

The Distinguishing Marks of a Genuine Seeker

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Looking at the last four verses of this chapter this morning. The title of the message is "The Distinguishing Marks of a Genuine Seeker." The distinguishing marks of a genuine seeker.

We were a few weeks ago looking at the fourth chapter of Ezra and at that time we noted how an interesting thing happens when they begin to build the temple. You remember when they first started after they laid the foundation and the shout went out, the shout of joy, remember we're talking about the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian exile, the nation of Israel taken into captivity for 70 years, then they're brought back under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest to build God's temple, to rebuild it. It had been razed to the ground by the Babylonians and so they come back to rebuild the place where man at that time, man must meet with God, the temple in Jerusalem.

So they come back and they lay the foundation, there's a great shout that goes out, a shout of joy, but also a shout of sorrow. Remember, some of the people there remembered the former temple and the glory of the former temple and in looking at the footprint of the new temple, they were mourning that it was going to be so much less than the former temple and the shout of joy along with the wail of sorrow mixed together and it was heard for miles, the author tells us at the end of chapter 3. Then in chapter 4 we find out that they began to build the temple and as they build, they are immediately, almost immediately the people from the surrounding area come and say, "Hey, we too worship the Lord. We want to build with you." Now the author of Ezra introduces those people by saying when the enemies of the Lord heard the shout, heard they were building, they go and they say, "We want to build with you." They appeared to be seekers seeking the Lord. "We too have been sacrificing to Him since the days our fathers were brought here by Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king." And so there were truly a number of people who professed to worship Yahweh and who offered sacrifices to him in high places and other around the area, and who now that they heard the temple was being built, wanted to get in on it. But if you remember, Zerubbabel tells them, "You have no part with us in building this temple." Was that an example of racism? No. How do you know? Well, we're gonna see it here in the passage we're looking at today, that it wasn't that no one could come and build, it was that anyone who was a genuine seeker of the Lord could come but the issue is genuine, the genuineness of your seeking God.

So the distinguishing marks of a true seeker, a genuine seeker we find in verses 19 to 22. Key phrase or key word actually is to seek the Lord God of Israel, and we're gonna see it in verse 21, and contrast that to what we just talked about from the fourth chapter. Now that the temple has been completed, we're told that there are those from around the area that are now worshipping Yahweh according to his will. Let's look at verse 19 of chapter 6 of the book of Ezra.

19 The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month.
20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves. 21 The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate the Passover. 22 And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to Your word mindful of our great need of grace, mindful of the great distance that separates us from You, You who are holy, holy, holy, exalted in majesty and splendor, greatness, purity, we who are so small, our knowledge is so small, our righteousness is not even to be spoken of, we're sinners. And we come knowing this great distance must be bridged by Your grace and our hope is in Your willing to condescend to speak to us, to tell us what You want us to know and grant us grace to humble ourselves before Your word and to repent and to believe and to walk in ways that are pleasing to You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The distinguishing marks of a genuine seeker. What is it that separates these guys in chapter 6, verse 21, from the apparent seekers in chapter 4, verses 2 and 3, who said, "Let us build with you for we, like you, seek your God." That's exactly the wording if you turn back over to chapter 4, verse 2, "they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.'" So what is it different about those false seekers and these true genuine seekers? That's the subject of the message this morning that we want to see that I believe that the author of Ezra wants us to glean from this. It's a very key theme in the whole book of Ezra and Nehemiah, is what is it that distinguishes the true people of God, and what we see again and again is that the true people of God are those who seek the Lord by separating themselves from the world and by trusting in his gracious provision.

So we're gonna look at that this morning, three distinguishing marks of a genuine seeker that I think flow out of this passage. The first genuine mark or mark of a genuine seeker

is the mark of humility. That's the first point, the mark of humility. We see it in the use of the word or understanding something of the definition of the word "seek" that is used, the Hebrew word in verse 21 when it says the "exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate the Passover." The word "seek," the Hebrew word there means "to inquire; to seek with care." It means to seek with a sense of earnestness that you're going to respond to what you find appropriately. It means an honest humble inquiry. You're not seeking in the sense of just wanting to find what you want to find, you're seeking with a determination to adjust your life in accordance with what you find. The Hebrew word "darash" has that connotation.

