

Ezra chapter 6. The last time we looked at Ezra 5 all the way through Ezra chapter 6 verse 15. And in that section of scripture, there was one major theme. And that major theme was this, God is with his people. And we saw that God is with his people in his providence and through his word. That as his people have returned to Jerusalem, and they've come across some delays in rebuilding the temple, God was with them. And God began to work through his word, in his providence, to stir them up to rebuild the temple. And although they faced difficulties, because God was with them, they were enabled to rebuild the temple.

And in chapter 6, verse 15, the last verse we saw last time, it concludes by saying, in essence, the people of God rebuilt the house of God. And so this evening, as we pick back up on the story, the people have just completed the house. And now that they've completed the house of God, we will see this evening that they are full of joy. And so that will be our theme this evening, will be the joy of the people.

Well, this before us, let us pray and ask God to help us to rightly divide the word of truth. God, we do come before you again acknowledging that it takes the Spirit of God to apply the Scriptures to the heart of man. We come and we ask that we would be docile under the Word, that we would be submissive to what you teach. And oh God, whatever you tell us, since it is your Word, we pray that we would love it. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. Ezra 6, verse 16, and we'll read through the end of the chapter.

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. On the 14th day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover, for the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together. All of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests and for themselves.

It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile and also by everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Amen. This ends the reading of God's word. May he bless now the proclamation of it to our lives. Well, as we come to this final section of Ezra chapter six, you can see that the theme is one of joy. You see in verse 16 that as they were dedicating the house of God they did this with joy. And then in verse 22 we are told, they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy for the Lord had made them joyful. So joy really is bookending our section of Ezra chapter 6 this evening.

And joy has been defined this way, a deep and abiding pleasure and contentment. A deep and abiding pleasure and contentment. Now everyone in the world wants joy. Every single human being wants a deep and abiding pleasure and contentment. The question then arises, where can you find ultimate joy? Where can you find an

ultimate deep and abiding pleasure and contentment? Can you find this joy ultimately in a wife or a husband? Can you find this joy in money? Can you find this joy anywhere in all creation?

And the answer is no, you cannot find this ultimate joy anywhere in creation. And why is it that you cannot find this ultimate joy that every human heart desires? Why is it that you cannot find it anywhere in creation? And it's because you weren't meant to find this ultimate joy in creation. You are designed to find that ultimate joy in the creator, not in the creation. When you look to the creation to find ultimate joy, to find ultimate abiding pleasure and contentment, you will never find it. And the reason you will never find it is because the world wasn't created for you to find that ultimate joy in it.

When you try to find ultimate joy outside of God himself, you are simply looking in the wrong place. You're like a fish trying to swim out of water. It's never going to end well for you. And the reason it will not end well for you is because that's not the right place to look.

You are to look for that deep and abiding pleasure and contentment in God himself. And so where can you find ultimate joy this night? We see in our text, specifically these three You find ultimate joy in the worship of God, the redemption of God, and the sovereignty of God. Ultimate joy is found in the worship of God, the redemption of God, and the sovereignty of God. So first, you find ultimate joy in the worship of God.

You see this in verses 16 through 18. It reads as follows, and the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bowls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. As they have this dedication of the house of God, it is something of a worship service. They bring forth various animals to be sacrificed, and they do this all with joy, the text says. But not only do they bring these various animals, there's a particular note that they bring 12 goats to be sacrificed as a sin offering. This means that they were acknowledging in this worship service that they were sinners. That was an important aspect of the worship of God. They had to acknowledge this about themselves.

Now ask yourself the question, how in the world, coming before the Holy God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is acknowledging that you are a sinner ever going to be a good thing? How is it that you could come before God and say with honesty what you already do know about yourself, I do hope, I am a sinner. How could that be a good thing? How could that be an important and actually absolutely crucial part of a worship service?

Well, it can only be a good thing if there's an atonement for sin. Right? It can only be a good thing if there's a sacrifice, a substitute. And that's what these animals represented. These animals themselves did not wash away their sins, but they understood that these animals pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to come, the promised Messiah, who would shed his blood for their sins.

