

First Things First Part 2

Ezra-Nehemiah

By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Ezra, the book of Ezra, right after 2 Chronicles. We began looking at this passage, this book a little over a month ago. We come today to a passage we began looking at last week. We're gonna look at Ezra 3:1-7 and finish up the message that we started last week which we titled "First Things First." First things first is the title of the message so this is Part 2, "First Things First Part 2." It seems kind of odd to say Part 2 after First Things First.

Anyway, what we saw is that this passage, the narrative of telling us what happened when the people of Israel returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem, that they came on a mission to rebuild the house of God. That was why they came home. That's what they were about and so we're seeing that that is exemplifying for us and teaching us that we are called to build our lives around worship. The very center of the life of the follower of God is worship; that everything is to be centered on that reality. We're called to build God's house, in the same way to build the church and to make other worshipers and to help the worshipers that we fellowship with to become even better worshipers in that mutual ministry to be made a better and truer worshiper ourselves. That's what discipleship really is and Jesus basically defined his role when he was speaking, his purpose in coming when he was speaking to the woman at the well in John 4, God is seeking for him worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth. True worshipers.

So Christ came into the world to restore worship and this is being typified in the history of the nation of Israel in their return from Babylon, the exile; that life is about worship and it is to be at the center of our lives and so we're to put that above everything else. And how do you do that, though? How does that really work out in practice? We've seen that first things first, worship is first but even before worship really happens we have to build an altar and we see they built an altar. We're gonna look at that again. We saw this last week. They built an altar and you build an altar for one purpose, that is to offer a blood sacrifice, to offer a burnt offering, kill an animal, a substitute and then offer it in fire to the Lord.

So they build the altar because that's the very first thing. If you're going to live a life of worship, you have to live your life at the altar of God. That is the only way that you and I can be true worshipers. If we want to live every moment loving God, living for his glory,

we must live our lives at the altar of God. Now what does that mean? What is the altar of God? The altar that they rebuilt was a type of the true altar of God which is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we're gonna be true worshipers, we have to live our lives in the shadow of the cross, clinging to the cross. That's the only way that we can be true worshipers and live lives of worship, we must live continually at the cross. That's essentially the main theme that comes through in this book, and particularly this chapter because the first thing they do, we're gonna see as we read again, is to build the altar.

So let's read the text and then I'll go through our five points. I got through four last week and I'll give you the fifth and then we'll, what we're gonna do, I'm gonna give you the fifth and then we're gonna talk through the last three again because I think we need to apply them a little better than we did last week. So that's what our focus is going to be, to really try to make application of what this really looks like in life.

So Ezra 3. We'll read verses 1 to 7.

1 Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. 3 So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required; 5 and afterward there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. 7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that You might speak through Your word by the power of Your Spirit that You might teach us Your way and we will walk in it. Unite our hearts to fear Your name. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

First things first. What we're doing is we're looking at the narrative of what happened in their lives and how it illustrates this essential calling for the people of God to put worship at the center and if worship's gonna be at the center, the sacrifice, the cross must be first.

We looked over five points last week so I'm gonna give you those and we'll see, like I said, we're gonna look at the last three again and show how those fit together.

The first was we saw they were committed to their work or their calling. They were committed to the work. Verse 1 of chapter 3, as one man they gathered to Jerusalem. They were all there to do God's work, to build his house, and that's what we're all called to do. We're called to build his kingdom, to build his house, to build one another, to build ourselves to be better worshipers of him.

Secondly, the second point was they had experienced God's blessing. They saw God work mightily in getting them back there and giving them all the resources they needed: the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the doorkeepers, everything. They had everything they needed including the vessels from the temple. So God's hand is upon them to do his work. His work is to make worship central and essential and foundational and God had given them everything they needed to do that. In the same way, God has given us everything we need that is necessary for life and godliness. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ. They are all at our disposal.

So they have received the commitment, they were committed to their calling, they've experienced God's blessing, thirdly, the third point we saw last week was they had good reason to be afraid yet though they had God's hand at work in them, they had good reason to be afraid. We saw how that jumps out at you. They were terrified. Here God is working in their lives but they're terrified. Well, they had good reason to be because there was great opposition against them. I mean, they were experiencing, they were in a different culture. Their whole world had been transformed. Israel when they had left was a kingdom that was essentially protected spiritually. Even though there was moral decline there, it was still safer, felt a lot safer than it did now. The walls of Jerusalem are down. They've been living in Babylon experiencing moral relativism, pluralism, the idea that every way to God is okay and, you know, immorality all around them, religious syncretism where you, some truth mixed in with error perverts the truth and people who say they love God but really don't. So they experience these things and now they're just basically, that's their environment: pluralism, syncretism, relativism and spiritual opposition.