So they are seeking the Lord God of Israel and they are seeking him humbly. Now it's interesting, the Bible says in Romans 3:10 that there is no one who seeks God. The Apostle Paul tells us, "There is no one who does good, there is no one who seeks for God, all have together turned aside and become corrupt. There is none righteous, no, not one." And the Scripture does teach us that, that the reality is that sinners, that sin has so darkened the hearts of men that no one on their own seeks God. The amazing thing is in reality God is speaking every single day all the time. The whole earth is full of his glory, we were singing that earlier. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. The whole earth is full of his glory. That's exactly what Isaiah heard in the temple when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and he heard the seraphim singing back and forth to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory." The irony is that Isaiah had not seen the glory of the Lord until he came to the temple and God opened his eyes, and he finally sees what has been all around him but he's been blind to. The glory of God is everywhere.

That is the reality that Scripture presents to us. Romans 1 says that the Lord has made himself known in all of creation; that he's made it known in every single person in the wiring of their being, their inner man, they know God exists. But what do they do? Romans 1:18-21 says that even though man knows God, he does not honor God or give thanks but he turns away from God in his foolishness, his heart is darkened and he worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator. He worships animals. He worships everything else but the true God. That's the nature of what sin has done to us. Sin has darkened our minds so that God is speaking continually. Psalm 19 says that the heavens declare the glory of God. The firmament speaks forth his praise day after day. Listen to this, day after day they pour forth speech. Night after night they are proclaiming knowledge. People looking around them, every day God is speaking, he's speaking, he's speaking and they're saying, "Why won't God speak?" The problem is not with God, the problem is man. The problem is sin and these wicked hearts that we have because we're sinners. We don't want to see. We don't want to hear. So that's why Paul can say, "There is none who seeks for God. There is none who understands."

So then how can you ever have a genuine seeker? Well, the wonder of it is God is a God of grace and mercy who even though he's speaking and no one's listening, he's speaking and no one's listening, he's speaking and no one's listening, by his grace he has favor when he touches the hearts of those whom he will. And when you see someone's heart

that has been touched, they become a genuine seeker like the people discussed here in verse 21, in this passage verses 19 to 22. These are the genuine seekers that the Lord has moved in their hearts and now they are really seeking God and the first element of that is humility. They come to understand that they know nothing and they need to be taught. This is the first distinguishing mark of the person who has truly had a work of God done in their life, is true humility. The acknowledgment and the understanding that, "My only hope is grace. My only hope is that God gives me something. My only hope is that God speaks to me, that God directs me, that God changes me." But the person who is an apparent seeker, false seeker, is someone who professes to seek, "Yes, we seek your God with you," but they don't humble themselves under the word of God. They don't put themselves under the Scriptures. They don't put themselves under other people speaking the word to them. It's the characteristic of their life not to be humble.

True humility is a mark of someone who really is seeking because they want, God has worked in their heart, they truly want to know God and they're willing to adjust their life based on what they hear. That's the first thing we see about these people and it creates in them, they come, they're seeking the Lord, they're willing to do whatever it takes as God exposes what they need to do. They come saying like Eli told Samuel, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening." They go to the word that way and when the Lord directs them, they obey. Not always immediately and it's not that there aren't fits and starts, but that the general disposition of the heart of the genuine seeker is humility before God, a willingness to humble themselves.

The second characteristic that we see, the second distinguishing mark or characteristic of a true seeker is a living faith. A living faith. An active faith. Now we get this from the sense that the emphasis is on the Passover here and these guys, these people are seeking the Lord in humility and they're coming under God's ordained means of seeking him. They're not doing their own thing. They're not off, you know, worshiping God however they feel like they want to. This is the mark of the false convert, he doesn't submit to what God says. He says, "Yes, I love Jesus," but he holds onto weird beliefs. I mean, this is what... And essentially what you had when you had those guys coming in chapter 4 who said, "Hey, we also worship God and we've been seeking Him and we offer sacrifices to Him. We want to build with you." It was like Mormons coming to our church and saying, "Hey, can we help you out with your building program? We too worship Jesus. We've been worshiping our whole lives." Or Jehovah's Witnesses, or just worldly professing evangelicals who really don't love God and don't really want to follow the word. Need to examine ourselves. Are these distinguishing marks in our lives?

