

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story: Chapter 19 – The Return Home
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 12, 2012

Deliverance is an interesting term. We talked about it last week. The nation of Judah, the last of the remaining inhabitants of the proud nation of Israel were held in Babylon. The Kings of Persia, first king Darius the Great and then King Cyrus the Great delivered them from exile and they were allowed to walk the 900 mile trip to return home. Darius and Cyrus apparently got religion of the good kind and released the Jews to go home and rebuild their city and temple and sent them home with not only their own treasures that had been stolen from the Temple of God but with resources from Persia coffers as well. Exiles delivered to their homes! Like I mentioned last week, it is a regular theme of the Bible:

Ezra 1:1-3

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.³ Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.”

Not all the exiles chose to go home. 50,000 did but perhaps hundreds of thousands did not. Some had lived in Babylon all their lives since they had been in captivity for about 70 years and had no direct knowledge of the Promised Land. Maybe they had good jobs and friends on the cul-de-sac where they lived and packing up and moving to a city in ruins that they had never seen didn't feel very attractive. So who would choose to pack up and move to this city so far away?

I think it was those who knew the Living God and feared Him and loved Him and believed in His promises spoken by the prophets. They were the ones who listened to God and obeyed. The rest were Jewish by heritage – by blood line - but not by heart. They were the ones with remnant hearts. They knew that they were strangers in a strange land and that they did not belong. They listened to God and obeyed regardless of the cost. I would think that many said “Don't do this. You don't know what will happen. We can make a new temple here. You think we know it all, you are so judgmental thinking you are so important that you will be wanted there.”

The concerns, the complaints, the criticism; it sounds so familiar to those of us who listen to God and choose a different path than the world offers. I have heard that there are some in our congregation who have chosen to not have a TV and they have been called fanatics. There have been some who have tried home school or abstain from alcohol or anything but PG movies for the sake of a righteous life and they have been made fun of - sometimes by people in the church. I can say out of personal experience – friendly fire hurts deep! Much deeper than a stranger hurling insults.

I think they left to go back to their ancestral home because they had a vision for a new future that was grand and obedient and hopeful. Because they wanted to fulfill the call of God upon their lives. They had been given the job of doing big things for God; rebuilding the walls of the city and erecting a new Temple so that God could be worshiped and the sacrifices to cover their sin offered again as the law commanded. They wanted to obey because these were big deals to God.

But then we have to ask ourselves the question;

What happens when God's big things are our small things?

In the Story on page 266 and in the Bible in the books of Ezra and Haggai we learn that the people get a good start on rebuilding. They build an altar even before the Temple is started so that they can offer

sacrifices. They go on to lay the foundation for the Temple. But then opposition comes and they lay down the work for a while. Then they are distracted by a lack of leadership and some personal desires to build their houses.

Haggai 1: 3-4, 7-11

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

The Temple is a big deal to God. It is supposed to be first and the Hebrews had let their priorities wander. They were building their own paneled houses while the house of God lies in ruin. He is jealous for His House because He is jealous for his Glory. It is all a very hard concept for us flatlanders – those of us who do not yet know of the glories of heaven. His Glory resides in the Temple and with the Temple in ruins, God does not get the credit and worship He deserves.

What is God's big thing? . . . His Glory!

John Piper took a stab at defining the glory of God and he calls it . . . **God's Glory Defined: *The infinite beauty and greatness of his manifold perfections.***

This glory is found in the Temple and it is in ruins. It is a tragedy of eternal proportions. And Haggai tells all who will listen that the trials they are facing are consequences because they are not attending to the Temple and to the Glory of God! When the big things of God become our small things, bad things happen!

Fast forward with me 550 years to the death of Christ on the cross and then his resurrection. Then the mystery of God breaks through again into humanity: the Holy Spirit comes to indwell believers and in so doing *we* now become the Temple of the Glory of God. It is staggering to consider. But the apostle Paul reminds us of this improbable truth.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

'Did you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . ?'