So what they're called to do is incredibly difficult humanly speaking, so then what do they do? In their fear, they don't let their fear paralyze them, they take action, they do the one thing that needs to be done in moments like this, they rebuilt the altar and they offered a sacrifice. They began to rebuild the whole sacrificial system and to reclaim their access to God through the blood sacrifice. I think I called it last week they sought God's face in his prescribed way. I would say maybe a better way to say that is they pursued reconciliation. They pursued reconciliation with God. They needed to be reconciled, they sought that, they put that first. If we're gonna worship, we have to, first of all, deal with the issues between us. They pursued reconciliation according to God's design.

That was the fourth point, now the fifth point. I didn't give you this last week so I'm gonna give it to you and then we'll work through it again, as I said. The fifth point is seen in verse 7 and it is this: they made progress in the work. They made progress. Now it doesn't look that impressive outwardly. True, it is incremental progress but it is in reality substantial progress. Verse 7, "Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia." Right after he says in verse 6 the foundation of the temple had not been laid, he says they gave money. They took up an offering and they actually sent the purchase order. They clicked the Amazon button and said, "Send." And it took courage because now people are gonna see the deliveries start happening. The opponents are gonna see that and this is a real move forward in the kingdom.

Often, often profound advancements in the kingdom of God don't look that impressive at first glance and we must not, one of the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, is they preached, they motivate them to build, to finish building later, and one of the things that they say is don't despise the day of small things. Sometimes you're doing something for God and it looks very small but if you are doing it according to his plan, rightly reconciled to him, abiding in Christ, then small things are huge things. Anything done by the grace of God, I mean, Jesus said this is the way his kingdom is. The kingdom of heaven is, "What shall I compare the kingdom of heaven to," he says, "It is like a mustard seed, that though it's the smallest of all garden seeds," you look at it, here's the kingdom of heaven, look, this little tiny seed. Wow, look at you plant that. That doesn't look like that's very impressive but the mustard seed grows to be the biggest plant in the garden. It's a vine plant that's almost like a tree, he says. Birds of the air come and rest on a mustard seed. It starts out small, finishes big.

Daniel said essentially the same thing. The prophesy, remember the vision he had in Daniel 2 when he sees that golden statue, the impressive kingdoms of the world, this massive statue, head of gold, chest of silver, thighs of bronze, feet and legs of iron mixed with clay, and these were the four kingdoms of the world: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, all mighty in their own right. And what is it that puts an end to those kingdoms? A stone cut out without hands. A small stone is taken by God and hurled at the statue and it hits the base of the statue and destroys the entire statue, and then that small stone grows into a mighty mountain that fills the earth. Do you see how God works? Little acts of obedience, little breakthroughs with long-lasting impact.

So what I want us to think about is how this really applies to our lives and unpack a little more of this last, these last three points because the issue really is they were called by God to do something, they knew they had God's blessing in their lives but as they looked at their circumstances, they were overwhelmed. They were afraid. They were discouraged. They really wondered if it would make any difference, their efforts. Could they possibly succeed?

This text says they were terrified. There are times where you and I, if we're honest, we are terrified. We know what we're supposed to do, we know what we were called to do,

and yet we have no idea how to accomplish it, no confidence that we can make a difference. Think about areas in your life right now that you know the Lord wants you to address in your own heart, areas of sin. Think about areas in your relationships, things that you know God's not happy with, that aren't honoring him. Your marriage, aspects of your marriage. Aspects of the lives of your children, shepherding them. Sibling, brothers and sisters, relational issues in the family. And as you think about those, you know that God wants to address them but you don't know what to do and you really, as you really think about trying to address it, the emotion you feel is inadequacy and fear. This text speaks to us today and it provides the path forward so that we can really build the kingdom of God his way and it gives great encouragement that we really can, if we do it his way, we can see progress that will likely be just incremental, not that impressive but in reality substantial, and if we keep building that way, we'll make incremental progress, substantial progress and over time it's amazing what God does.

I remember hearing James Boice say this one time at a pastor's conference years ago. James Montgomery Boice, many of you will remember him, a wonderful teacher, Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He said as pastors we often, he's talking to a bunch of pastors and thinking about, you know, guys out there that are trying to, you know, lead churches and maybe situations where they're trying to lead to new directions and stuff, and he said we often, we overestimate mightily what we can accomplish in one year and we massively underestimate what we can accomplish in 5 or 10. He says that what we should be thinking is thinking long-term little incremental movements aimed at a long-term transformation. That's the way God works.