So the issue here, he says the Passover, why does the Lord have this event recorded? This is always something we need to be reminding ourselves as we read the Scriptures, remember that everything that in the Bible is there for a purpose and it's there when you really think about it, there's a lot of events that happened, I mean, we noted this when I showed that timeline, you know, how chapters 1 to 6 covers, of Ezra covers from basically 536 to 515, 538 to 515. Remember that? It's a 23 year period. Then chapter 7 to chapter 10 of Ezra and then Nehemiah, chapters 1 to 13, those 17 chapters cover 458 to about 430 BC, 28 years. But what about 515 to 458, did anything happen in those 68

years? If my math is wrong, don't.... I guess you could mark me off, a red mark on the sermon notes. But anyway, so did anything happen in that period of time? Well, sure there were people living, there were significant things but why is that omitted? Why are the events here put here? God selectively leaves out some things and he puts in some things so that we really get his emphasis.

After they completed the building, the temple, they dedicated it. The first thing he wants us to know after they did the dedication is they celebrated the Passover, and he takes time to tell us about that. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. Why does he tell us about that and the emphasis? Even the emphasis on the word "exile," listen to this, "The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month." The word "exiles" means "sons of the captivity." In the Hebrew you actually have the word "sons" in all the places you have "exiles." Sons of the captivity. But we don't talk like that. It was those who returned from exile, those who were out of the land who were nearly a thousand miles away, cast out of the land in the exile. The sons of the exiles have come back.

"The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves. The sons of Israel who returned from the exile." You see the emphasis on, don't miss this, who is worshiping the Lord through the Passover? The people that had been exiled. Now he adds to that, "and all those who had separated themselves from the nations." But it's mainly the exiles. It's mainly those 43,000 Jews that had come back from exile.

They're worshiping the Lord in the Passover. What's the significance of the Passover? Why this? Why didn't he tell us about the other feasts? There's two other major feasts in the year, why didn't he go and tell us about those? Why did he just tell us about the Passover? Why is there no mention of Pentecost or the Feast of Booths? Pentecost happens in May/June, the Feast of Booths happens in September/October, but he tells us about the Passover which happens in March/April according to our calendar, the first month of the Jewish calendar but the third or fourth month of our calendar. Why does he tell us about this? Well, it's the first thing that happened. Well, okay, but why not tell us about the others too? It's because the Passover, the Passover is the key salvific event in all Old Testament history. It is the key typological act of God in the Old Testament that typifies what Christ does in saving us.

In fact, it's important for me to take a moment to talk about typology. One of the things we see in the Scriptures as we read through the Bible is that there are many types of Christ, there are many types that are fulfilled in Christ. The type is a resemblance, it's something that's shaped to resemble something. In fact, our English word "type" comes from the Greek word "tupos" which means to like implant or, you know, well, like a typewriter. Some of you guys old enough to remember a typewriter, remember the typewriter, you hit the key and that, you know, it causes that thing, I don't know what you called the metal thing that hits the strike that strikes the paper, and it actually would strike

the paper and indent the paper and ink would fill that indentation. Young people, this really happened. We can vouch for that. So you would hit a key and it would make this imprint and now you have the letter "r" there, and you hit the letter "l" and you hit another key and it makes an imprint and you have the letter "l" there. Well, the metal piece that's striking the paper is actually the "r" or the "l" and the paper just resembles that, what it was struck with.

In the same way, Old Testament types are like the paper, not the reality, and so they are many Old Testament types of Christ, Old Testament anticipations that would be fulfilled in Jesus and in this typology that we have in the Old Testament, we have to be careful when you read the Scriptures not to get too crazy with this, but when you're reading the Bible carefully and you see this is what clearly what's being taught, then you make sure you're careful with your hermeneutics and your interpretation but it is incredibly rich what God does with typology. What he's doing is he's teaching us, he's teaching his people amazing truths about who he is and who his Son would be and he's doing it, as John Calvin said, he's like baby-talking with us. Calvin said that God prattles with us, baby-talks with us. It's like when you have a child and you're communicating with your child and you use the terms they use because they can't form the words yet and you're speaking but you're really communicating, you're coming down to their level and speaking to them so there's real communication happening. God condescends, in some sense everything he does to us is baby-talking. Here is the holy God condescending to speak to us but in the Old Testament especially as he's beginning to unfold his plan of redemption, his plan of salvation, there's a sense in which the Old Testament is baby-talking to us, it's telling us something wonderful is coming and in the Passover event, you have this incredible typology.

