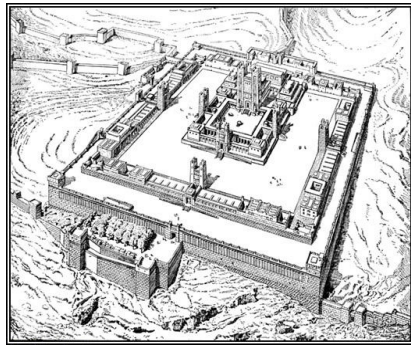


Thanksgiving in Jerusalem



At thanksgiving time we think about pilgrims and religious freedom. It is a time when we celebrate abundance and, sometimes, we think of those less fortunate. A heart of thankfulness is something that God wants us all to have. But today let's leave Plymouth Rock and the pilgrims and go to another thanksgiving celebration. This one in Jerusalem. But before we get into our thanksgiving story I'd like to pose a question.

Colossians 4:2—How do you give thanks when there's nothing to be thankful about? That's a vital question that some Levites had to answer.

Ezra 3:10-13—What better reason to celebrate than the laying of a foundation for a house of worship? The rejoicing was not in hushed subdued tones—it was ecstatic! When we were still living on Macomb St. we knew whenever the Badger football team got a touchdown because all the shouting could be heard loud and clear! Take that noise and add about 42,000 more people to the crowd and you have an idea of the kind celebration that is being spoken of here.

Ezra 3:12—Notice that not everyone is celebrating though. Those who had seen the old temple recognized what they had really lost. Because of their sins they had lost what was arguably the most amazing temple in the world. The place that was now being built to replace it was a shack in comparison.

There is an important lesson here. God is gracious and forgiving. He restores us after we repent *but* when you turn away from God you can *know* that there *will* be a loss.

Recovering From Loss:

When you've had a loss, whether by your own fault or not, how do you find a heart of thanksgiving again?

1. The first thing we see in this passage is that we need to take time to grieve that loss. When everyone else around us seems thankful and happy we often get the idea that our grief is inappropriate so we deny it and try to act normal. These men who were grieving over their sin and the temple didn't pretend to be joyful; they faced their sorrow.

2. **Ezra 4:1**—Next we find that they didn't live life wallowing in their sorrow. They moved forward in creating a solution. Even though they didn't see this temple as being as good as the last one they still built it.

3. **Ezra 5:11, 12**—They didn't deny their sin or cover it up. They admitted it and began doing what was right to rectify the situation—that is, they moved on.

Even when our loss isn't our fault we tend to want to deny it or cover it up thinking that if we just ignore it it will go away. That may work for some minor things but normally it will come back at some other time to rear its ugly head. We need to own it—it happened—we can't change the past but we can work toward the future.

4. **Ezra 4:4,5**—Anytime you're doing what is right you can expect opposition. When you choose to move beyond the past and start serving God again Satan will bring in his hired counselors to work against you, discourage you, make you afraid, and just plain attempt to frustrate God's plan. Although this is not fun, God is greater than Satan and we must keep on trusting Him.

5. **Ezra 4:24**—the work of rebuilding will have setbacks. Sometimes we need to step back and regroup—sometimes we're forced to do it. But that doesn't mean that the "gig is over" This is a time to regroup or re-grieve. Just because you've grieved doesn't mean you'll never have to again. God will get us back on track—in His time.

6. **Ezra 5:1, 2**—Sometimes the rebuilding process must be a stepping out in faith. These men had not been given permission to build from the king, but they had a command to build from God. They moved forward.

7. **Ezra 5:2 & 6:14**—Notice that "the prophets of God were with them, helping them". A very important part of recovering from loss is Godly counsel. This may or may not come from a pastor but it should be from someone who has a relationship with God and will allow the Holy Spirit to use them to guide you in rebuilding.

8. **Ezra 6:15, 16**—Now that the temple was finally finished everyone rejoiced, not because the new temple was better but because they had a place where they could worship God. What better reason for thanksgiving?

Notice that they're still in a destroyed city with all their neighbors hating them yet they give thanks. Why? Because their focus is on God, not their troubles.

Haggai 2:1-9--God is able to restore our loss. He can make all things work together for our good. We can have a very, very bright future!

At the beginning of this sermon I said that we were going to leave the pilgrims and Plymouth Rock for a while. But maybe that's not the case because the pilgrims had gone through many of the same losses and problems that the Israelites did in our story. They lost family members, a comfortable life, their neighbors hated and distrusted, them but God had seen them through and they rejoiced because of God's blessings and because they had a place where they could worship God.