So we see this passage is gonna speak to us, it's gonna help us with those things to take the steps we need to take to address those issues that the Lord put on your heart as I asked you a moment ago, in your own life, in your relationships, what does he want me to do and how do I go about it. So I think the answer, the whole passage turns, the hinge of the passage is the fourth step, the fourth point: they pursued reconciliation with God. I mean, because you think about it, step 1, 2, 3, they were committed to their calling, they know they're supposed to build God's house; they know God's blessings with them; point 3 was they're terrified and they have good reason to be. Step 5 is they make real progress, though. They overcome their fear and make real progress. How did they do it? Step 4, the fourth point, they put reconciliation with God at the forefront of their lives and what they did is they focused on the one spiritual need that you and I have.

The word "need" is a word that's used, often misunderstood and just twisted and distorted in our culture because of our own sin. You hear things about, you know, "I need to be loved. I need significance." No, the Bible doesn't think, speak of that, speak that way. We need to think biblically. The Bible says that you have physical needs, you have the physical needs of food, clothing and shelter, and the spiritual need that we have that the Bible says that we have, this is the spiritual need you and I have, to be reconciled to God. That's the need. That's the only need. You say, "Don't I need to be loved?" That's secondary. That comes later. It's not really a need. Your need is to be reconciled to God. That's my need, to be reconciled to God. Paul says that in 2 Corinthians 5:20, he says we

are ambassadors speaking on behalf of God, we implore you, be reconciled to God. That's the imperative commanding you, be reconciled to God.

So I want us to, I want, two points I want us to consider to help us think about. It's really how 3, 4 and 5 works so this is still kind of the continuation of Part 2 of first things first, but it's a new angle, so just kind of almost think of it as a new message because it'll be easier to follow it, I think. Two points now. So just, draw a line across your page. Two points and the first point is your greatest need before conversion. Your greatest need before conversion, that's the first point. Your greatest need before conversion is to be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20, I just mentioned, Paul is exhorting people, "Be reconciled to God."

Now the word "reconciled" is a word which is used biblically and it captures things that other places we see similar themes with slightly different words, but the idea of being reconciled to God assumes, the command to be reconciled to God assumes a state, an ongoing state of hostility. Please don't miss this. This is just, it's so important and foundational and so completely and thoroughly biblical. The command to be reconciled to God assumes an ongoing state of hostility. You don't have to reconcile friends unless they've become hostile in some way. They're already friends, you don't get together and they're just loving each other, hugging, "Hey, I need to reconcile you guys." No, you reconcile people who have become at odds and that there's some distance, there's some enmity, there's some problem and there is a problem between every human being and God.

The Bible makes this clear. There is an ongoing state of hostility between God and man. It would be appropriate to say, you know, why does Jesus, he's the Prince of Peace, why does he need to make peace? You don't have to make peace unless somebody's at war. Peace is already there until war. So the fact that he comes as the Prince of Peace to make peace is to say that we were at war with God and there's the sense in which the picture of them coming back into the land, remember I mentioned Canaan, the land of Israel, is a type of heaven, and so the whole picture of how God's dealing with his people is he invites them, he leads them out of slavery in Egypt originally, brings them into Canaan as a type of heaven, a land flowing with milk and honey, it's a beautiful land, it's a spacious land, it's a wonderful land, the land of Canaan, it's a land flowing with milk and honey, all that imagery to say, "It's the place of My presence and I'm gonna take up My residence among you," and God dwells among them and they dwell in his land, and that's really the picture of what's going on and he's teaching us how do you come to dwell in God's land? How do you come to dwell in God's presence? How can sinners dwell with a holy God? That's the question that he's answering and he's teaching us in the way he's dealing with Israel. Israel is in this way functioning as a kingdom of priests. His dealings with Israel are teaching all of the world around them the way back to God.

So when they are cast out of the land in the exile because of their sin, the land vomits them out, as Leviticus had prophesied and actually Deuteronomy had prophesied too. Moses told them in Deuteronomy 29, "You're going to be sent out of the land and the people around you are gonna wonder, 'What in the world happened?' And it's because you

have forsaken God, you've gone after idols and essentially you've made war with God and now God is making war with you." And the reality is the reason there's hostility between God and us, it is completely 100% our fault. We started it. He did not. The Scripture is clear. God is love and kindness and lovingkindness and he gave man everything he needed in the garden of Eden and the only command he gave them was the one command, "Don't eat of that tree." The whole world lay open before him and man chose to go eat of that one tree and rebel against God and that rebellion was massive. It was like the dog biting the hand that feeds him, only multiply that by a trillion, the magnitude and ugliness of it, and we all are caught up in that same rebellion and we come into the world in rebellion against God.

