

The Dangers Of Living In Past

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Welcome once again to *Good Hope through Grace*. I am pastor Jeff Arthur, Senior of the Elizabeth Baptist Church in Bancroft, West Virginia. I would like to draw your attention tonight for tonight's lesson to the book of Ezra chapter three and we are going to be looking at verses 11 through 13. It says:

And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever 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 chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.¹

Now the book of Ezra and chapter three, which is where we are a looking at this evening, what it deals with is a rebuilding of the altar. Of course there was a brass altar there in Israel, in Jerusalem, a brazen altar. And that is where they offered animal sacrifices. And in verses one through seven of chapter three that is what they did. They had rebuilt the altar and they had set up the daily offering and to set up sacrifice again, but then in verses eight through 13 they laid the foundation for the temple. Of course they had been in captivity for 70 years. And now what had happened is the Lord had seen to it, he had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Persia and he had sent them back to rebuild, first of all, here in the book of Ezra, to rebuild the temple and then under Nehemiah they would rebuild the wall.

But what we want to notice tonight in verses 11 through 13 is we want to notice the different reactions that the people had to the rebuilding, or, I should say, in this text, the setting up of the foundation of the temple.

¹Ezra 3:11-13.

In the verses that we just read we notice two different responses that were given. One was a response of joy. It says the people shouted with a great shout and they were happy because here they had been in captivity for 70 years and now they had been returned to their own land and they were now beginning to reconstruct the temple and re-set up worship towards the Lord their God.

Well, response number two in the text was the old men, those that had seen the former temple and all of the glory that was associated with that. It says that they wept.

One response to the setting up of the foundation of the temple was one of joy from the younger men and the younger people. But those that had seen the old temple in the past and those seeing Solomon's temple, those that had seen that and they compared the two and this new foundation that was being constructed was not as large, no doubt, was not as nice as the previous one, so they began to weep.

Well, what we are going to do tonight in the broadcast is by using this text we are going to show you the dangers of living in the past. Why it is dangerous. And that is what basically the ancient men here in the text as it is recorded here, that is what they were doing. They were not looking at the blessings of the now, but they were focused on the past. And because they were so focused on the past, what I am telling you tonight is that is very dangerous for people to do that and what I want to do, I am going to share with you tonight five reasons why it is dangerous to live in the past.

Well, let me go ahead and give you the first one.

Number one, it will take away your joy. If you live in the past, one of the things it will do it will take away all your joy. The difference between these two people, the younger ones, they were rejoicing, here the older ones, they were mourning, the difference was you see which one had joy and which one did not. You cannot be happy in the present if you are stuck in the past. And one of the dangers of living in the past is that you can't be happy in the present if you are stuck in the past.

I seen people that have at one time been joyous people that men, because of different reasons, different losses that has took place over their life and what happens as a result of that is they begin to wish to be back where they used to be. Man, their whole life has been desiring to be back where they used to be, maybe back in the days before the job loss, back in the days before the loss of a loved one, back in the days before the loss of health. And that is what their whole mind presently is on is presently on the past and they long for the good old days.

The only danger of that is, is those that live in the past does not have any joy. They lose their joy when they live in the past.

I have never seen a happy person who lived in the past. It will drive you under the juniper tree, my friends, to the point that if you continue to do so you will wish to die.

So what is the first danger that I want to share with you tonight about living in the past? Number one thing it will do, it will take away your joy. It will take your joy, my friend. And one of the things that is a key to happiness is the joy of the Lord. We will look at that later in the broadcast. The joy of the Lord is your strength. What looking at the past will do is it will, indeed, take away your joy.

Number two, it will take away your praise. If you look in this context you have people that are singing. You have the priests of the Lord, the Levites. They are singing by their course and they are giving thanks unto the Lord because he is good and because of his mercy. You have all of the people shouting with a great shout and, buddy, I tell you what. They are having a tremendous worship service here.

Well, when you move on down to the chief of the fathers, the ancient men who have seen the first house, and they are weeping. Not only do they not have any joy which is what living in the past will do, it will take away your joy, but it will also take away your praise. They weren't singing. They weren't giving God thanks. They weren't rejoicing in the present circumstances that they were in. My friend, there was lot of reason to praise.

After all they had been in captivity and now they had been released from captivity and they were back in their land... They... they temple had been destroyed. Now they were back and the foundation of the temple was laid and the altar had already been fixed to where that they could offer sacrifices on it. So public worship had already begun anew again. So there was plenty of reasons to praise the Lord, but one of the things that living in the past will do is it will not only take away you joy, but it will also take away your praise.

Folks, isn't it sad that the Lord had done such great things in the present for them, but they were so engrossed in the past that they couldn't see the blessings of the present. They were so engrossed in the past and living in the past that they could not see the blessings that God was presently doing for their nation and for their people. And instead of praising God like the younger ones were doing, instead they were weeping and they were sad.

So that is a danger, is it not? Here they had great opportunity for joy and great opportunity for praise, back in the land, rebuilding the temple, God was blessing, but they couldn't enjoy it and they weren't praising God for it, because their [?] was living in the past. They were too busy longing for the good old days to be thankful for what God was doing presently.