And that is how you must come to worship. You must come to worship acknowledging that you are a sinner in the sight of God who needs the shed blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse you from your sins. So you come to worship with an element of honesty about yourself.

I don't deserve to be here. I'm not worthy. But then you say, but there was a lamb who shed his blood for my sins. There was not just a goat, but the Son of God came and shed his blood for my sins. I am here to worship you. You are the God who created me. You are the living and true God. I am here because of Christ to give you, O Father and Son and Spirit glory, which is due your name. And so you see in this worship service an acknowledgement of sin, an acknowledgement of their need of a savior.

And the night, you think to yourself, perhaps, I don't know if I can have much joy this evening in the worship service. I don't know if I can have much joy here tonight. Maybe you have a thousand reasons for which you have a legitimate case for weeping, for shedding tears because of grief in your life. But I ask you this, do you know the Lord Jesus Christ here this evening?

Do you know the massive sins and the massive sinner that you are, that you have had your sins forgiven in Jesus Christ? There are trials in your life, but Christ is risen. You have a reason to rejoice. You have a reason to be thankful. Rejoice always, Rob read for us in the prayer meeting. Rejoice always and pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. How in the world can you echo the words of the Apostle Paul there from 1 Thessalonians 5? because you know your sins are forgiven, because you know Jesus Christ is risen. That is how you worship with joy. That is where you can find contentment that is abiding and lasting, because you know that the weight of your sins, which deserve the eternal wrath of God, eternal hell, have been dealt with in Jesus. But I want to ask this question.

If you worship with joy here this evening, and I hope that you do, if you worship with joy here this evening, Does that mean you should worship however you want? Does worshipping with joy equate to or mean that you just sort of do whatever you want in worship because you want to have joy in your worship? Does worshipping with joy mean that you need to have some sort of hip music or some sort of cool, casual, funny worship leader? What does it mean to worship with joy?

Well, verse 18 actually tells us all this was done how? As it is written in the book of Moses. They worshipped with joy and they worshipped according to the word of God. Their worship was God-centered. That is why they worshipped with joy, because their worship was centered upon the glories of who God is. That makes it to where you worship with joy.

Who's the object of your worship? Is the object of your worship your feelings? your emotions. No, the object of Christian worship is the triune God. He is the one that you come to church to glorify, to worship. It's Him, not yourself. And so we worship with joy because finally, for just a small amount of your week, You actually, by God's grace, hopefully, are taken out of all the self-centeredness that is the fallen sinner, and you're fixated for at least, hopefully, the portion of the worship service upon God, the one that you were created to worship and enjoy. And so finally, you're separated from the selfish motives and thinkings of yourself, and you can just simply bask in the glories of who God is. You see, you really don't need some sort of light show or superficial things to make your worship service special.

What you need is something supernatural. You need the risen Lord Jesus Christ. I plead with you, what is more incredible, silly skits and fleeting garbage, or the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is risen. If that is not enough to make the heart worship, then I beg you to realize that you are not understanding what Christ has done. The Lord Jesus Christ is risen, and so many churches are looking to gimmicks for worship. How does that compare to the risen Lord Jesus Christ? Why would we settle for something less than the God who is risen from the dead for our sins that we might have a right relationship with him?

And so this text is bursting with joy because it's focused on God. And that is what made them worshipful with joy is because they were God-centered. But secondly, you find ultimate joy in the redemption of God. Now, obviously, you see this in verses 19 through 21. Now, obviously, we've touched something upon the redemption of God already. But I want to read these verses again because they bring out a few other elements of the redemption of God that are helpful for our joy.

It says this, verse 19, on the 14th day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover for the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together. All of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests and for themselves. It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile and also by everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel, and they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Well, as you come to these verses, you continue to see this joy. And this joy here is centered particularly not so much on the worship of God in general, which is more the focus, we could say, of the previous section, but here it's more located on the redemption of God in particular. They are filled with joy as they contemplate the redemption of God. You see this in their celebrating of the Passover and of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Now, when Guy was here and he preached through Exodus, he talked about how the Passover highlights the idea of justification and the Feast of Unleavened Bread highlights the idea of sanctification. And in that sermon, Guy brought out these ideas that in the Passover, it was this meal, if you will remember, particularly in Exodus 12 when it's first instituted, but you see it throughout in passages like this.