So there's this state of hostility. They come back into the land, so the people are kind of a picture of that. They've been cast out of the land, they come back into the land and what's the first thing they do? They build an altar to make a sacrifice and they start sacrifices and we're told in the text that in the providence of God they celebrate the feast of booths in verse 4, as it is written.

I mentioned last week, you find this in Numbers 29 and it's a listing of all the animals that were offered. There were all kinds of animals. It was basically 13 bulls on the first day, 14 male lambs, 2 rams and 1 goat. And the second day it was 12 bulls, 2 rams, 14 lambs and 1 goat. And the third day it was 11 bulls and 14 sheep, 2 rams and 1 goat. And the total of 200 animals over eight days. So that actually of all the daily festivals, that's the one that has the most daily offerings. Passover wins with a total number on one day, but when you talk about the feast of unleavened bread or the other feasts, this is the most massive offering other than Passover of all these different animals.

So in the providence of God, God brings them back in the land and they offer this, as he says, they celebrated the feast of booths. It's like this is the restoration and the feast of booth celebrates when God dwelt among them and they dwelt in tents and God dwelt among them. So it's the picture even then of how do you get back in the presence of God? And that's basically saying the way to God, your greatest need before conversion is to be reconciled to God by going to his sacrifice.

Let me just mention a few verses that show you the hostility, though, between us and God, just to show you this biblically. Ephesians 2:1-3 shows that God's wrath toward us, his righteous and holy wrath toward us. Paul is reminding these believers now who have been set free from this, he says, "I want you to remember where you were before you were saved." He says Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins," you were spiritually dead to God, "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." He says before you're saved, you are living and walking according to the course of the world system that is opposed to God, that hates God, and you were walking according to really the thinking that the world system has been formed by is by the prince of the power of the air, Satan himself. This is why Jesus told, remember he told the Jews, he told the Jews who were rejecting him in John 8, "You," he said to the Jews, "You are of your father the devil." That's the nature of sin, it's

to be like Satan. Satan wanted to be like God. That was Satan's rebellion and the essence of sin is to want to be like God.

What does that mean? Do I want to sit in heaven on some kind of throne and throw lightning bolts, not that that's how God is, that's just the worldly kind of mindset. But anyway, no, no, to be like God means I want to rule my life and run it the way I choose. That is the prerogative of God. He created all of us, we exist for his glory, and to willingly decide that is cosmic treason and rebellion. It makes us insurrectionists. It makes us like spiritual terrorists. If we could see sin the way God sees it, that's what we'd see. We don't see it that way because sin has blinded us. We say things like, "To err is human. You know, to sin, I'm just human." No, sin, yeah, you are human and, yes, sin is a part of being human but sin is incredibly offensive to a holy God and if we could see it the way it is, it would be offensive to us.

God's wrath is a term we find in Scripture, in fact, the word "wrath" occurs 189 times in the New American Standard Bible and not just in the Old Testament, you find it 39 times in the New Testament. The wrath of God is his settled opposition to evil, his settled opposition to evil and his determination to put an end to it. Now think about that. Is that not a good attribute? Don't you want a God who's opposed to evil and who's determined to put an end to it? What would it be like to live in a world where people were not opposed to evil, the law enforcement apparatus didn't punish evildoers? They kind of congratulated them? Boy, that would be misery, that would be terrible, and to think about the heinous things that happen in this world if they were unpunished and sometimes they are and sometimes justice is perverted in this world, isn't it? And when it is, our hearts grieve because we have the image of God in us and we know justice needs to be done and if we as sinners can feel grieved about anything in this world, imagine what it would be like if we did not have sin in us and we looked at the evil in this world, how appalled we would be when we look at the evil in our own hearts.

So there is an ongoing state of hostility. Romans 3:10-18, you can look at that. It says there's none righteous, no, not one, there's none who seeks after God, together they have all turned aside and become corrupt. This is talking about all of us. Romans 1:18, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." But it's not just his anger toward us and that he has hostility toward us, let me explain something else to you here. One of the things, this, we've got to watch this but you have to keep reading your Bible, let the Scripture inform your thinking. God is not just angry with a sinner every day, he is angry with sinners every day, he is but he also loves sinners every day. This is very important for you to understand that. He loves all people every day. The Scripture makes this clear. Matthew 5, "Be perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect." What does he say? The Father shows, how does he show love? He causes it to rain on the just and the unjust. He satisfies sinners with good things every day and he speaks to them every day in the natural order in what he's made, inviting them to repent. He sends his Gospel out across the whole face of the world and he genuinely invites and longs for sinners to be saved. He genuinely does. The fact that election plays a role in this does not change what God says about his heart toward

sinner. 1 Timothy 2:4, he desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Charles Spurgeon in exegeting that said, "All means all." It doesn't mean "some" there. Now, in Romans 5, you can see there's something going on here that means "all" means "all in Christ," but in 1 Timothy 2 there's no delimiting factor. He desires all men to be saved. How can he desire all men to be saved and not save them if he has to do it through election? God can do that. God can at the same time exercise love toward a person and wrath. He has all of his attributes in perfect harmony.