Isn't that a sad sight to behold? But it happens many times with regard to people. They always long for the good old days and by so doing, many times, they miss the blessings that God is presently doing in their lives.

Well, let's move on to our third reason or third danger of living in the past. We have got the first two. It will take away your joy. It will take away your praise. Number three, it will take away your service also.

Those who live in the past don't normally serve God in the present. They are so focused on what is behind them that they don't do anything for God presently.

In the book of Philippians chapter one the apostle Paul said:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”²

Well, one of the things that we need to recognize... of course, Paul made that statement from a Roman prison. And he realized that even though he was in a Roman prison he still continued to serve the Lord there. He wrote several prison epistles. He continued to write. He continued to encourage. He continued to praise. And, my friend, he continued to serve. If you get so focused on the past that you don't serve God in the present, that is one of the dangers of it.

Many times people that are living in the past and their minds are focused totally on how great things used to be and what used to be done, many times they are not doing anything at all in the service of the Lord. It doesn't really record in the text what these men were doing, the priests and Levites, the chief of the fathers, ancient men. There was a lot of things they could have been doing. They could have participated in the praise. They could have participated in the worship and the work of God. They could have encouraged, but, my friends, one of these things that focusing on the past will do it will take you out of the service of the Lord. It will cause you to be focused on things that are behind and that where you are not looking at what God is doing and can do with your life now.

One of the things that we need to recognize is that as long as we are living we are to serve our Lord.

There reason I read Philippians one and verse 21, “For to me to live is Christ,”³ is to show you that as long as you are living, that is what we are supposed to be doing if we are saved. If for us to live is Christ. It is always a reason for living. Circumstances change. Jobs change. A lot of things that our life is filled with changes, but, my friend, in every change our God faithful will remain and it in every change we have a reason to live. And that reason to live is Jesus.

Look at Philippians chapter three and verse 13. The apostle Paul writes here:

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.”⁴

Now you can imagine if Paul just dwelt on the past, he would have never accomplished anything in the present. If Paul would have lived in the past, he would have never

² Philippians 1:21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Philippians 3:13

accomplished anything in the present. So one of the things he did not... you can draw strength from the past. You need to be thankful in the past, but, my friend, you are not to live in the past or you won't accomplish nothing in the present.

It will sideline you, cause you to waste your time, time that could be well spent and experience that could be well spent in service to the Lord wasted because instead of looking at the present, we are looking at the past. Instead of focusing on what we can do now, we are focusing on what we once did. My friend, it will take away your service.

Now those are three dangers of living in the past. It will take away your joy. It will take away your praise and it will take away your service. It will cause you to cease to serve the Lord.

Well, let's go back to our text in the book of Ezra chapter three and let's look at the fourth danger, the fourth danger of living in the past. Number four, it will take away your influence.

These were older men. These were, it says, ancient men, experienced men. It says they were priests and the Levites and chief of the fathers. These were men that had been leaders in their nation in times past. And it could be and should be very influential men over other people.

I tell you what, folks, the influence of an elderly saint can be great, but these men could have been an encouragement to this younger generation. But instead of helping, instead of joining in with the worship, they tend to quench the great day. I mean, I am sure that it was very disheartening to them. It really doesn't say the reaction of the younger men, but I am sure that it would have been very disheartening to them to see these men mourning when God was doing such great things, when such great accomplishments such as the return to the land, the setting up of the altar, the reestablishing of the sacrifices, I am sure such things should have been an instrument of bringing joy to them, but instead they chose to mourn. They didn't use their influence. It will take away your influence in you live in the past.

Instead of being an encouragement, you will be a discouragement. And that is, indeed, what had happened in this text. They could have been a good example. They could have enjoyed the praise. They could have been an encouragement. Instead they mourned and never had any joy. And it was totally different from the response of the younger people, those that hadn't seen the old temple. It was totally different and their response wasn't the, I am telling you, their response wasn't the best response.

Four dangers we have seen so far of living in the past. Take away your joy. Take away your praise, just live in the past, not praising God. Number three, it will take away your service. Those living in the past usually stop serving the Lord. I guess newly set and they don't use what they have and can do now for the Lord and, number four, it will take away your influence.

I mean, they could have been an influence and they could have an encouragement and they could have participated. But instead they didn't have any influence at all other than a negative influence.

You know, you do have an influence, do you not? It can either be a positive one, or it can be a negative one. Theirs was a negative influence.

So I tell you. You have got to decide about this living in the past, whether that is what you are going to do. But here is the dangers of it. And you have got to realize how it can affect you spiritually. I do feel strongly that the devil uses this living in the past to take away our service presently and to take away our joy, to take away our influence, to take away our praise.

Let's move now to the fifth danger of living in the past. And that is if it will take away your strength.

