

BEYOND BRICK AND MORTAR

Today we are doing part 22 of the series titled **FROM RUBBLE TO RADIANCE**. We are now in Chapter 6 of Ezra, and after a long time, we see a completed temple.

Ezra 6:15 The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

We are often moved by what catches the eye, what excites the emotions, and what everyone celebrates. As human beings, we are prone to judge situations by what is apparent to the eye. In other words, we are intrigued by the beauty of a house but do not realize that there might be death beyond the walls. Not every house is a home, not every church attendee is a worshipper of Jesus, not every church building houses the presence of God.

This morning I want to talk to you on the subject matter: **BEYOND BRICK AND MORTAR**. We must not run after the loudest, but rather let's pursue substance over form. At the heart of this message is the idea that we must go beyond what meets the eye. The question is, how do you do that?

- Finally, the temple of God was completed as we have read. This was after many years (16 years) of neglect, and when they resumed, it took only 4.5 years to complete the work.
 - Through God's providence, pagan Kings such as Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes were used to supply what was needed for the building of the temple.
 - Whether we are part of it or not, God will get His glory, God will be worshipped and you want to be part of it (if these people keep silent, the stones will cry out – Luke 19:40).
 - One would have thought the job was done when the temple was completed – no, the physical building was just the beginning and a shadow of what God intended to do.
 - It's not about the building, but about what the building contains. It's not about pitching up on a Sunday morning (though that is important), but it's about why you pitched up. It's not about how well you can speak, but it's about what accompanies the speech. It's not about the smile, but about the spirit behind the smile.
 - We must never settle for brick and mortar – we must go beyond that.
 - The physical temple represented the presence of God; it was a point of contact, but if they only stopped at building the temple, nothing was going to change around them.
 - God was not just interested in the building; He was interested in what the building would bring to His people. The building would house the presence of God.
 - How did the exiles shift from just having a physical structure to having a spiritual home?
- Ezra 6: 16 The Temple of God was then dedicated with great joy by the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the people who had returned from exile.*
- Something needed to happen before the temple could become God's dwelling place. The exiles needed to dedicate the building to the Lord.

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- Dedication is to give someone or something wholly to God, setting it apart from ordinary use, and committing it to God's faithful service.
- Dedication changes everything about you – it is what determines the extent of God's involvement in your life.

1. Dedication transforms the ordinary (natural) into extraordinary (supernatural)

- Yes, the intention was for the temple to become God's habitation, but it remained just a building until they dedicated it to the Lord.
- With joy and celebration, they dedicated the temple – they saw the dedication as something of great significance.
- God will not possess what has not been given to Him. God will not actively engage in what He has not been invited into.
- The dedication of the temple was not just any other ceremony, filled with food and dancing – it was something with deep spiritual ramifications.
- Dedication stresses the act of giving or setting something apart for God.
- For this temple to fulfill its mandate, there was a need for it to be dedicated to the Lord.
- God only came and made the place Holy after He had been invited into it. In other words, dedication sets it apart for the sole use of God. This is where the word sanctify comes from. The Holy of Holies became sacred after the dedication – this is the key (Exodus 40:34-35).
- Today, we are no longer talking about the physical temple. We are now talking about your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6: 18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a man can commit is outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.

- Instead of saying beyond brick and mortar, I could say beyond flesh and blood, I could say beyond outside appearances.
- In other words, a life that is not dedicated to the Lord, cannot function as the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- The extent of dedication is summarized in *Romans 12: 1 Therefore I urge you, brothers, on account of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*
- Anything that is done and is not set apart for God, is not fit for worship. Let me unpack what are the implications of dedication.

1.1 Dedication implies belonging to God

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- What is dedicated is no longer treated as merely common or privately controlled.
- Dedication made the building sacred because it now belonged to God, who is sacred.
- Job was dedicated to the Lord, so he refused to sin against God when his wife challenged him to reject God: " Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2:10).

1.2 Dedication implies separation from improper use

- It is set apart from purposes inconsistent with God's holiness. A life dedicated to the Lord can no longer enjoy any other indulgences that are opposed to God.
- Whenever you find someone still fighting to engage in ungodly conduct, then know they have not dedicated themselves to the Lord – they are still dedicated to this world.

2 Corinthians 6:17 Therefore, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," saith the Lord. "And touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you"

- Joseph was dedicated to the Lord, and when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him into bed, he refused and said, "How can I sin against God?" – Genesis 39:9
- The exiles knew that sin was not welcome in God's temple, and they offered a sin sacrifice
Ezra 6: 17 For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel.

1.3 Dedication implies assignment to a divine purpose

- Samuel was dedicated to serve the Lord, and he grew up in the house of the Lord.
- Samson was dedicated to the Lord as a Nazarene – God used Him mightily as long as he remained in his divine purpose.
- A dedicated temple is for worship; a dedicated priest is for ministry; a dedicated life is for obedience and service.
- When Moses came of age, he refused to be associated with Pharaoh, for he knew that his life belonged to God - Hebrews 11: 24-27: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season

1.4 Dedication implies ongoing faithfulness

- Dedication is not only a public ceremony or emotional decision. It must be expressed through continuing obedience.
- When we are dedicated to the Lord, we pursue only that which brings honor to Jesus.

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- In other words, your life exclusively belongs to God.
- Dedication invites God to take his rightful place among us, but the way we conduct ourselves will determine whether we can contain God's presence or not.
- Paul was committed to the gospel – he called himself cursed if he did not preach the gospel. He was prepared not only to be imprisoned but also to die for the gospel.
- What did the exiles do to ensure that they retain God's presence?
- You might have access to the glory, but you might not be able to retain the glory.
- We are living in a time where no one is interested in taking instructions. That is why we have professing Christians who do not produce Christian fruit.
- Religion has made us comfortable with our own ideas of what true worship looks like. That is why we come to church when we want and not when God wants us. We are ok leaving a meeting regardless of what God is still doing.
- The exiles were tired of doing life without God, and they needed to make sure that this time around they only do what attracts God, and what distinguishes that building from any other around them.

Ezra 6: 18 And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses

- God was only going to come in a place where spiritual order was observed. Moses received instruction from God on how worship was to be conducted, and that is what these exiles wanted to do.

2. A scripture-aligned lifestyle attracts the supernatural

- Doing life in line with scriptures will help you retain God's presence in your life.
- Jesus spoke about this when He said in *John 14: 23* "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him".
- Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well and told her that it was not the building, it was not the mountain that mattered in worship, but rather the state of the heart.
- We can have beautiful songs but if those songs don't glorify God, then don't expect God to come down.
- We can sing our lungs out, but if our hearts are faraway from God, He is not coming down to endorse our performance.
- What is the type of worship that God is looking for?
- What Moses wrote is what God expected as a way of conducting worship in the temple. In other words, what the word says is what God expects from us.

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- What does God do when He sees true dedication and true worship in someone and in a church?

2 Chronicles 5:11 And it happened as the priests came out of the holy place, for all the priests present were sanctified, and did not wait by division. 12 And the Levitical singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brothers, being clothed in white linen, having cymbals and with harps and lyres, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets, 13 and they were as one to the trumpeters and to the singers, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Jehovah; and as they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Jehovah, saying, For He is good, for His mercy endures forever, the house was filled with a cloud, the house of Jehovah, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God!

- God comes down and abides among us. His glory is seen in and around us.
- When He comes we seize from just being natural people, we become supernatural people, carrying His glory.
- Its not about brick and mortar, its not about flesh and blood, its not about outside appearance, its about the indwelling glory of God among us.