Let me show you that just to kind of legitimize this for you biblically. Turn to 1 Corinthians 5 and you'll see the Scripture tell you that the Passover is a type. Here Paul is talking about a situation where in Corinth, the church at Corinth was priding themselves on their love and their tolerance, actually. They had a man there who was married to his father's wife, that is, he had married his step-mother and they were in the church, and Paul is basically saying, "This is an abomination. What are you guys thinking?" So he says in verse 1, chapter 5, 1 Corinthians, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead," you should be mourning over this not proud that you're so accommodating and loving and, you know, you're gonna be gracious and let them come to, you know, to church and be with you even though they're living in active immorality that even the Gentiles don't do. Verse 3, "For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." He says, "Exercise church discipline on him. He's deceived so greatly, he says he loves Christ but you can't love Christ and live like this. So if he truly is the Lord's, the Lord will use your church discipline to bring

him back to obedience." And that's exactly what happens you find out in 2 Corinthians. This guy repented. Awesome.

But look what he says next, verse 6. They were boasting because they were being tolerant and loving and overlooking the sin. He says in verse 6, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." He's directly alluding to the Passover and he's saying, he's talking about leaven in an interesting way, that unleavened bread symbolizes something, and Christ was our Passover, that the Passover lamb was itself a type of Jesus and that the Feast of Unleavened Bread somehow relates to who we are in Christ. It was a type. The reality has come.

So typology, what you have is you have shadows in the Old Testament, images that are impressions and then the substance comes in the New Testament and we see this is the shadow is here, now this is the substance and now we no longer need the shadow, we have the substance, Christ. Again and again and again we see these kinds of things so that the Passover itself, now when you look at the Passover and you read Exodus 12, remember that the Passover, the exodus event happened in 1446 BC, the people of Israel, Jacob's 12 sons and him had gone down into Egypt during the time of famine. Joseph was there, remember the story of Joseph. He makes sure that they're well taken care of and for some decades things are fine and then somewhere along the way a Pharaoh that doesn't remember Joseph comes up, the Israelites are being so blessed, they get a little frightened about a revolt and so they decide to put the Israelites under their thumb and they enslave them for basically 400 years. So they enslave these Israelites and then God sends Moses to deliver them.

Now a question that we need to ask is why did God allow his people to be enslaved? Do you ever think about that? I mean, did it just happen because the Lord is so busy, he's got so many things on his agenda? You know, he's gotta take care of all the various galaxies. Well, it's pretty phenomenal what he's got to do, right? He's doing it every day, he's holding the molecules in the universe together all the time continually, in him all things consist, and yet it wasn't accidental that he allowed his people to go into slavery. Did they do something wrong? We're not told that they did something wrong to make them slaves. The reason he let them become slaves is so that he could show them through a wondrous type, he could show them and us what our salvation is so that the exodus from Egypt, the Egypt pictures the domain of darkness, ungodliness, wickedness, the oppression that was on the people, they were enslaved. He's saying how does a man come to know God? How do you come to know the living God? You have to be delivered from slavery. You are in darkness and bondage. You must be radically delivered.

And how were they delivered? They were delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb. God comes to them and he says, he tells Moses, "Tell the people to take a lamb without spot or blemish, one year old, to kill it for each household, to spread the blood over

basically the door frame of the house, and they are to eat that Passover lamb in its entirety and whatever they don't eat, they've got to burn. They can't keep anything until the next day. They are to cook it with fire. They are to eat it and they're to eat it with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs." He says in chapter 12 of Exodus, "And eat in this manner. You're to eat in the manner that you have your staff in your hand, basically your jacket on, your boots on, your shoes on." You're not at home just relaxing. That's not the way I like to normally eat when I eat. I don't like to have my coat on when I sit at the table, unless you're someone who doesn't run the heat in the wintertime and your spouse is like freezing you out because they're hot or something. Nobody wants to sit at dinner with a coat on. He says, "This time you eat not only with a coat on but your staff in your hand." What's with that? Well, we're gonna see more of that, "But what you must do is eat all of it. That is, this blood of the lamb over your door, you're gonna consume the lamb, you're gonna separate it out, everybody's gonna have, eat from this lamb in the household and the blood over the door, the blood of the lamb is going to protect you from the destruction that God is going to bring on Egypt."

What God did is he came to Egypt and he destroyed the firstborn of every household in Egypt in a single night. This was the tenth and final plague on Egypt, the Passover, and the death angel would pass over the houses that had the blood over the door. Every other house and it's real emphatic on this, even people in jail, their firstborn died. The people in the palace, Pharaoh's firstborn died; from the lowest to the highest all across Egypt, every single firstborn male died, animals too, except where there was blood over the door. God passed over those homes. That's where the phrase Passover comes from. So the slaying of the sacrificial animal protects you from the wrath of God.

