

Ezra 6:16-18

There are times in the life of the state and of the church that are marked and remembered by inauguration ceremonies and dedication services. Such events and the places in which they are remembered are important and the pomp and ceremony that attend them are often given enormous attention. The straightforward description of the opening of the second temple in Jerusalem is, therefore, somewhat surprising

Summary

In Ezra 6:16-18, following the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, Ezra gives a simple description of the celebration of its dedication.

1. Stark Comparison vs. 17

The first feature of this account of the second temple's dedication is its comparison with the dedication of Solomon's temple. There was no ark of the covenant in the second temple and no king in Israel to lead the proceedings at the temple's dedication. Also, the second temple was far less ornate than the first. In addition, there were significantly less sacrifices offered than when Solomon's temple was dedicated (**Ezra 6:17; cf. 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5**).

The number of worshipers in 516 B.C. was far fewer than in the time of Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah, in addition to which, the returning community was poorer. Zechariah proclaimed times of blessing that lay ahead (**Zech 8**), but such times were not true of the present. God had taught them to wait in expectation of blessing by bringing them to a low position. In lean times, faith encourages believers to look away from themselves to the infinite resources and unfailing promises of God alone.

2. Joyous Celebration vs. 16

The second feature of this day of dedication was joyous celebration (**6:16**). Part of the celebration involved making sacrifices (c.f. fellowship offerings; **Lev. 3**).

First, the Jews now had a place where the sacrifices could be offered and God could be worshiped in the manner in which he had prescribed.

Secondly, God had been true to his Word; seventy years of exile had been exactly what he had threatened, and this was less than what they deserved.

Thirdly, the Lord had provided them with true prophets who proclaimed the Word of God without fear of men.

Fourthly, the promise of a Savior, to which both temple ritual and prophetic Word alluded, remained the focus of their expectations.

Throughout the history of redemption, there are times when the provision of God is such that everything else must stop in order to provide opportunity for praise to God.

3. Remembered Mercies vs. 17

In addition to the general offerings, specific sin offerings were also made (**Ezra 6:17**). First, a specific sacrifice was ordered as a sin offering. This was a day of celebration, but the Jews were not to forget that they were sinners and that atonement for sin could only be achieved through a blood sacrifice (**Heb. 9:22**).

Secondly, the offering had a communal dimension (**Lev 4:13–21; c.f. Josh. 7:19–21**). Thirdly, twelve goats were sacrificed, which shows that the people of God were still conscious of their identity as “the twelve tribes” or “Israel.” The temple was still the temple of the whole of Israel and even though those who worshiped that day in Jerusalem might have thought only of ethnic Israel, a greater promise was in view. The Messiah, of which these sacrifices were mere types and shadows, was the Messiah of the whole of Israel, the whole of God’s true people; the church.

4. Scriptural Commitment vs. 18

In the dedication of the Second Temple, there was also a commitment to the Scriptures (**Ezra 6:18**). The organization of the priests and the Levites was reinstated as it had been practiced before the exile and in accord with the law of God (**Exod 29, Lev 8, Num 3 & 8**). The faith of Israel had been kept alive during the exile. This is yet another example of their commitment to regulative principles that bound them in matters of worship and practice to the express teachings of Scripture. They refused to adopt novel ways. They shunned all forms of compromise. With regard to the worship of God, believers are not at liberty to introduce changes for the sake of novelty and a pandering to generational tastes (**c.f. the Regulative Principle of Worship - 2LBC 22:1 & 1:6**). The Regulative Principle does not answer every conceivable question about either the worship of the church but it remains an important and vital principle, without which we are left to the tyranny of human preference. Without this principle, there can be no real freedom of conscience, but only an obsession that lies deep within us to become followers of fashion.

If you had been in Jerusalem that day, what would you have seen?

In essence, a people conscious of their larger identity, confessing their sin and committed to scriptural worship and joy.

When we gather for worship today, in a service of worship where the gospel is preached and understood, joy ought to be similarly experienced.