

Ezra chapter 3, we'll be looking this evening at verses 8 through 13. Ezra 3, verses 8 through 13. Well, the start of Ezra 3, you see that God's people have arrived back in Jerusalem from Babylon. And when they arrive, what you might expect them to do first is to build the temple.

After all, that's what they were commissioned to do back in chapter one is to return and build the house of the Lord. But that's not the first thing you see them do when you come to chapter three. First thing you see them do in the first seven verses is build altars or an altar to worship God, to make sacrifices to the Lord. Why did they immediately build the temple? Well, because the temple in a special way at that time in redemptive history in the Old Testament represented the presence of God. And they knew that they had no business trying to go into the temple if they did not have a sacrifice for their sins.

Remember perhaps from last time how the book of Exodus ends. We saw that the book of Exodus ends with this great picture of the tabernacle being completed. And it's called the meeting place of the Lord. And you remember what they weren't allowed to do? Go into the meeting place of the Lord. It's as if God says at the end of Exodus, I've moved into the neighborhood, but you better not come over to my house. This is where I'm present, but you're not allowed to come into my presence.

And then Leviticus begins. Leviticus begins with sacrifice right out of the book of Exodus. Because God in that book is saying, this is how you can come to where I am present. This is where I'm present. End of Exodus, here's how you can come into my presence.

It is through sacrifice. It is through substitutionary atonement. The blood of another being shed on their behalf. The blood then of bulls and goats pointing forward to the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. through whom we have access to our Father, through whom we can come and worship God.

And so that's the scene there was the altars in the first seven verses, but as we come to verses eight through 13 of chapter three, we now see the beginnings of the rebuilding of the temple. Before we read this portion of God's word, let us pray and ask him to bless Father, we do come before you again this evening, and we ask that you would be pleased to pour out your spirit upon the reading and the preaching of your word. For apart from your spirits being poured out, this is of no value. But should you be pleased, O Lord, hearts will be turned right side up, and even real believers will be able, by your grace, to grow in their love for you. And we long for these things, in Jesus's name, amen. Ezra chapter three, verses eight through 13, this is the word of God.

Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the son of Josedach, made a beginning, together with the rest of their kinsmen. the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites from 20 years old and upward to supervise the work of the house of the Lord. And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers and Cadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Hanadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests and their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of David, king of Israel.

And they sang responsibly, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid. Though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away." This ends reading of God's Holy Word. May He bless now the proclamation of it to our lives.

Well, our text this evening takes place roughly in the year 536 BC. It's been about 50 years since God's people were taken captive by the Babylonians from Jerusalem. So for 50 plus years they had been in Babylon. And when the Babylonians had come and taken them, they also destroyed the temple. And now, God's people in our story are coming back to that place and they are beginning to rebuild the temple.

And so our proposition this evening is very simple. The rebuilding of the temple. And we're going to consider the rebuilding of the temple underneath two headings. The organization of the rebuilding and the responses to the rebuilding. The organization of the rebuilding and the responses to the rebuilding. So first, the organization of the rebuilding.

You see this in verses eight and nine. Look how verse eight begins. Now in the second year after they're coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month. You see the organization of the rebuilding in a couple of different ways, but right here you see it in the time of the rebuilding.

They had been gathering goods to begin to rebuild for about six months. According to verse seven, they had started to do different things to gather together the goods. And now when you come to verse eight, based on the dating, we can see that it's been roughly six months that they have been preparing. So it takes them time to get all the supplies together to do this rebuilding project. There's some organization there.

But perhaps this word in the second month is more than simply to tell you it's been roughly six months since they started this gathering project. It's likely that this is trying to tip off the fact that they are starting to build the temple in the exact same month that Solomon had begun to build the first temple in the second month. You can read about that in 1 Kings 6, verse 1, for example. It's in the same month that he had begun to rebuild the temple, that now they're beginning to rebuild the temple. And there are other details to this same effect that show the organization of what they're doing.

The mentioning that the Levites were 20 years old and upward. David had given that command that they were to be 20 years old and upward in 1 Chronicles 23, verse 24, and verse 27. But interestingly, when Hezekiah begins to do his reforms, if you remember King Hezekiah of Judah, and then after him, King Josiah of Judah, when they do their reforms, it mentions that they do things with the Levites from 20 years old and upward, the pattern that David had established before them and then they carried on. It's been roughly 500 years since David had given that order and they're doing it in that sort of manner. There's organization.

The people, it's obvious from this, didn't want to do anything in the rebuilding of the temple. That was out of accord with the Word of God. Whether it was minor details or big details, they were trying to do everything in the rebuilding of the temple in accordance with God's Word. And that obviously has application to your life too. Your whole life is to be governed by the Word of God. In the littler things that you do, and in the bigger things that you do, God's word is to govern the decisions that you make. But not only do you see the organization of the temple in the time in which they are organizing it, you also see it in the unity that is evident in the rebuilding of the temple.

