

SERMON FOCUS: I must live a life that is together with other believers but separated from the world.

SERMON FUNCTION: The hearer will examine his/her life to see where reconciliation and separation need to happen.

BACKGROUND:

Previously, in Ezra, we have seen God's people return to Judah from exile in Babylon in order to rebuild the temple for worship of God. We saw where they built the altar first, and only had what was necessary for worship. We saw that they faced opposition to their work when rebuilding the temple and were even forcibly stopped for about fifteen years. We then saw that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah came to prophesy to them and encourage them to get to work. Finally, we saw that they were able to complete the temple. Interestingly, I read this week that scholars date the completion of this second temple as March 15, 515 B. C.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ezra 6:16-22

Then the Israelites, including the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. [17](#)For the dedication of God's house they offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs, as well as twelve male goats as a sin offering for all Israel — one for each Israelite tribe. [18](#)They also appointed the priests by their divisions and the Levites by their groups to the service of God in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the book of Moses. [19](#)The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. [20](#)All of the priests and Levites were ceremonially clean, because they had purified themselves. They killed the Passover lamb for themselves, their priestly brothers, and all the exiles. [21](#)The Israelites who had returned from exile ate it,

together with all who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the Gentiles of the land in order to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. [22](#)They observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, because the Lord had made them joyful, having changed the Assyrian king's attitude toward them, so that he supported them in the work on the house of the God of Israel.

INTRODUCTION:

On July 16, 1054, the Patriarch of Constantinople (Michael Cerularius) and Pope Leo IX in Rome excommunicated each other resulting in the first church split in history more than a millennium after the founding of the church. Almost five centuries later, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg, thus starting the Protestant Reformation. Today, the nearly 2.3 billion Christians of the world are in about 41,000 denominations.

The body of Christ is more divided than ever. Today, we are looking at a time when God's people were united together in joy to worship Him.

MESSAGE:

1. I SHOULD COME TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD WITH JOY
 - a. (6:16) Then the Israelites, including the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.
 - b. What reason would they have to not be joyful?
 - i. God had restored them to their land.
 - ii. God had allowed them to rebuild the temple.
 - iii. They were able to worship in relative peace.
 - c. Certainly, the temple was not the same.
 - i. It was missing things from the first temple, like the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy

seat, the manna, and Aaron's rod. These were long gone.

- ii. But the temple had been rebuilt, and Israel could worship there.
- iii. Remember those who cried when the foundation was laid because they remembered the glory of the old temple? They are not mentioned as crying here.
- d. They came with many animals for the dedication
 - i. Of course, there were hundreds of times more animals sacrificed at the dedication of the original temple. There were many more people, and they were much richer the first time.
 - ii. "The word for dedication (hanukka) was later to become the name of a festival in memory of the Temple's re-consecration in 165 B.C. after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes (cf. John 10:22f)." (Guzik 2017)
 - iii. I want you to pay attention to the 12 male goats in verse 17. There was one for each tribe of Israel.
- e. Even though they could not distinguish the tribes one from another, and everyone was known as Jews because of Judah, they offered a sacrifice on behalf of the whole nation. And they did so joyfully!
- f. Not only should I approach the house of the Lord with joy, but I should be sanctified.

2. I SHOULD BE RECONCILED

- a. About six weeks after the dedication of the temple comes the Passover. They are celebrating God's deliverance of His people from Egypt. Of course, now, they are also celebrating His deliverance of

them from Babylon. It appears that there had been some reconciliation happening.

- b. (Matt 5:23-24) So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, **24**leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.
- c. When we come to the house of the Lord, we must get right with Him. He also expects us to get right with our brothers and sisters.
- d. (6:21) The Israelites who had returned from exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the Gentiles of the land in order to worship the Lord, the God of Israel.
- e. It seems that three groups were likely involved in celebrating the Passover.
 - i. Those who returned from exile
 - ii. Those Israelites who had been left in the land.
 - iii. Gentiles who renounced the unclean practices.
- f. Those who were worshippers of God united to worship Him and celebrate His deliverance.
- g. We should continue the practice of celebrating God's deliverance of His people.
- h. In doing this, we must be separated from the "uncleanness of the Gentiles of the land."

3. I SHOULD BE SEPARATED

- a. Wait, how do I know who I should be united to and who I should be separated from?
- b. This is a tricky distinction but read the words in verse 21. The Israelites who had returned from exile ate it, together with all who had separated

themselves **from the uncleanness** of the Gentiles of the land in order to worship the Lord, the God of Israel.

- c. We can separate ourselves from the unclean practices of this world while still living in it and loving the people who are in it.
- d. In fact, that's one way that we show that Christ makes us different from the world is that we are not slaves to the same things the world is.
- e. We can be a light in the darkness to a world that is lost.
- f. Paul provides some neat clarification in 1 Corinthians 5:9-12. "I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. **12**For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? **13**God judges outsiders. Remove the evil person from among you."
- g. We should separate ourselves from those who claim to be Christian and yet live and endorse sinful lifestyles. These are not genuine Christians.
- h. We should separate ourselves from all manner of sin, so we do not become enticed by it. God demands this for the protection of our souls.
- i. Jesus came into a sinful world, yet did not sin, instead keeping himself separate from sin while being a friend of sinners. We are called to follow Him.

CONCLUSION:

The need for joyfulness, unity, and separation are not contradictory. They are complementary. As we experience joy in the Christian life, we will naturally be drawn closer to Christ and therefore closer to those who also experience joy in Him. As we do this, we begin to see other believers as our brothers and sisters, not as enemies. We set aside animosity against them. We also set aside the patterns of carnal behavior which leads to death, and instead, embrace Christ who gives life.

FOUR QUESTIONS:

1. What do you hear God saying to you?
2. What keeps you from doing that?
3. If you were to do that, what might be a good first step?
4. Who are you going to tell?

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