Paul is saying that our bodies now house what the Temple in Jerusalem used to house – the Glory of the Lord! Remember when the veil of the Temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies – the sacred place in the Temple where only the High Priest went once a year during Yom Kippur to offer atoning sacrifices for the people of God. It was a foreshadowing that God would no longer be separated from His people and 40 days after Christ ascended to Heaven the Spirit was sent to indwell us and in so doing make us the dwelling place of God and His Glory. Have you ever thought of yourself as the house of God; a Temple where others can see the manifest character, perfections and beauty of the Lord? You should because it is good theology.

The sum of the matter then is this: The supreme goal of God in history from beginning to end is the manifestation of his great glory. Accordingly our duty now with the abiding of His Spirit in us is to manifest that glory. It is what we live for. To join God in this goal is called glorifying God. As a natural result of this joy in God we experience freedom from selfishness and are moved to seek the good of others.

Then what is to be humanities' big thing?

The Shorter Westminster Shorter Catechism

'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.'

How do we glorify God? . . . We come to know him and love him and obey him!

John 14:15

If you love me you will keep my commandments

Jeremiah 9:23-24

This is what the LORD says:

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

We cannot glorify God if we do not love him and we cannot love Him if we do not know him. It is a child’s game.

Interview with Children’s Ministry (re: VBS) - Prayer

How do we come to love and know God?

We know God through His Word

Psalms 1:1-2

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

Psalms 119:1-2

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD.
Blessed are those who keep his statutes
and seek him with all their heart—

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

We know God in Prayer

Psalms 27:7-8

Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.
My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek.

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

We know God with the fellowship of the Body – His Church

1 Corinthians 12

We know God through Worship

We know from the psalmist that “God inhabits the praises of His people” (Psalm 22:3).

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. *William Temple*

Sing lustily and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. *John Wesley*

We know God in Suffering

Philippians 3:10

. . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

1 Peter 4:12-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

How do we enjoy Him? In everything at every moment!

Maybe this illustration will help:

Alice and Henry Conklin were celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary and using it as an excuse for a family reunion. Joining Alice and Henry that afternoon for a picnic were their eight children and their spouses, some 24 grandchildren, 14 of which were married and 11 great grandchildren, the oldest was 15 and the youngest was little Stephanie, who was 4. Amazingly all lived in the greater Austin, Texas area and all but 4 could attend, 63 in all there to celebrate.

The day was a grand day and they were at one of the kids houses with a sprawling back yard. The grand and great grand children were playing some organized old fashioned children's games; Kick the Can, Steal the Bacon, Red Rover. The 90 year old patriarch Henry, watched with his eye closely on the youngest in his tribe, little Stephanie. The older kids were generally watching out for younger ones until they started to play the family favorite, Red Rover. In this game some of the older children held hands and called to the younger ones, red rover, red, rover send “Stevie” right over. Steve would then run and try to break through the arms of the line calling their name. If they could break through they got to go back to the other side. If not they had to join the line until there was a winner, the last one left alone.

Henry noticed that little Stephanie never won at Red Rover. Every time they called her over she was captured and had to join the line. Fearing for her self esteem and sensing his own sense of justice heating up he began to feel bad for little Steph. When the game took a break he called little 4 year old Stephanie over. “Stephie, do you feel bad because you never win at Red Rover?” he asked tenderly. The little great granddaughter looked at her great grandfather smiling and said, “Oh GranPaPa, it's ok. I like to lose.”

“When I lose, they all hug me and I get to join the line. That is my favorite part. When I lose it seems like winning.” Then she hugged Henry and said, “It's ok GrandPaPa, it is hard for you to understand these things,” and ran back to the games.

You see enjoying God is a child's game. But the rules are all backwards and upside down. To win you must lose, to be first you must be last and to live you must first die.

If you seek God with all your heart and soul and mind, *He* will find *you*. And then when you come to *know Him* you will find that He has *always loved you*. And when you rest in that love and delight yourself in the Lord, His glory is poured out through you. And love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness and self control pour out of you and again God is glorified in His Temple. It is simple as a child's game.