We see the unity, for example, in verse eight, when you read of all these different people, You have Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, you have the priests, and you have the Levites, and you have all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity, a sort of catch-all, all the other people. Remember that those who are of Zerubbabel's lineage are the kingly line, and you have the priestly line with Jeshua, and then you have all the other sorts of people that were there, and they're all united in doing this work. And what was it that united them in their work? In chapter three, verse one, we read this.

When the seventh month came and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one, there's that unity, as one man to Jerusalem. And you'll remember from last week's sermon, perhaps, that they gathered as one for a purpose. And you remember what it was? It was to worship God. That was what gathered them together.

And it's out of their unity in their worshiping hearts to God that you now see unity in their working hearts for God. As they begin to build this temple, what brings them together is ultimately that they have the same God, they worship the same God, that's where their hearts are. And that enables them to work together with a sense of unity. And there's a principle here that applies to most workforces, really all workforces, and it's this. The best way to have unity in a workforce is to all be worshiping the one living and true God.

Doesn't mean it's always going to be perfect, but if you've ever worked with staunch unbelievers, and I have, it affects the way they work. They're going to be more inclined to cheat and steal. They're going to be more inclined to come in hungover and angry and bitter. They don't have unity with you in the worshiping of God, and it affects the way that they work.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that every believer is automatically a better worker. They're better at something, per se. But the point, the principle that you see in this text is when you have unity in your love for God, it will affect even the way that you work with other people. You will have greater unity with others when you work out of your love for the God that you worship.

So they worship first and then they work. But this unity is not uniformity. And that's important. The unity that you see in this text is not uniformity. Uniformity is when you try to eliminate all distinctions between people. And that's called wrong. And you don't see them doing that here. There is not uniformity.

There's an acknowledgement that while they're united in their desire to work and build this temple, there's an acknowledgement of different gifts, graces, responsibilities, callings. For example, you have supervisors mentioned in verses eight and nine. You have the priests. You have the workmen that are mentioned. If everyone

tried to be a supervisor, the temple wouldn't be built. And if everyone tried to be a workman, they might build the temple, but it would not be orderly. It wouldn't be done well.

And in the world around us, we have a world that wants uniformity. They might call it unity, but what they want is uniformity. What do I mean? We live in a world that doesn't want to acknowledge distinctions. We live in a world that wants to say, that there is no distinction between a man and a woman. We live in a world that wants to say that there is no distinction between a boss and an employee. We live in a world that wants to say that there is no distinction between an adult and a child.

This is not only an attack on common sense, it's rebellion against God's design for his world. It's uniformity. It's not godly. But it's not just in the world. It's in the church too. The church oftentimes wants uniformity. They want to set aside and eliminate God's structure for the way he wants things done. And so what does this look like in the church? If qualified men can be leaders in the church and publicly lead in the church, then Women can too. If qualified men can be elders, then women can be elders. If qualified men can be deacons, women can be deacons.

Why? Because we want to eliminate the God-designed structure and order of his church. That's uniformity. It's not good. God has given a structure, and when everyone plays their part, the result is unity, and an acknowledgement of God's design, and it ultimately produces good, not chaos. Uniformity always ends in chaos and destruction.

Well, as the people of God here at Second Presbyterian Church, we ought to have unity. We ought to have unity in the good things that God has called us to do. Unity in the worship of God. Unity in praying for one another. unity in using our various gifts to care for one another and to love one another and to help one another. We ought to have unity in these different avenues and aspects. We have to have unity in our desires to use our various gifts and graces and callings to serve in our community, whatever that might look like where you have been placed in God's providence.

But as people of God, you must never seek uniformity. You are not called to be your neighbor. You're called to be your sanctified self. You're called to be who God made you and to do what God has called you to do where he has placed you. And that's going to look different. But when we all work together where God has us in the callings and graces and responsibilities he has given to us, not trying to be our neighbor, but trying to be a sanctified you where God has placed you, you will be united. And that is how God builds his church often.

But secondly, we see not only the organization of the rebuilding, but we see responses to the rebuilding, responses to the rebuilding. You see this in verses 10 through 13. And as we begin to unpack these verses, we'll see that there are three responses here in verses 10 through 13.

The responses are obedience, worship, and weeping. Obedience, worship, and weeping. In verse 10, you see obedience. Look at verse 10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests and their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of David, king of Israel.

You see obedience in this verse in a number of ways. Notice that the priests don't just come forward, they come forward in their vestments. Now this is a reference to their priestly garments. It's noting for you that they didn't just dress however they wanted at this celebration of the laying of the foundation of the temple. They came with obedient hearts, doing what God would want them to do in the vestments that he called the priests to wear.