Now you can understand this in some level. We're in the image of God. When you discipline your child and they really did something really bad, not just knocking something over, you know, doing something kids do, but like rebellion, and you know this must be disciplined, this is really serious. You think about the righteous anger you have but do you hate them now? No, you love them. They're your child. You can have at the same time anger and love. That's what God has to all people, he has anger and he has love. Now listen, if you don't repent, you will, there will become a time when you will no longer experience his love, you will only experience his wrath, but until that point you can say God loves you.

Now the problem is people, sinners, love to talk about the love of God and we all did before we were saved, we think God should love us, why would he not love us? I'm lovable, that's what we think. And we are in the image of God and there is great value in every single human being, and in one sense there is loveliness but if you really look at sin as it is, there's something profoundly wrong. It's like someone with a massive cancer that needs to be addressed and the technology is there to eradicate it and you just say, "Hey, it's okay. I love you. I want you to feel good about yourself. Go your way. Be warmed and filled." That's what it is just to say God loves you and not say, "Listen, yes, God's love but there's a day coming when His wrath is gonna be poured out and He's inviting you today to run to His Son and be saved."

So when I'm talking about wrath, put it in that context. God is still loving and kind and he's inviting sinners to be saved. He's inviting you, if you're here today and you don't know Jesus Christ, he's inviting you to be saved today. But this state of hostility is not just God to us. Romans 8:7 says the natural, I mean, the mind set on the flesh, the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God. It will not submit to the law of God nor indeed is it able to do so.

Colossians 1:21 and 22, just a few pages beyond what we were just looking at in Ephesians says, Paul is reminding the Colossians what they were before they were saved and he says this, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death." Formerly you were alienated and hostile in mind toward God and engaged in evil deeds. You were doing your evil with a part of your heart aimed at God in hostility and at war with God. That's what the Bible says. That's the diagnosis Scripture gives and I'm telling

you, that is 100% spot on, and if you will open your heart and look at yourself honestly, the Spirit will enable you to see that's true of you just like it's true of me.

So we were at war, we have hostility, he had righteous hostility at us because of our hostility toward him and because of his holy nature. So the greatest need is to be reconciled to God and how does that happen? It happens through a sacrifice. It happens through the sacrifice that all of those sacrifices in the old covenant pointed to. They pointed to the final ultimate sacrifice of God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, at Calvary when he would bear in his own body the sins of everyone who would ever believe would be placed upon him and he would bear them in his own body and take them out of the way, and in bearing them, he would bear the guilt, the condemnation and the wrath of God and he became a propitiation, Paul says in Romans 3:25, for our sins; that is, he stood between the wrath of God and us and he absorbed the wrath of God and he paid the sin debt and he took all of God's wrath for us and took it out of the way. This is why there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There's not any left. There could be no condemnation if you're in Christ Jesus. There's nothing left. Jesus finished it. He paid it in full. Now if you're not in Christ Jesus, that's not true of you. There's only the expectation of wrath to come. The wrath of God abides on you, John 3:36.

So the hostility is both ways. There's a state of hostility but it can be ended and the reconciliation happens through what Jesus Christ has done. You go to Christ in repentance and faith. You turn from your sins, you place your faith in him, you trust in him, and you are reconciled to God and you are united to Jesus and so that now when God looks at you, he sees you through or robed in the righteousness of Christ and you are accepted in the Beloved, Ephesians 1. You're accepted in the same way God's beloved Son is accepted.

I mean, think about how when, we'll say, I'm getting older, your grandchild comes. I don't have any grandchildren yet but, you know, you think about some of those of you who do. If you're somewhere and suddenly you weren't expecting to see and you look over, you hear somebody's voice and you think it might be your grandchild and you look over and there it is, it's your grandchild, how do you feel? Isn't it like, "Oh, whatever." No, it's like, "I can't believe it!" That is how the Father always sees his Son and if you're in Christ, that's how the Father always sees you. You have been reconciled. You've not just been brought back to peace, you are now fully brought into the loving embrace of the Father in his love for Christ.