In the Passover, they had a spotless lamb. And that lamb needed to be spotless to represent God's demand for perfect righteousness. God calls those who would be in his presence to be spotless, to be without blemish. And so the lamb had to be spotless, representing a sense of righteousness or purity.

But what does the lamb receive in the Passover? The Lamb receives death. The Lamb is slaughtered. Now, why is the Lamb slaughtered? Well, the Lamb is slaughtered in place of those who are looking to the promised Messiah to come, in place of them and their sins. And so, the Lamb of the Passover points to that need to be declared righteous, to be declared to have your sins forgiven. That's the concept behind the idea of the Passover Lamb. But then what about the Feast of Unleavened Bread? It follows immediately upon the heels of the Passover celebration.

And the Feast of Unleavened Bread, if you remember, was a time when for seven days the people of God had to get rid of all the leaven among them. In their diet, they had to get rid of leaven. In their houses, they had to get rid of the leaven or the yeast. And what did that represent? Well, according, for example, from 1 Corinthians 5, it makes it explicit, it represented sin. Now, the leaven itself was not evil. But in the feast, it was a representative for the concept of sin. And they had to get rid of all the leaven. All of it had to be removed.

Why? Because they were to be seeking holiness of life. But remember, it was only after the Passover lamb had been slaughtered that they were to begin to have all the leaven of their life removed. In other words, they couldn't remove their sin by their own strength and then God forgive them. They needed to be declared righteous. And then having been declared righteous, they were to pursue personal holiness, the removal of their sins, sanctification in their lives.

And so as they do all of this, as they are to pursue this feast of leaven, which represented the need to have holiness of life, how did they pursue holiness of life? According to verse 22, and they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy. They pursued holiness of life with a godly gladness. Pursuing holiness of life is not something that must be done with a frown on your face. You can pursue holiness of life with joy in your heart because you're getting to live for God, the purpose for which you were made.

You know, sometimes there's this idea, even among Christians, see, often among Christians, that if you're gonna be a serious Christian, you can't be joyful. If you're gonna be a serious Christian, you're not allowed to have real joy in your life. Well, this isn't only untrue, this is a sinful idea. God wants you to be joyful.

How do I know that? The fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace. The second fruit of the Spirit is a call to joy. It's a call to be glad that you know the living and true God, to rejoice that you have a right relationship with him. Pursuing holiness of life is not something that must be done with a frown on your face. You're striving to live for your God who loves you, who redeemed you. That's something that you ought to do with joy. It doesn't mean you never might weep over your sins, but the disposition of your heart should be one of gladness and gratitude. You know those Puritans, you know those old closed-minded bigots? Not really, we like the Puritans around here, but that's the idea, right? The killjoys?

Well, you remember they did write the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechism, and they did write the first catechism question to the Shorter Catechism. which says, what is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. They understood that if you really want to enjoy this life, you must glorify God. And if you're really glorifying God, you will enjoy this life because your joy isn't really in this life, so to speak. It's in the God who has created you and the God to whom you get to give And so this idea that sometimes can exist in our lives that if I'm going to be a serious Christian, I must forego having joy, that's not found in the scriptures.

Jesus was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief. That's true. Jesus also endured the pain of the cross because of the joy that was set before him. Hebrews chapter 12. When you pursue holiness you do have to cut off arms and you do have to pluck out eyes. And sometimes you do lose friends and sometimes you do experience a sense of loneliness and sorrow.

But as you go through all of this there is a hidden joy because as a Christian you're living for God. And this is what brings them joy in this text. It is not their circumstances. It is the God in whom they're delighting and the redemption that he has given to them.