So how are you delivered from slavery? How can we come to know God? You have to be delivered from slavery to know God. You have to be delivered from his wrath because you're a slave to sin and you deserve his wrath, but if you can appropriate the blood that he provides as a sacrifice, you can be passed over. And even more of the typology and I'm gonna mention this, we can't read all the passages we need to but make a note of Hebrews 11:8-10 and 13-15. Hebrews 11:8-10 and 13-15, and also Hebrews 3:7 to Hebrews 4:10. What you will see in those passages is the author of Hebrews basically says this: Canaan, the Promised Land is a type of heaven. It was the type, heaven is the antitype. In the same way that the Passover lamb was a type, Christ was the antitype. Heaven is the antitype, Canaan was the type. It was the shadow. Heaven is the substance.

You see this when he tells you in Hebrews 11:8-10 and 13-15, that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dwelt in the land as in tents, they never possessed it. Why is that? Why did God not let them have the land? He could have just nuked everybody there and given them the land, it would've been a really cool thing to do. I mean, people would have been wowed by that. It's the kind of thing, that's how we would write the script but the Lord didn't do that. He had them pass through the land top to bottom. They had problems at times. Isaac, you know, digs a well, people steal his well and he's dealing with that. You're dealing with all this. He's living in tents. They don't have an inheritance. God said it's their land, though. The author of Hebrews says the Lord did this so that they could learn that they would start looking for a better country, that is a heavenly one; that Canaan is a type of

heaven. When God said, "Abraham, I'm gonna take you to My land, a land I'm going to show you," he was really prattling with him to say, "I want to tell you how to get to heaven."

So then the exodus continues that explanation, how do you get to heaven. Because what happens? When they leave Egypt, bondage, where do they go? They go to Canaan and Hebrews 3 and 4 explain how some people didn't get into Canaan. Why? Because they didn't have faith. To get from the domain of darkness into heaven, you have to have faith. You've got to have saving faith and faith, back to the Passover, faith is believing God and his promise. God says, "If you have the blood over your door, He will pass over," and so faith kills the animal and puts the blood over the door, stays inside like God said all night, and eats the food just like God said. Faith trusts God's promise. His provision. His promise. That's what faith does.

True seekers have faith. They submit themselves to the word of God and they trust in his promise. God has said it's this way. The only way that I can be right, the only way as an Israelite in Egypt in that time that you could survive was to do what God said and believe his promise and that was a type to say that the way that you escape the wrath of God, the way that you are delivered from the domain of darkness, the way that you are brought out of the house of slavery, in fact that's what you'll see in Exodus 13 when you read that. I encourage you to read 12 and 13, you'll see that they're talking about by a powerful hand God brought you out of the house of slavery. Four times he uses that phrase. By a powerful hand God brought you out of Egypt. By a powerful hand he brought you out of the house of slavery.

We need a powerful hand to bring us out of the house of slavery and Jesus Christ is the means by which that happens because he is the true Passover Lamb. It is his death and his death alone, his blood that must be applied to our hearts, and if you believe in God's provision and his promise and you trust in his provision and his promise, that is a mark of someone who is a genuine seeker. You're trusting in Christ alone. My only hope is Jesus. My only hope is his perfect record of righteousness. He lived a perfect life, 33 years, tempted in every way yet without sin. So he has a perfect record of righteousness to offer to God and then he dies as a spotless lamb just like the Passover lamb, a lamb without spot or blemish. Peter picks up on that image and says too you were purified, that you were redeemed, you were redeemed from your former way of life, not with silver or gold, 1 Peter 1, but with precious blood, blood as of a lamb without spot or blemish. So you place your faith in his provision, his promise, and you take his promise, you take him at his word.

Interesting verse I was looking at this week actually, Romans 10:3-4, because what makes a genuine seeker from a false seeker because there could be religious people who are not genuine seekers? What makes the difference? Paul in Romans 10:3 says this, he's talking about his broken-heartedness for the Jewish people who by and large in the first century, the Jewish people as a whole rejected Christ. Now there were a significant number a minority of Jews who believed, of course. All the apostles were Jews but most of the churches in the New Testament world had a nucleus of Jewish believers, but the