In 2 Chronicles 5.12, at the celebration of the establishment of the first temple, When they first bring in the ark at the first temple celebration in 2 Chronicles 5, 12, it mentions that they wore, the priests wore the vestments, just like they did here. But they didn't just wear the vestments, they came forward with trumpets and with cymbals. And all of this, trumpets and cymbals, you find those at the establishment of the first temple in 2 Chronicles 5, 12, and 13. According to my study, nowhere else in the Old Testament do you see all these things coming together, the vestments, the trumpets, and the cymbals, other than the establishment of the first temple at that celebration in 2 Chronicles 5, 12, and 13. They're intentionally doing everything according to how they had done it in 2 Chronicles 5, 12, and 13.

Even the name Asaph, which is found here, is also found there in 2 Chronicles 5.12.

It's all intentionally mimicking what God had, how they had done it in the past. They didn't set aside the past when the past was good. And neither should we. When the past got things right, we should do it the way they did it, when they got things right. And sometimes the past did get things right.

But these people, Asaph mentioned in verse 10, have actually been mentioned once before in this book. That was in verse 41 of chapter two. The singers, the sons of Asaph, 128. The people of Asaph, the sons of Asaph, were specifically commissioned by David in 1 Chronicles 25 to be the people who were musicians, to be the people who were singers. And here they are fulfilling that role. While we don't get the details on how all the other people in the second chapter played apart in the rebuilding of the temple, you can get a little snippet from that comment, that those singers, the 128 singers, had a role to play in the rebuilding of the temple. Again, in Christ's church, you have a role to play in the serving of Christ's people.

But all of this is done in obedience, and that's driven home by these last words of verse 10, according to the directions of David, king of Israel. We're not imposing anything on the text. It tells you right there, this is what they were doing. It's in obedience. But not only was there obedience, there was worshiping. That was one of the other responses, they worshiped.

You see that in verse 11. And they sang responsibly, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. You'll notice in this worshiping here that it is very God-centered. Their worship was God-centered. And you see that in the fact that the word praise is used three times. It's used twice in verse 11, it's used once in verse 10, and in all three cases, the object of their praise is the Lord. And so it was God-centered worship. And that's a call to, all of scripture preaches this so clearly, but the worshiping of God is Well, worshiping God, and so our worship ought to always strive to be God-centered. But why is it so God-centered?

Well, they tell you with their little song, don't they? For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. The Lord is good, that's the first thing they state. He is good, period, full stop. These statements are

wonderful in the Bible. For the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in Him, Nahum 1 7. These statements are incredible in the Bible because they don't leave the goodness of God up for discussion.

They declare to you who He is. and expect you to receive it with faith, to believe that it is true. You don't always feel like God is good, but he is always good. You don't always believe that he is good, but he is always good. For the Lord is good. This is part of who he is, and he's immutable.

But this fact that the Lord is good is bad news for you, if that's all he is. If all the Lord is is good, this is bad news for you because we are not good. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. Every thought of our heart is continually wicked. Genesis chapter six. His being good is bad news if that's all that he is. But he isn't.

And that's what the little song that is so well known perhaps to us in this room goes on to declare to us, it's not just that he's good, it's that his steadfast love endures forever. This steadfast love is that Chesed love. This is his covenant love by which he determines to save a people for himself, not because of anything in his people, but entirely and completely simply because he loves them. There's nothing in you that makes God want to chase you down and make you his own. It's simply because he loves you and that's what he determines to do. That's good news. There's things in every human being's life that would make you, if you reflected rightly, say he should not want to love me.

But he says, this is who I am. My steadfast love endures forever. I am committed to my people. I love them because I love them. This is his immutable covenant love for his people. This hesed love, this love that he's talking about here finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's where you see his hesed love on display. It's in Christ's coming. It's in Christ dying. It's his hesed love that sent Christ into the world. For God so loved the world.

Now that's Greek in John 3, 16, not Hebrew. But perhaps if it were Hebrew, it would have been the word hesed. We can't say that it would have been, but he loves his world. That's why he sent his son, to redeem them. It's that covenant love for his people.

This is your only hope. Where do you look for hope this evening? Psalm chapter 33 verse 18 says, behold, the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love. There is no other place to hope that is safe other than in the steadfast, immutable, unchanging covenant love of God for you. Nowhere else will you be safe but there. These incredible words that we all know so well, and we will sing them forever, which is incredible to think about. You'll sing these words forever. You'll never tire singing them. They'll never get annoying to you.

There's something that is here that to my knowledge is not found in any other version of these words in the Bible. I might have missed it, but I tried to look for it and didn't find it anywhere else. And that's this, toward Israel. For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. So why does this particular manifestation of these very familiar words add the two words toward Israel?