When my sister, Kate, was getting ready to get married, my dad knew that he was going to die pretty soon. He had about a month left to live. And he gave her a charge at the very small wedding that we threw for them. And he said this to them, do not find joy in your circumstances, but in the promises of Jesus Christ. And see, he knew he was about to die. And he knew when he said that, what he was saying wasn't just an idea that sounded sweet for his daughter and her new husband to hold on to. It was something that was giving him life as he was prepared to die. You cannot find your ultimate joy in your circumstances. It must be in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ, the redemption that is yours. Thirdly, you find ultimate joy in the sovereignty of God. So we've seen the worship of God, the redemption of God, and now the sovereignty of God. Verse 22 again, we've looked at the start of verse 22, but let's read it again.

And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them. so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." Matthew Henry, commenting on this verse, said, God is the fountain from whence all the streams of our joy flow. And that is just what you see here. God is the fountain from whence the joys of our life flow. He says here in verse 22, they did this with joy for the Lord had made them joyful. This joy comes from their heavenly father.

It is he, the Lord, Yahweh, the covenant making, covenant keeping God, who made them joyful. Ultimately, he was the one who brought them joy. They were joyful because it was God who had sovereignly brought them back to Jerusalem. They were joyful because it was God who had sovereignly enabled them to rebuild the house. They were joyful because it was God who had sovereignly caused the king of Assyria, alluding here to the king of Persia, who had enabled them, who had helped them and aided them in the rebuilding of the house.

It was God's sovereignly working out all of these things that brought them joy. God had brought them this joy and God's sovereignty ought to bring you joy too. God is sovereign in your marriage. God is sovereign in the lives of your children. God is sovereign in the lives of your grandchildren. God is a sovereign over the farming industry. God is sovereign over your businesses. God is sovereign over his church. And these realities should bring you joy. And why should they bring you joy? They should bring you joy because if God has not spared his own son, how much will he also not graciously with him give us all things?

He cares more about you and knows what you need better than you do. And he's sovereign over you. He's sovereign over your children. Perhaps you're here and you see a child or a grandchild who you believe might be straying. Well, there is comfort in knowing that God is sovereign even over that. And he cares about you and knows what you and your family need more than you do. There's comfort that we can take and joy that we can have even as we go through trials in our lives because we know that these are underneath the sovereignty of our God. So where can you find ultimate joy this evening? Oh, it's been clear.

I hope that you'll never find it in yourself. If you look inside yourself, you'll find misery. And if you keep digging, you'll find more misery. You must look outside of yourself. You must look outside of yourself, not to the created world, but to the creator, God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the reason that you will not find ultimate joy in this created world is, again, simply this world was not created to bring you ultimate joy.

When I was maybe eight or 10 years old or so, A friend of mine, the two of us got together and we went fishing. And he wasn't trying to be funny, but he had never gone fishing before and he got his fishing pole out and he got some scotch tape and he taped the hook to the end of the fishing string. I informed him that this was never going to work. He was never going to catch a fish this way.

But the problem wasn't that he used, the problem wasn't tape. Tape isn't the problem. The problem is that he's trying to use tape for a purpose for which it wasn't designed. And in the same sort of way, when you look for that ultimate joy somewhere other than God himself, the redemption or the worship that you have in God, the redemption you have in God, the sovereignty that you know he has, when you look somewhere other than him, It's sort of like that. It just simply won't work. It's not the purpose for which you've been created. Creation is not designed to bring you ultimate joy. The creator is.

So be joyful here this evening if you're in Christ. Be joyful because of who God is and of what he has done in for you in his plan of redemption. Let us pray. Our heavenly father, we do come before you with joyful hearts. Not because everything in our life is always what we wish it were. Oh Lord, much we would change if we had that ability.

But God, we are rejoicing and filled with joy because you're our God. Because you have let us worship you when our lips cannot even really begin to give you the praise that is due your name. You have washed us in the blood of your son. You have filled us with your Holy Spirit. And oh God, you are sovereign over our entire lives.

And so, oh Lord, help us to learn to rejoice. Help us, oh Father, to repent of thinking if we do in any way that we will only be a serious Christian if we don't have laughter or we don't have gladness at any level in our hearts. Oh God, that is not true. Oh God, you call us to be joyful because of who you are and we praise you for being who you are. It's in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, amen.