

October 4, 2015  
"Returning Home"

2 Chronicles 36:14-23

The people became more and more unfaithful. They followed all the pagan practices of the surrounding nations, desecrating the Temple of the LORD that had been consecrated in Jerusalem.

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

So the LORD brought the king of Babylon against them. The Babylonians killed Judah's young men, even chasing after them into the Temple. They had no pity on the people, killing both young men and young women, the old and the infirm. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. The king took home to Babylon all the articles, large and small, used in the Temple of God, and the treasures from both the LORD's Temple and from the palace of the king and his officials. Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value. The few who survived were taken as exiles to Babylon, and they became servants to the king and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

So the message of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled, just as the prophet had said.

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the LORD fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

"This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any of you who are the LORD's people may go there for this task. And may the LORD your God be with you!"

Today's scripture from 2 Chronicles tells us how the Temple, a symbol of God's presence, a place consecrated to God was desecrated because the people were unfaithful to God. And how this led to the destruction of the Temple, and the exile and slavery of the people of God by Babylon. The place of the Temple was left desolate for 70 years, a Sabbath rest or as... Eugene H. Peterson puts it in **THE MESSAGE**: This is exactly the message of GOD that Jeremiah had preached: the desolate land put to an extended sabbath rest, a seventy-year Sabbath rest making up for all the unkept Sabbaths. (of the unfaithful people).

The people were exiled and kept captive in Babylon for 70 years, or until Babylon was conquered by Persia. Then God moved on the heart of Cyrus, the king of Persia to return the people back home to build a Temple.

Notice what King Cyrus says and doesn't say. In v23 he says, He (God) has appointed me to build Him a Temple... what he doesn't say, rebuild a temple, he says God instructed him to build a temple. Didn't they already have a temple? Yes, but it was destroyed. The Lord does not want to repeat what was there the Lord wants to do something new.

God had searched the hearts of the people and found them lacking. What does God see when He searches your heart? Self-sacrificing Love or only doing what's good for you? Joy or discontent? Peace or anxiety and lack of faith? Patience or an easy irritability? Kindness or no time to meet the needs of others? Goodness maybe, but only to those who you feel deserve it? Faithfulness, or unreliable? Gentleness or proud and intimidating? Self-control or a lack of restraint over sinful human desires?

God had searched the hearts of the people and found them lacking. He found desecrated temples, no longer consecrated to God, unfaithful. His temple was destroyed, but then He wanted to do something new. And I was encouraged to remember the many scriptures that say:

1 Chronicles 16:34 NKJV

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

Lord I didn't always do what was right but your grace and mercy endures forever.  
Lord I didn't always treat people right but your grace and mercy endures forever.  
Lord I didn't always remain faithful but your grace and your mercy endures forever.

Cyrus finds himself King of Persia, God speaks to him and I can hear Cyrus saying, "Lord whatever you want me to do, I'll do." God has a way of putting the right people at the right places at the right time for you in your life, because His grace and mercy endures forever.

Have you ever gone through or needed a major change in your life? Well, that's what's going on here for God's people in 2 Chronicles. They are returning home after 70 years in captivity. They were in transition and needed an explanation of their past and hope for their future. 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles met that need. It reminded them of their identity, who they were, God's people and it gave them hope for their future. This was especially symbolized by the temple in Jerusalem. Nothing symbolized God's presence among His people more than the temple. But God does not live in a building made of stone.

Acts 7:46-48

"David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who actually built it. However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands.

The NT declares that a believer's body is the temple where God resides. We were purchased at a high price; therefore we are to glorify God in our body and spirit, which are His. In today's terms, Solomon's temple cost hundreds of millions of dollars to build. Yet God purchased each of us with something far more valuable – the precious blood of Christ. Let us therefore glorify Him as His temples, houses of His glory, vessels fit for the Master's use.

God is determined to have a temple, and He wants you to be that temple, a dwelling place for His glory on earth. Is your body and spirit a temple where God can reside, is your life glorifying God? If not God wants to do something new in you this morning.