So that's your greatest need before conversion was to be reconciled to God and, man, the reconciliation that happens through Jesus is amazing. That was point 1. The second point, your greatest need after conversion, the first one was your greatest need before conversion, be reconciled to God, the second point, your greatest need after conversion and you're gonna have to work with me on this, be reconciled to God. It's a different shade now. Nothing's changed in how God sees you. There need be no more offering for sin. The problem is in us. The problem is we continue because of the presence of indwelling sin, we continue to need to go to the cross, not because we need to find some

new way to be forgiven by God, no, the forgiveness is already there. We need to continue to be broken ourselves and to lay down our own antipathy and resistance to God that sin still breeds in us.

So your greatest need is still to be reconciled to God. I think you see this in the text in the way God set things up and the way it comes out in the passage, back to Ezra 3. I mentioned that the decisive way that the feast of booths was celebrated in a sense typified that the massive offering of Christ, but look what he says after that. Verse 4, "They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required." He's given us that indication that they did it according to day 1, day 2, day 3, exactly what was supposed to be happening, all those 200 animals. But look what he says next in verse 5, "and afterward there was a continual burnt offering." Now they're back in the land. You see, they've come out of the land into the land through sacrifice. How do you remain in the land? How do you remain in God's presence? How do you remain under the blessing and in the spirit and cooperation with God in doing his work? How do you stay there? Point of usefulness?

There was a continual burnt offering, that's speaking of the daily burnt offerings. I mentioned this last week, that the way that the Lord set things up was there was to be, at daylight, as soon as they saw, the way it was set up and the Jews did it, they would have priests stationed so that someone could be at a high point and as soon as the sun crested over the horizon, they cut the throat of the first sin offering. At the moment daylight broke and that was a burnt offering every morning, and the last thing as the sun set, the same way, another burnt offering. So the day began and ended every single day with the reminder that we need a sacrifice for sin.

He says after that, there was a continual burnt offering, look what he says next in verse 5, "also for the new moons." Every new moon. The Jews had a combination of a lunar calendar and a solar calendar. The solar calendar for the years, lunar calendar for the months. A lunar calendar is like 29 ½ days on average and each month starts with a new moon. So when the new moons came, that's when the moon's basically kind of, you know, blacked out, you can see it but it's dark, when that happened there was a prescribed offering. So every day there's an offering, in fact, when you look back in Numbers 28 and 29, you'll see this all laid out. There was a daily burnt offering like I just mentioned, morning and evening, there was also a weekly offering on the Sabbath that was added to the daily offerings. So every day, all seven days the regular daily offering, on the Sabbath an additional offering for the Sabbath. On the new moon, the daily offering plus the new moon offering. Every month a new offering and the Jews had to be aware of this and every one of them is prescribed and it's different.

He says not just the new moon offerings, look what else he says, "and" verse 5, "for all the fixed festivals of the LORD." There were three fixed festivals. The feast of unleavened bread which came after Passover. Then there was Pentecost, the second feast. And then there was the feast of booths or tabernacles, which they celebrated. So basically a triannual feast that were basically a week long with all their own sacrifices.

So think about that, daily reminder, weekly reminder, monthly reminder, triannual reminder. We need blood to cover our sins. We need it when? Once a year, the day of atonement? Yes, but we need it every single day, continually. That's showing us and even on this side of Calvary we don't need another sacrifice for sins to appease God toward us, no, there's no wrath left for us, but because of the nature of sin, we still need to keep going to the cross to kill sin in us and to deal with the sin in us because there is a state of hostility that comes up and erupts in our hearts. It's only one-sided, though. Though we are accepted in the Beloved, we find ourselves reasserting our own authority to rule our life. We find ourselves sinning, taking matters in our own hands. We find ourselves becoming angry. We find ourselves pursuing our lusts. We find ourselves fearful and anxious. And what is the answer? The answer is be reconciled to God. Go to the place of reconciliation. What's the place of reconciliation? It is the altar. It is the cross.

You go to the cross now and there's a sense in which the Bible gives us windows into what this, it is the idea of daily sacrifice and regular sacrifice is picked up in a couple different places that I think add to our understanding. We're gonna go to them in just a moment but I want to give you three subpoints. This is your greatest need after conversion, be reconciled to God, and I want to talk about three things that we need to do to deal with our ongoing sin and our need for reconciliation toward God, our need to continually die to self and submit to him, and my point is that transaction happens at the altar, at the cross. It's the only place it can happen.

