



LOCKINGCASTLECHURCH

Life Group Notes –5th September 2021

Coming back to the heart: Ezra 1:1-8

Please visit the LCC website to listen to the talk or read the transcript if available.

Ezra 1

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil 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:

² '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. ⁴ And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

⁵ Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites – everyone whose heart God had moved – prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. ⁶ All their neighbours assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. ⁷ Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. ⁸ Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

Note this is the NIV2011 version of the text. It would be helpful to compare it with other translations.

Comment:

The theme of exile and return is a repeating one for God's people throughout history. Humanity's return to Eden after Adam's eviction from the garden is perhaps the overarching grand narrative of the bible, as people find their way back to God through the new and living way opened up through faith in Jesus Christ. Exodus tells the story of the journey back to the promised land for God's people after their exile and captivity in Egypt. Then there is a second period of exile in Babylon after Israel and Judah are conquered by Nebuchadnezzar around 600BC. That period of Exile lasted around 70 years, then as prophesied by Jeremiah and Isaiah, Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon, subsuming it into the empire of the Medo-Persians. He brought in a new foreign policy which encouraged exiles to return to their homelands with freedom to worship. If God could move a pagan King to initiate a new policy that brought about a revival for the people of God, then we need to trust that he can bring about revival in the most unlikely situations in our day too. Cyrus didn't encourage the Jews to go and rebuild the economy first, rather, he invited them to go and rebuild the temple – the focal point of their worship and identity as a nation. As we move tentatively into the post-pandemic era in our country, we might be tempted to focus on just coming back to worship in church buildings or rebuilding the economy. But King Cyrus had it right. Under the Lord's anointing, he prioritised worship first. Heartfelt worship connects us to God, especially when we worship together. The kind of worshippers the Father seeks, said Jesus, are those who worship in Spirit and in truth. In other words, those who will worship him together from the heart, based on the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

Questions:

1. What do you think of the statement 'our identity is tied into what we worship'?
2. Why is worship so essential for our growth as Christian disciples?
3. What does it mean to 'worship as a way of life'?
4. How can we support the church best as we rebuild after the pandemic?
5. How can we make sure worship and prayer remain priorities in our life together?