The people were attacked, captured and taken from their home. Now they were returning home after 70 years. You see, God said, "That's enough!" They have been captives for years; they were exiled for years, then God said, "Enough!" Then God said, "I will bring you home again." Have you been attacked, enslaved, hurt, making you insecure and feeling worthless? God says, "enough! Come home to Me for in Me you will find security and significance, and fullness."

The people were exiled for years, now the Lord will bring them home. When God brings them home again, the Lord does not want to repeat what was there the Lord wants to do something new. So he has commissioned Cyrus to do a new thing.

We read that this fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah. So let's look at that prophecy:  
Jeremiah 29:10-14

This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you," says the LORD. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land."

We love, and memorize and claim as our own the promise of v11; that God has plans for you, plans for good not disaster, plans to give you a future and a hope. But we stop there without looking at the conditions: of calling out to the Lord in prayer, seeking Him with all our heart. Again look at how Eugene Peterson says it in The Message:

Jeremiah 29:12-14(from THE MESSAGE: by Eugene H. Peterson)

"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.

"When you come looking for me, you'll find me.

"Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed." GOD's Decree.

"I'll turn things around for you. I'll bring you back from all the countries into which I drove you" — GOD's Decree — "bring you home to the place from which I sent you off into exile. You can count on it.

We talked last week about building a temple for God a dwelling where God abides, not in a building made of stone, but in us. A holy place, a sacred spot, a consecrated place, in us where God dwells.

When a builder is ready to build something he must first survey the land or surface he wants to build on. He must determine if it is right for his use if it can support the structure being built.

Much like GOD will do before he begins to work on us. (Jeremiah 17:10) the Lord searches the heart & knows the secrets of our heart. He has to prepare you for the new work He wants to do in you.

The builder will clear the land and have the debris taken away, then have the area will be cleaned and prepped for work. James writes: James 4:7-10  
So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

David said it this way: Psalms 51:10-13  
Create in me a clean heart, O God.  
Renew a loyal spirit within me.  
Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.

Then I will teach your ways to rebels,  
and they will return to you.

And so we have some debris on our hearts. Anger, hostility, jealousy, malice, pain, hurt, pride. Sometimes we carry distrust, because of being used by someone before. There's emptiness, and feelings of abandonment that can linger deep within our hearts. The desire to retaliate and do harm to our enemies, because someone has wronged us before. With some of us it's stubbornness, or worldliness, when you hang out in the world of the ungodly sometimes you pick up things. God needs to clear away the debris.

Once GOD cleans our heart and removes the debris He gets us ready. If you ever watch the builder once the area is prepped, the builder will begin to lay his foundation. He will mark his area off and he will then begin to pour into his mold the foundation.

Jesus our foundation and He is the master builder of your soul and mine. Once we

accept Him as the potter of our lives He begins to pour his word into our hearts a little at a time and He begins to form us. He begins to pour in more and more each day and the Word begins to set and strengthen. When concrete sets whatever there is that is unlike it will begin to stick out. You will see the impurities they will begin to stick out. Jesus starts to mold us He begins to form us. Our character begins to take the shape of the godly way He wants us to be. We begin to look new, and act differently.

Once you get the entire framework done it's time for the Mason's. Jesus the master builder starts to build with the stones of righteousness, and the stones of (Galatians 5:22-23) love for God, other believers, and for all people, and with stones of joy, peace, and with stones of patience, kindness, goodness, and stones of faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Jesus said I will destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. In order to go higher in GOD our old temples must be destroyed. Jesus is ready to give somebody new found faith this morning, Jesus is ready to give somebody a new beginning this morning.

God never destroys without building something new. Someone has been praying to God and seeking God. The Lord is ready to do something new for you this morning. I'm trying to encourage someone this morning. God is ready to build a new house somebody has been caught up in a place of despair. Somebody has asked like Habakkuk how long Lord must this go on. God is getting ready to tear down that old pain. Destroy that old animosity. Tear out that stone of rejection, Tear out that stone of loneliness. Tear out that heart of stone and make you a living stone. I can feel him moving on the altar of someone's heart, somebody is getting some new stones here is a stone of peace. You are hurting here is the stone of love. You are weak here is the stone of strength. Say yes, Yes to your will Lord, yes to your way Lord make me over Lord, I'm returning home.