That's why there was so much emphasis in the Old Testament on the prescribed number of sacrifices. I mean, God, it seems like it's arbitrary when you read it, you're like, "Why this number? Why this?" Well, the Lord said it and he also in the text in Ezra 3, do you remember it says they built the altar on its foundation or in its place. They didn't build it wherever they wanted to, they put it where God told them to, where it had been before because that's the place of his altar and that's the only place a sacrifice is supposed to happen, and all of that in the Old Testament is pointing to the fact that there's only one place where you and I can deal with sin. There's only one. There's not many different ways of dealing with sin, there's only one. You might wish there were, well, so did Jeroboam in 1 Kings and read about that. He wished there was different ways to deal with sin and God hated that. Look at Nadab and Abihu, they thought that you can approach God however you want to and so they mixed up their own sort of special formula for the incense to offer. These were the sons of Aaron, they mixed up an incense formula that wasn't according to what God had laid out. This is to burn incense in the temple and fire came from the throne of God and killed them.

Or remember Uzzah, remember the story of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 5 or 6 when David is bringing the ark back to Jerusalem in preparation to build the temple and they have it on an oxcart and it starts to fall and this is where when you read the story, I mean, this is where you just like, you're perplexed, at least you should be or just something's wrong with me because when I read it, I am. Uzzah reaches up to steady the ark of the covenant so it doesn't fall and God's anger burns against him and he strikes him dead. David gets angry with God. David's thinking like I guess we are, "Why, why, Lord? Why would You

do this? He's trying to help. He's trying to advance, I mean, to protect the holiness of Your ark." Well, then apparently somebody went back and read the Scripture and then David found out about it, that the Bible is really clear there's only one way the ark of the covenant is ever to move, it is to move with poles through it being carried by priests. It's not to be put on an oxcart. I heard John Street say this too and this is really something profound. I think he said think about, in an article that he had written online, it said Uzzah's pride was to think that his hand, the hand of a sinner was better for the ark to touch than the ground. You see, he didn't see his sin like he should. You see, we have to put on the lens of Scripture so we can see clearly.

Well, all that to say God determines how he's to be approached and isn't that perfectly reasonable? So he says the only place that you can deal with your sin is the cross of Jesus Christ. That is the only place and we don't need any re-offering. There is no re-offering. It was a once-for-all offering. It is done. The thing that we do is spiritually we go by the power of the Spirit and we go back and we trust in that. We place all of our trust that we really are united to Christ in his death and in his resurrection which is what the Scripture teaches, the union with Christ.

So now let's think about what this looks like. So I said earlier you're thinking about something that you need to do in your own life, in your family, in relationships, and the prospect of doing it, you know God wants you to do it but it's frankly terrifying. How do you deal with that? Well, the first thing to do is to go to the altar, to go to the cross. What does that look like? So here's three points. Every occasion of sin, our awareness of our sin, go to Jesus, go to the cross, go to Christ. It is his sacrifice, I mean, what happens? So I've got a problem, I need to deal with something, something's wrong in this relationship and the Lord wants me to go to Jesus about it and so often when we're dealing with stuff like this, we know even if it's a relational issue, we know that some of the problem is us and sometimes we may have the confidence that only 10% is ours. Do you ever feel like that? I think maybe 10%, I'm 10% at fault, 90% is over there. And sometimes we might be close to right and sometimes we're way off. We're not seeing it correctly because sinners don't see things correctly.

So anyway, if you think it's 10%, take your 10% to the cross to Jesus and go with him and talk about this issue with him and open up to him and as you look at his word and as you think about his Scripture, pray to him and seek him trusting that your 10% or whatever that percentage is, is paid for by the blood of Jesus and then add to that that your sin, whatever, if it was 10%, that that sin, ask God to show you the ugliness of that 10% and to help you see the ugliness of it, think about this, if that 10% of your sin was the only sin that was ever committed, that sin would be enough to send Jesus Christ to the cross. That's how offensive that is. So what this does, you go to the cross to receive forgiveness but also the sensitive heart that lingers there with Jesus begins to see sin in a whole new way and if you're right and it's only 10%, you need to be broken over that 10% before you go deal with their 90. The best you can, you never could be broken completely so you've just got to do your best and then you're gonna go.

So every occasion of sin, every time you're aware of sin, every time you're aware of things in your heart that aren't what they ought to be, "I should love God more than I am right now. I should have a desire for spiritual things that I don't have right now." Whatever it is, take that to Christ. Don't try to fix it on your own. You can't do it. There's only one place that can be dealt with, it's the cross. So go to Jesus with it, face it as honestly as you can confess it, ask him to show you more of the ugliness of it, and as he works in you, ask him to grant you that you can mourn over your sin. In fact, the second thing, so every occasion of sin, awareness of sin, awareness of need, go to Christ, go to the cross and the second thing, Psalm 51:17, turn to that. Psalm 51. In the providence of God, this sin of David, horrible sin resulted in the gift to us of Psalm 51, a beautiful picture of repentance and brokenness before God and how we ought to deal with our sin. So the second subpoint after you go to the Lord Jesus on the occasion of sin, remain there confessing sin and looking at Christ until brokenness comes, some measure of it. You don't always have time. You may have to make more time later, come back, "Lord, help me see it." That's what happens in Psalm 51, in fact, the verse I want to point out, I said look at the imagery here. In verse 16, David seems to understand that it's not just about physical sacrifices, God's not really interested in the blood of bulls and goats, he's interested in human hearts.