predominant number of believers in all the churches throughout the Mediterranean world were Gentile from the nations. So Paul in writing to the Romans is lamenting the fact that he's seeing so many Jews reject Christ and he says, "I tell you, I've unceasing grief in my heart for my brothers." And he says in verse 3, "I testify to you that they have a zeal but not according to knowledge." They have a zeal but not according to knowledge and he goes on to say, "What do you mean that they have a zeal?" They're earnest and they're eager in their pursuit of God and yet it's not according to knowledge. How do you know? What's that mean? He says, "For not knowing," being ignorant of, "not knowing the righteousness from God and seeking to establish one of their own," their own righteousness, not knowing the righteousness that comes from God and seeking to establish their own, "they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." The issue is they would not humble themselves below what God said is the way of righteousness. It was pride. They would not subject themselves, some translations say that, they would not subject themselves to the righteousness from God. You must subject yourself to what God says about how to be saved. We don't get to edit it and we find ourselves or we hear other people saying things like, "Well, my God wouldn't do that," well, the issue is it doesn't really matter what your God would do because if you're talking like that, your God is not the God of the Bible at that moment because the God who says in his word what he does, has spoken and that settles it.

So faith humbly, and we said humility, and then faith, faith puts your trust and subjects yourself to the promise of God and all of your trust in the promise of God and the provision of God. These people are partaking in the Passover in Ezra 6, actively trusting in the image that is there and worshiping God as he's meant to be worshiped, realizing and celebrating the historic salvific event when they were delivered from slavery, anticipating God's future deliverance somehow for them into his presence.

So faith is the second distinguishing mark. Now what's the third distinguishing mark? Back to Ezra 6:19-22. The third distinguishing mark is repentance. Repentance. The word "repent" is not used in the passage but I think it's illustrated in a really wonderful way here and very clearly. It's first of all illustrated or spelled out in that clause when he says, "The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD." That seeking the Lord genuinely, that believing in the Lord genuinely always encompasses a separation. To separate themselves, the idea is to wall off, to completely remove one's self from something. What are they walling off? What are they, I mean, figuratively walling off? What are they figuratively walling off in their life? The impurity of the nations. The uncleanness and the wickedness.

You see, genuinely coming to God, the mark of a true seeker if you're really seeking the Lord, you come humbly, you come believing in his provision, and you come willing to let go of sin. You turn from sin toward God. This is the doctrine of repentance. Repentance is a very important biblical concept that means to turn from sin to God. Faith and repentance are two parts of the same thing actually. Conversion is faith and repentance. It's two sides of the coin, one coin. Faith is the active going out of the heart to trust in Christ and unite yourself to him as God's provision, and so faith is, in a sense, the eating

of Passover, the reception that the Passover lamb is my salvation and I'm eating it, I'm taking Christ himself for mine, spiritually I'm being joined to Christ. But that's part of conversion, the other part though in doing that, I must let go of the world. I must let go of sin. I must separate myself from the impurity of the land. There must be in the heart a real surrender to Christ.

Now the rest of your life is going to be continually believing and repenting. This was the first, one of the first, I think it was the first thesis of Martin Luther, the 95 Theses that he posted to the door of the Wittenberg church to start the Reformation was that the Bible does not teach the Catholic doctrine of penance, which is doing things to appease God. No, the Bible teaches repentance and that we should carry our repentance all the way through our life; that the Christian life is to be continually repenting. But it starts at some point and so the genuine believer is someone who is always growing, he's learning to be humble, he's learning to trust in God's provision, and he's learning to repent. He keeps repenting. He keeps believing. He keeps humbling himself.

That's the true seeker. They separate themselves from the impurity of the nations, the uncleanness. You see this emphasis too in even the emphasis in the previous verse on purity. In verse 20, "For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure," that is ceremonially clean to come to God who is holy. One of the metaphors he uses in the Old Testament is the idea of clean and unclean, that to worship the Lord you had to be ceremonially clean. You had to wash. There were all kinds of things that could make you unclean to worship the Lord. If someone died in your family and you had to be a part of carrying their body, then for so long you could not go to the temple, and then when you went, you had to be, to experience some kind of ritual washing before you could actually worship the Lord in the temple. What's with that? That's a type. That's baby-talk. It doesn't really matter about our physical body. It doesn't really make us unclean before God for someone to die that we love and we have to care for them and to care for their body. No, God is teaching us, he of course wants that done but he's trying to say, "Listen, to come into My presence, you must be completely pure because I am so pure that I cannot look upon sin or all of the devastation that sin has done." So you must be made clean. I must be made clean to come to God.