Now I am going to go from the book of Ezra now to the book of Nehemiah, to another day. The book of Nehemiah deals with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. The book of Ezra deals primarily with the rebuilding of the temple. That is the difference between the two books. But here in the book of Nehemiah chapter eight the wall had been constructed and this text God's Word had been open and had been read and what happens as a result of hearing the wall, the people began to weep. Now let me read that to you.

“And Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”⁵

A danger of living in the past is it will rob you of your strength. It will take away your strength. When you see someone that is living in the past they are usually very discouraged and very depressed and they have very little strength. What happens over a period of time is, like I said, depression will sneak in their life and begin to take over their life. And then over time it can actually affect their health. They lose their strength spiritually. They seem to have no strength at all.

Many times all they want to do is just lay around and sleep and then when they are up they are sad because they are thinking about the past. It will take away your strength. You won't have strength that you need for your service like you should.

“The joy of the LORD is your strength.”⁶

⁵ Nehemiah 8:9-10.

⁶ Nehemiah 8:10.

Folks, is there not reason for you have joy? Is there not reason for us to have joy? If you are listening to me and born again, if you are listening to me and saved, is there not reason for us to be happy today?

Now you might have had some very hard things happen to you in the past. You might presently be in a very difficult situation, would love to go back a few years, would love to go back the way things once were. But, my friend, the problem is you can't go back. There is no going back. So what happens is your mind goes back, but you physically cannot go back and then when you have to come back to the present it makes you sad.

There is no future in that, my friend. There is no joy in that. Is there not reason for us in the present to have joy? Is there not reason for us to have joy? Now if you go back and we look at our text again in the book of Ezra, there was reason for them to have joy. There was at that time presently reasons that they could have rejoiced in the Lord and praised the Lord. What happens when you are living in the past you can't see your present blessings.

And if you are listening to me and you are born again, you are a child of God, you have a home in the Father's house, you have glorious, glorious future ahead of you, your sins is paid for, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling with you, you have the sweet promises of God that he is with you always, that he is working all things out after the counsel of his own will, that he is working together all things for the good of them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose. We could go on and on. But, my friend, presently there is reasons for which we could praise.

Instead of focusing our minds on the on the past, we need to focus our attention on the blessings of the present. You see, that is one of the things that we have already pointed out. We can get so stuck in the past that we can't see the blessings of the present and you need to do that. That is one of the things that you need to do every day of your life. Focus on the blessings of the present, but not only the blessings of the present, but the blessings of the future. We have great present blessings but we also have great future blessings.

In the book of Haggai chapter two this was a prophet that lived during these times and addressed this issue that these ancient men, these older men that were living in the past and had lost their joy and lost their service and lost their song, he gave them a message. He sent them a message from God about this very, very issue in the book of Haggai chapter two.

And I would like to begin reading at verse three. Here. This is what the Lord does.

“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?”⁷

And that is talking about the temple. And he is addressing these that had seen the temple of Solomon and how much more glorious it is.

⁷ Haggai 2:3.

Notice what else it says. Haggai two and verse three.

“And how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts.”⁸

See, there is reason to praise, my friend, because the Lord was with them. The Lord was in this work as he had been in the old days been with them. He was still with them.

According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.⁹

We almost have [?] in this second temple that was being constructed in the days of Ezra it says the desire of nations would come. Now the desire of all nations is Jesus.

It is not talking about the second coming. It is talking about the first coming, when he came the first time. See, the whole Old Testament pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah the first time in which he would come and live a perfect life and then go to Calvary and pay our sin debt on Calvary's cross.

So he said:

“I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.”¹⁰

How would he do that? Well, you know, Jesus would ... the Messiah would go to this temple. The glory filled this temple of Solomon, but this new temple, one day the Messiah himself would come and teach in it, do miracles in it, dwell in it. So the glory of this second temple, it had a glorious future ahead of it. It might not be in comparison to Solomon's temple, but its glory would be even greater. It says in verse nine:

“The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts.”¹¹

Because the God of peace, the God of glory, the Messiah of glory would come to this house. And you can read all about that in the gospels.

⁸ Haggai 2:3-4.

⁹ Haggai 2:5-7.

¹⁰ Haggai 2:7.

¹¹ Haggai 2:9.

So they had some things to be glory... to glory in. They had some things to joy in. And this message given by Haggai looked forward to what was coming out in the future. What a glorious future this temple had.

And those older men were so focused on the past that they couldn't see the present blessings, nor did they know of the future blessings that this house would experience.

My friends, that is the danger of living in the past.

Where are you living at tonight, my friend? Which one are you the most like in the book of Ezra? Are you like that younger generation that were presenting seeing the glory of God engaged in the Lord's work, singing praises to the Lord and active in serving him? Or are you as the old men who looked back in the past and never lived in the present, who couldn't focus on what the Lord was doing at that time?

I give you five dangers of doing that and I pray that these dangers would serve as a warning to you that you need to be thankful for what God is doing presently and thankful for what God one day will do in the future.

The dangers of living in the past. It will take away your joy. It will take away your praise. It will take you out of your service. I will take away your influence. And, number five, it will take away your strength.

May God add his blessings to his Word.