It seems to make sense given their circumstances, That it's because these words were highlighting for them the reality that this love was for them in particular. They felt the fact that the God of this universe loved them particularly. And they wanted to exalt that reality. And so they add that it's not just in general that a steadfast love endures forever.

They felt it for themselves, for Israel, because for 50 plus years, they had been in Babylonian captivity. And all they had were the promises of God. They hadn't come true to them experientially. They were still in captivity. But now they come back. And they had probably sung these words, perhaps with the words toward Israel omitted, that can't be proven. But perhaps they didn't sing that part because maybe it didn't feel like it was true for them. But when they got back, they said it is true. His covenant love is true toward Israel, toward us, the people of God. He hasn't abandoned us. And here's how that applies to you today. Israel is the church.

To grasp this, you might say the words like this, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward his church. What hope is there that the church will persevere? The hope is this, it is his steadfast love His immutable covenant promises to his people that will endure forever.

It was this steadfast love that created the church after the fall. When man had fallen into sin, the whole church, Adam and Eve, should have been obliterated. And God preserved a church, a people for himself. It was his steadfast love that created the church. It was his steadfast love that brought the church out of Egypt into the promised land. It was his steadfast love that brought the people of God from Babylon back to Jerusalem. It was his steadfast love that brought Jesus into this world to shed his blood for his church. It is his steadfast love that will bring his church to glory. That is the way this applies to you this evening. It is his steadfast love that will bring you to be with him forever, the church.

But then you see a weeping response, and that's in verses 12 and 13. After the foundations have been laid, you see that there are some older people among them who remembered the first temple foundation, or at least the first temple in its completion, and they are weeping. They're weeping because the outward appearance of this temple, the foundation, did not compare with the glories of the previous temple. And that's undoubtedly true. There were 180,000 workmen who helped build the first temple, and they did it for over seven years. Surely it's true that in its outward glory, it did not compare. But should these people have been weeping?

According to Haggai chapter two, which is a parallel passage that deals with a lot of these same events, Haggai chapter 2, that passage informs you that they're weeping because they did not appreciate the work of God in their lifetime, in that present moment. They were not appreciating what God had done and was doing. They were stuck in the past. They would not forget what lies behind and press on to what lies ahead.

And let this be a warning to you. Do not despise the day of small things. In Ezra chapter three verses eight through 13 that we've been looking at, it may have appeared to some of those older gentlemen like a day of small things. In fact, Zechariah 4.10 says that that's what they thought. But what they thought was a day of small things was a day that was happening because of the steadfast love of God. That's why they were able to lay that foundation. That's why they were back in Jerusalem. This may have appeared to be a day of small things, but it was a day that God was working and doing something, laying the foundation again of his temple. And these people were missing it. and they ought to have been worshiping, not weeping.

In your life, God may have done amazing things in the past, but you should be worshipping today because God isn't done with you yet. God may be doing small things in your life today that you're not appreciating. But God is doing them and you should be grateful and glad and thankful for those things that God is really truly doing.

And he may be doing things in Second Presbyterian Church. And you should be rejoicing in whatever those things may be doing, he may be doing. Small perhaps in your eyes, but perhaps he's laying a great foundation, just like he was in this passage. Well, tonight we have considered the rebuilding of the temple and we've considered that under two headings. the organization of the rebuilding, and the responses to the rebuilding. But the foundation of the temple that we've seen them lay in this text really points to the Lord Jesus Christ. Because you see, the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church. He is the cornerstone upon which the church is built.

And a building that doesn't have a firm foundation will not do very well. Really, a building, in a lot of ways, is only as good as its foundation. You might not spend a lot of time looking at it, but if you don't have a good foundation, the results can be bad. And the foundation of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ. If you try to build your life on any other foundation, it will be to your own destruction. build your life upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a firm foundation. Though you may go through awful things, if your life is built on that foundation, though you truly go through horrible things, with that foundation, even the devils and hell cannot strip you from the hands of your heavenly Father. His steadfast love endures forever for his people. You will be safe. But if you try to build anywhere else, you will perish. Build your life upon the firm foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will never forsake you.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do praise you and thank you for the unity that we got to see in this text, that the men were building with this sense of unified love for God. We praise you, O God, that they did things to the best of their ability according to your word. We pray, O God, that we who are united in Jesus Christ would obey you, that we would worship you, that we would be delighted to sing of your steadfast covenant love for us and to sing of it over and over and over again, this undying and yet never old song, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. Oh God, I do pray that we would not miss your marvelous workings in our midst, in our own lives personally, in this, your particular church. Would we rejoice and be glad for you are doing things which are the result of your steadfast love for us corporately and individually. To you be the glory forever and ever. Amen.