We must be separated from the impurity of the land. We must be willing to turn from it and the one who truly is repenting and trusting over time will become more and more pure. That's part of what, that's part of the type that this was teaching. I mean, they had all these rules about what you could eat and what you couldn't eat, remember that, the dietary laws? You know, they couldn't eat pork. That was a loss right there. No bacon. But if you lived at that time and that was the way you sought God. You don't eat that because God has said no to that. Now praise the Lord in the New Testament Jesus said it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles the man, Mark says thus he declared all foods clean. Amen. Praise God. Shrimp too.

So but the type was to say what was God doing with that? Why did he do that? Was he just like, is God just capricious, he just likes to on a whim let's try this, let's try that? No, he's teaching something very fundamental. He's teaching his people in one of the most

effective ways possible because he knows he created us to eat, he created us to enjoy the blessing of eating wonderful foods, all the various tastes that we have, the taste buds in our bodies, all the spices and things that he's filled his world with, all of the beauty that's here. It's amazing and what he said is, "In Israel I'm teaching you that everything that you put in your mouth has a spiritual focus, that whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." He was teaching them that, teaching us that through their example.

Then he says, "It's not really about the food, it's not really about the type of the food. It doesn't matter. I made the shrimp. I made the pigs. It's all good. What it is is that everything in your life is to be lived for My glory." So when you eat you ought to be thinking, I ought to be thinking about the portion size I eat just to glorify God. I ought to be thinking about as I taste and enjoy it, praising and glorifying God who has made things so wonderfully because that's what, everything's about worship, everything's about God.

Now so he used that to say it's all about clean and unclean, so they had to think, "If I touch something that makes me unclean, I can't even go, I can't go to the temple tomorrow. Passover is coming, I won't be able to participate." So they had to think about that. It was constantly making them think about that. In fact, if you look, I want you to turn over to Leviticus 20, the word "separate" is used there three times and I want to show you, remember they separated themselves from the impurity of the peoples of the land. This is a passage that helps us understand that, what God was teaching through this, separation, this repentance. When you read, we're not gonna read the whole chapter, but essentially Leviticus 20 is a catalog of all of the incredible offensive wickedness of the people in the land of Canaan that God drove out for his people. It talks about just almost every kind of sin you can think of. If a man lies, and it actually has here if a man lies with his father's wife, that's an abomination. If a man lies with his daughter. If a man lies with his sister. If a man lies with a man as you should lie with a woman. If a man lies with a beast as you should lie with a woman. All these things are an abomination, they are detestable to God, God hates it, and the people of the land have done this. "Separate, be separate from that. Do not try to worship Me and live like them." That's his message. "I am holy and if you come to Me, you must be holy for I am holy."

Now the wonderful news is God is the one who makes us holy so we can come unholy if we come trusting in his provision, believing in the Passover lamb, believing in Christ, and repenting and releasing these things and saying, "Lord, clean me up," then he will do it. But we can't come holding onto those things. He says in verse 22 of Leviticus 20, "You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out." You are to live righteously because if you don't, the land will vomit you out. That's exactly what happened in the exile, the land vomited them out because they were doing exactly the same things that the people, the ungodly and wicked idolaters in Canaan had done.

He goes on to say, "Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. Hence I have said to you, 'You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you

to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples." That "separate" is the same word in Ezra 6. They separated themselves. God has separated you from the peoples.

And then he says, "You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean," this is about the eating thing, and that word "make a distinction," the New American Standard that I'm reading from is the same word "separate." You're to separate the unclean from the clean.

Verse 26, "Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine." "Set you apart" is the same word, separated, same Hebrew word. "I have separated you to Myself therefore you are to live as one who is separated by separating yourself from the worship of the idols and from the detestable practices of the nations." This is the way God is.

So if you want to dwell in God's land, you have to have the Passover sacrifice, you've got to trust in him to deliver you from slavery. He brings you into his kingdom which ultimately will be heaven, but he brings you into his kingdom now, his church, and we are to live as those who are separated from the impurity of the nations, that is, we are people who live lives of repentance, continually turning from sin and continually turning to Christ.

