. [15] Through him then let us continually offer up a **sacrifice of praise to God**, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Psalm 118 - written post Exile (sometime during the rebuilding of Altar, Foundation, and Temple)

Psalm 118:5-6 (ESV)

[5] Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free. [6] The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Psalm 118:8-9 (ESV)

[8] It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. [9] It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

Psalm 118:14-17 (ESV)

[14] The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. [15] Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, [16] the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!" [17] I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.