



November 22, 2015

Ezra 3

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 3

*“The Priority of Jesus, the Practice of Worship”*

Pastor Gary Hamrick

As our church goes through a season of change with a building program, there are many principles we can learn from the Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their city, their lives, and their Temple during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Two of the things that will remain constant at our church are the priority of Jesus and the practice of worship. In this message, Pastor Gary teaches us about the parallel in found in Ezra chapter three.

### The Altar Of Sacrifice

1. The Israelites had been in back in the land six months, and on the first day of the seventh month, they started to build the altar of sacrifice to the Lord.
2. By building the altar before they laid the first stone for the Temple, they did first things first.
3. The altar was a platform, with the following dimensions: 30' x 30' x 15'.
4. A priest and a worshiper would bring an animal up the ramp to the platform, and then the worshiper would lay his weight on the head of the animal while the priest would slit the throat and collect the blood as it drained.
5. The altar of sacrifice connected man to God.
6. The main difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament has to do with how we approach God and how God accepts us.

7. The problem is that man is born into sin, and therefore, there is a gap between man and a holy God.
8. God prescribed a method, which allowed man to commune with God and be accepted by God, and that method was the animal sacrifice system.
9. God determined that in order for us to approach him, there had to be an exchange of an innocent life for a guilty life.
10. The method between the Old Testament and the New Testament changed, in that God sent his son, Jesus, into the world to be the exchange of an innocent for a guilty life.
11. Jesus' death on the cross was a one-time sacrifice for all time and all people.
12. All who believe in the finished work of Jesus on the cross will experience the miracle of the great exchange.
13. [John 1:29](#) - *"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"*
14. In his single sacrifice, Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system of the Old Testament.
15. [Hebrews 10:10](#) - *"... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*
16. [1 John 2:2](#) - *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*
17. [Ephesians 3:12](#) - *"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."*
18. The altar of sacrifice points to Jesus' sacrifice.

### Keep Jesus The Priority

19. Jesus must always be the priority of the church.
20. Unfortunately, making Jesus the priority is not a priority in many churches today, because these churches are moving away from making the Bible and Jesus the priority.

## It Was A Very “Spiritual” Time

21. Pastor Gary said that it was the case in Ezra's day, that it was a very spiritual time, in the sense of being mystical.
  - a. During the time period covered by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (538BC to 444BC): Buddha was alive in India, Confucius was alive in China, and Socrates was alive in Greece.
22. This was a time of so-called spirituality and enlightenment, but nothing has changed, because we see that in our day there is a great deal of interest in spirituality and intellectual assent.
23. We need to be reminded that Jesus is the only pathway or connector to God; otherwise we can be on all kinds of “spiritual” journeys and never arrive.
24. Pastor Gary quoted one of the questions Oprah Winfrey was asked in an interview in the October 2015 issue of *AARP Magazine*:
  - a. “Some people question whether you can be a Christian and also embrace so-called New Age philosophy, how would you respond to that? ‘I can't define ‘God,’ so to be open to the mystical and mystery of God is a natural part of myself. ...It's working for me and has worked for me and continues to work for me, in a way that fills me with a sense of peace and contentment about what God means to me.’ ”<sup>1</sup>
25. Pastor Gary said Oprah's answer reminded him of Mahatma Gandhi's incorrect understanding of God.
  - a. “God is that indefinable something which we all feel but we do not know...”<sup>2</sup>
26. A proper biblical understanding of God helps us recognize we can know God and we can have relationship with him through his son, Jesus Christ.
27. If we don't know Jesus, then any spiritual journey we may be on will have no destination.

## It's A Very Unpopular Time To Be Solely Devoted To The Lord

28. **Ezra 3:3** - *“Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Finding Your Spirituality, Oprah Joins Americans Over 50 On a Search for Meaning.

<sup>2</sup> <http://bit.ly/1R6vFuR>

29. Pastor Gary said, "When you get serious about worshiping Jesus, and Jesus alone, and you start talking in exclusive terms, there will definitely be people who won't like you!"
30. In the time in which we live, it will become increasingly unpopular to stand for truth, to believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and talk about the things of the Lord in exclusive terms, and it's likely we will personally experience how unpopular being a Christian is in our culture.
- If you take a stand for marriage as only being between one man and one woman, you will be called a homophobe.
  - If you take a stand for life, you will be labeled as someone who is against women.
  - If you take a stand against harvesting the body parts of babies, you will be labeled as someone who is against women's health.
  - If you share Jesus in the workplace, you will either be disciplined or fired, for proselytizing.
  - If you conscientiously object to signing marriage licenses, baking wedding cakes or selling wedding flowers to same-sex couples; you may be put in prison, fined, run out of town, or any combination of the three!
  - The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) has within their guidelines for employers, that they must make accommodations for their Muslim employees so that they will be able to have their personal times of prayer.
31. **Mark 13:13** - *"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*
32. **Mark 8:38** - *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

#### Keep Worship The Practice

33. **Ezra 3:10-11** - *"When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."*

34. Pastor Gary said Cornerstone Chapel has always and will continue to worship the Lord, no matter what the style of worship might be.
35. **Psalm 150:1-6** - *“Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.”*

### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Ezra 3:1-6** to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Read and discuss the Scriptures that point to Jesus as the pathway or connector to God. (See #13, and #15 through #17 above)
4. What are some of the ways you see Cornerstone Chapel being intentional about keeping Jesus and the Bible the priority in the church?
5. How are you being intentional about making Jesus and the Bible the priority in your life?
6. Before coming to faith in Christ, was there a time in your life when you had an interest in spirituality and enlightenment? (See #21 and #22 above)
7. Read and discuss **Mark 13:13** and **Mark 8:38**.
8. How have you experienced being unpopular because of your Christian faith?
9. What does the practice of worshiping the Lord mean to you, and what does the practice of worshiping the Lord look like in your life?
10. Read and discuss **Ezra 3:10-11**.
11. Lead your group in a reading of **Psalm 150:1-6**, and close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).