You know, I mentioned the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Really interesting. I hadn't really studied that until just this week, really looking at it a little more closely. When you read Exodus 12 and 13, you'll see this, that he tells them, remember I mentioned earlier you're to eat with your coat on, your shoes on, your staff in your hand, and so what would they eat? They'd eat the lamb. They'd eat unleavened bread. They'd eat bitter herbs. Then what'll happen as the story unfolds, the Passover happens, the Egyptians are wailing in the morning, Pharaoh calls in Moses and says, "Take the people and get out!" And the people around them say, "Please go or we're all gonna be dead! Go!" And they're hurrying them out of the land and it tells us that they go and the first place they stop they eat but they have to eat unleavened bread because they didn't have time to let their bread leaven. He's telling this is why that whole unleavened bread thing was there. They had unleavened bread for seven days was to remember how they hurried out of the land of Egypt. Unleavened bread isn't as tasty as leavened bread and you normally would want to leaven your bread. But the unleavened bread for seven days, the Passover, you kill the Passover lamb, you eat the Passover lamb, seven days of unleavened bread, you removed the leaven, what's that? I think we see in 1 Corinthians 5, leaven was a type of sin. It was a type of the love of the world and the fact that you had to hurry out, think about that, you've got to hurry out. Why did God do that? I mean, it's serious. "I just destroyed the Egyptian pantheon. We can do a little victory celebration or victory lap around Egypt if we want to. We can just go around and parade around the fact that you guys don't worship the true God." I mean, I'm being a little facetious of course here, but why hurry out? They don't need to hurry out, God is protecting them. Why hurry out? Because they needed to hurry out because the Lord even says right after they go out he says, "I'm not gonna take them through Philistia because if they encounter war too quickly, I'm gonna

take them around this way. If they encounter war too quickly, they'll want to go back to Egypt. Hurry out, don't look back, don't desire Egypt!"

That's the unleavened bread. You cannot continue wanting that. Run away from the world. Run away from sin. Kill it. Fight against it. Trust in Christ. Repent. Run from everything in your life that would keep you from loving Christ. Don't look back. This is pictured in Pilgrim's Progress when Bunyan describes Christian as he is leaving the City of Destruction, there are people calling after him, his wife and his children even, "Come back. Come back." And he stops his ears up and he runs toward the Wicked Gate to find his way to the Celestial City. Such is the lure of sin and the lure of the things of this world and God's typifying that and he's saying the way to be saved, the way to be delivered from the domain of darkness, the way to be delivered from the house of slavery, the way to be a true genuine seeker is to be humble and to look to God's provision and it is to repent fully and to keep believing and to keep repenting and to keep humbling yourself. Those are the marks of someone who is truly seeking.

So we need to consider ourselves, does that describe me? Does that describe you? Are there areas of your life where you're not subjecting yourself to the word of God? You're exalting yourself in pride. You're not listening to people who try to correct you. Repent of that now. Humble yourself under the word. God has put people around you who are imperfect people and if you're always looking at their imperfection, you won't listen to the truth that God is speaking through them. If only 10% of the correction they're giving you is right, humble yourself under that 10%. That's what he's calling us to do, and as you humble yourself and you see your sin, cling to your Passover Lamb, cling to Christ, cling to the cross. It's our only hope. It's the only provision that we have. There's no other hope for us. It is what Jesus has done and subject yourself like Paul said, "They not knowing the righteousness from God and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." You have to humble yourself and subject yourself to the righteousness of God which is to say, "Yes, Lord, I trust that Jesus has done everything. I truly trust that." Then in trusting Christ, to turn from whatever it is he wants, he lays his finger on. What are the things in your life right now that Jesus is not pleased with? That he is grieved by? That his Spirit is grieved by?

The mark of a true believer is we're going to be willing to turn from that. There's nothing better than turning from that. The deceitfulness of sin, the pleasures of sin last for a season, but it's all lies and emptiness. Christ, holiness, that's where joy is, that's where hope is. So don't hold onto anything. Whatever he wants, just say, "Yes, Lord." A lot of times it's good things but we just want too much and the Lord is saying, "You're wanting that good thing too much. You've idolized it. Lay it down. Cast it down." I only want to be faithful to Christ. Make that your heart's desire. Ask God to help you make that your heart's desire. Run to Jesus asking him to help you do that. That's what he's calling us to do.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word that cuts and exposes what we cannot see. We know that even as redeemed children, those of us who know You, we're still so prone to not see, prone to pride, prone to unbelief, prone to hold onto things that are wicked and evil and destructive and displease You. God, grant us grace. And for those here that now truly know You, maybe have professed to know You for a time that they don't truly know You, Lord, grant them the grace of true repentance and faith, true humility to humble themselves before You, to embrace Christ fully and to surrender to Him completely. Lord, make us holy. Don't let us be like the people around us. Give us the grace to surrender to You so that Your power can be made known in our lives and that we will be different, we will be holy because You are holy. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.