Look what he says, verse 16, "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering." Well, he is in some ways but he's saying, "No, there's something. You're pleased with sacrifice and burnt offering when this heart accompanies it," what he says in verse 17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." So you take your sin to the cross, you allow Jesus to show you the ugliness of it and you ask him to give you a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. "Lord, I want to hate my sin. I know I see it, I see it in a shallow way. I want to hate it. Help me hate it." This passage is a good passage to read through, meditate, to pray to the Lord.

The third thing, remain there confessing and looking at Christ until brokenness comes, the third thing is another passage that speaks of sacrifice, Romans 12:1. When you go to the cross and you look at Christ and you take your sin to him and you see the ugliness of your sin and yet you see the beauty of Jesus and the sufficiency of his offering and sacrifice for you, that you are clean, that you are accepted before God, then it should motivate our hearts to service. This is what Romans 12:1 says. This is kind of like the hinge of the book of Romans from the theological section to the practical section and he uses the imagery of a priest offering a sacrifice. Romans 12:1, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." He says when you consider the mercy of God, when you go to the cross with your sin and you see the mercy of God for you and you see it in a deeper way because you see your sin in a more real way and you see the blood of Christ and its glorious sufficiency in a more clear way, then that mercy of God that God embraces you and loves you, what do you do? Now give yourself to God as an offering, a living sacrifice. You're the priest who offers yourself. You offer yourself to God.

It's consecration and in doing that, now you move against whatever the situation you were dealing with, the sin in your own life, you move toward that person you need to restore a relationship with, to work on something, and if you consecrate yourself and you're broken like this and you're focusing on Christ's sufficiency for you, then you can go to them, speak the truth in love, confront sin honestly and openly and God will make impact. Now let me tell you something, he's not promising the result on that end. Often you won't see much result on that end. Sometimes the only result is that you now are even more discouraged about that but it drives you back to Christ and what's happening is you are being changed which should always be our prayer anyway, "Lord, change me." That's what every single one of us should be praying in all of our relationships. Now we tend to think, "Lord, change them," but if we were being biblical, if we were being like David and Abraham, "Lord, change me." And when you make, "Lord, change me," your focus, you will make real breakthrough. If you go to the cross, you go to the altar, you do these things, you mourn over your sin, you consecrate yourself to God, you then join him in the work, you go back to the work whatever it is, sometimes it's something practical like trying to help someone with a problem, you go back to that with a different heart.

You will make an impact. Don't judge by human eyes, though. It may be incremental, outwardly unimpressive, but if you and I are learning to abide in Christ, this is what this really is, this is what obeying Jesus, John 15, "Abide in Me and you'll bear much fruit. Run to Me and you'll bear much fruit. Stay at My feet basking in My love. The sufficiency of My finished work, abide in Me and you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing."

So the Christian life is to be lived at the cross because our sin nature must be crucified and the only place that you can crucify the sin nature is in the finished work of Jesus on the cross and if you do that, if you make that your goal, God is gonna do great things. You may not see outwardly, you know, a lot of impressive things but I'm telling you, in the heavenly places God is doing great things. That's the invitation that is open to every single one of us. The debt has been paid. The work has been done and Jesus says, "Now remember what you're called to do. See My hand at work in you. Yeah, there's reason to be afraid, you've got opposition, you've got opposition within, you've got opposition around you, therefore run to the altar, run to the cross and then see Me work."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, how grateful we are for a Savior, a mighty Savior who has made an end to sin to everyone who trusts in Him. How grateful we are for Your Holy Spirit who has been given to us now to indwell us and to empower us and to enable us to abide in Christ. Father, we pray for those that are here who need to repent and believe the Gospel today in a saving way. Help them see their greatest need is to be reconciled to You and that there is nothing hindering them from being reconciled to You but their own pride. Help them humble themselves. Grant them grace. Grant them repentance. Grant them faith. Father, we pray for all who belong to You, that we would get to the work, remember our calling, walk worthy of the calling with which we've been called. Lord, there are areas where we have been afraid,

we've been neglectful. You know what those things are, Lord. You have such a clear picture of everything that You want done in our lives. Show us and help us and help us, Lord, to live at the feet of Jesus, loving Him more and obeying Him more. We pray in His name. Amen.