Ezra Ch3v1-13 - God's Pattern For His People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 September 2026

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0:00] If you could turn up your Bibles to Ezra chapter 3, that's on page 474 of the church Bible.

! Reading from verse 1.
When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem. Then Joshua, son of Josedach, and his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and his associates, began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it in accordance with what is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.
Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.
Then, in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the festival of tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day.
[1:28] After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the new moon sacrifices, and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the Lord, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the Lord.

On the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, though the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.
Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters and gave food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa as authorized by Cyrus, king of Persia.
In the second month of the second year, after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Josedach, and the rest of the people, the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work.
They appointed Levites, 20 years old and older, to supervise the building of the house of the Lord. Joshua and his sons and brothers and Cadmiel and his sons, descendants of Hodaviah, and the sons of Hennadad and their sons and brothers, all Levites, joined together in supervising those working on the house of God.
[2:56] When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites, the son of Asaph, with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David, king of Israel.

With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord, He is good, His love towards Israel endures forever. And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.
But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.
No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise, and the sound was heard far away.
Thank you, Kirsty. Keep your Bibles open, please. That's Ezra chapter 3. Let's bring this down.
[4:34] Well, let's pray. This is what God says. These are the ones I look on with favour, those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.

Father, we come to your word afresh today, in humility, because we need to hear from you, and for our hearts to be changed.
Do a work amongst us individually, and together as a church family, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.
Well, after five long months, and a thousand mile walk, God's people began to settle back into their homes.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Have a look at verse 1. So when the seventh month came, and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together, as one, in Jerusalem.
[5:48] Seventy years of captivity have passed, and now they are back home. But all is not well. Their city had been destroyed, the temple was in ruins, and their land was laid bare.

Not only that, there are others living nearby who don't seem to be terribly friendly. There's no big welcoming party. In fact, verse 3 tells us, God's people were living in fear.
Life back home was not looking so good. So the question that they're all asking is, what are we to do now?
What happens next? We're back. But what goes on now? Now we can find ourselves in similar situations, can't we?
Circumstances change in our life. Maybe we need to move. Future is uncertain. Fears overwhelm us. All kinds of things come into our life.
[6:58] And we ask the same question. What do I do now? What happens next? Well, there's a message here for the gathered people of God.

And as we gather as God's people, we want to hear what he has to say. There's a pattern for God's people to follow.
A pattern for God's people to follow. And first, if you've been paying attention at all to the songs we've sung today and as Sam was leading, God's word is the foundation for God's people.
The word of God is the foundation for the people of God. So under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel, verse 2, they began to build the altar of God.
Now, who came up with that idea? Build an altar. Well, what about the temple? Surely that's more important. Or what about the city? That's in ruins.
[8:07] And look at the roads. They're full of potholes. And the fields, the fences need put right again. No, this wasn't a random thought. Some bright spark who said, let's build an altar.

It was because, look at the end of verse 2, it was in accordance with what is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.
You see, God had spoken his word. Moses had written down God's word. And now the people are gathered together and are reading or hearing God's word.
Everything was done, look at verse 4, in accordance with what is written. You see, there's a pattern here.
God has spoken his word. His servants, like Moses, wrote God's word down. And now the people gather together to hear the word of God spoken afresh to them.
[9:16] Now as we gather as a local church, we might ask, what are we to do? Well, we always start with the Bible.

We begin with the word of God. We do what is in accordance with what God says. We don't make things up and plough our own ways.
You see, the word of God shapes and directs how we live and what we are to do. So we are to prioritize listening to the word of God.
That's why we gather each week. And if you're wondering why you're here this morning, it's primarily to hear the word of God to us through song, through prayer, as we read the Bible, as we hear it being taught.
You see, there are many voices seeking our attention. Think about all those voices that we have heard this week. Not least our own word telling ourselves what we want.
[10:26] Our own inner voice telling us you do things your way. The problem with my thoughts are they're not God's word.

We need to listen to our creator, to listen to the God who redeems us, who loves us. The God who knows what is best for you.
And it's so true. God always knows what is best for you. I'm thankful that when I was growing up and if I was in a difficulty and wondering what to do or what was happening in life, my mum and dad would say, very simply, have you read your Bible and prayed about it?
Doesn't sound much, but it's full of wisdom. Don't be listening to your own thoughts. Listen to what God has to say. God's people always start with the word of God.
So what is it that the word is telling us? Well, let's look at the rest of the text and see what God has to tell us his people.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[11:44] First, the people of God are to rely on the gospel of God. The people of God are to rely on the gospel of God.

In obedience to God's word, the people began to offer sacrifices and celebrate festivals. And what a lot there were.
Do you see there in verse 3? There were morning and evening sacrifices. Verse 4, there were festivals and tabernacles.
In verse 5, there's new moon sacrifices. And then at the end of verse 5, sacred festivals. What are all these sacrifices and festivals all about?
Well, it was all about relying on God's mercy and grace. We see this in two ways. First, no, we don't have a heading.
[12:47] Let's go back. the sacrifices. Look at the sacrifices which speak about the mercy of God. Verse 3, despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

So at the beginning of the day, can you imagine all God's people gathered together? At the beginning of the day and at the end of the day, an animal sacrifice was made for all the people. The priest representing the people would confess the sins and then take an animal and slaughter the animal. The message was crystal clear.
Sin is serious. Death is the penalty for sin. This animal dies in your place. It demonstrated a need for God's mercy, that God wouldn't treat them as their sins deserve.
So they were to rely on the mercy of God. But not only were these sacrifices, there were festivals, verse 4. Let's look at one of them.
[14:14] Then in accordance with what is written, verse 4, they celebrated the festival of tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day.

The festival of tabernacles was an annual festival celebrated to mark the time when God's people had come out of Egypt and were heading to the promised land, and how God had provided for them on the journey.
So every year, each family for about a week would set up a little tabernacle. It was a makeshift hut that you would live in and sleep in.
It was like putting a tent in your back garden. And as you lived there, so it was an exercise of relying upon God's grace, that we need God to provide for all of our needs.
So these sacrifices and these festivals were crucial in the life of God's people. They had a purpose. They need God's mercy.
[15:24] They need God's grace. Now isn't that what we all so desperately need? You see, as I think about God's commands in his word, well, I haven't listened to God as I should.

I have so often listened to the own inner voice that says, Johnny, you do what you want. You live as you please. I haven't listened and loved God's word as I should.
So I need a God who will look down upon me, who will not treat me as my sins deserve, who will shower mercy upon me.
And I need a God who will give to me what I don't deserve, grace and all that I need for living a life with God.
Isn't this the foundation of our relationship with God? Isn't this where we should come time and time again, whatever may be going in our life, whatever experiences or circumstances or fears, we come back to the gospel of God.
[16:40] This is the pattern for God's people. Just as they celebrated their festivals annually, just as they had their sacrifices evening and morning, so it's saying to us, all of life, all year, every day, morning and evening, come back to a glorious God who pours out his mercy and his grace upon his children.

This is the pattern for his people. So we are to rely on the gospel of God. Second, we're to depend on the presence of God.
With the sacrifices and festivals kept, attention now turns to this ruined temple. The leaders, verse 8, gather together and they begin the work of laying the foundations.
But notice how the temple is described. Look at the end of verse 8. They appointed Levites, 20 years old and older, to supervise the building of the house of the Lord.
Or look down at the end of verse 9. All the Levites joined together in supervising those working on the house of God.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[18:12] We see it again down in verse 11. And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Yes, they're building a temple, but it's the house of the Lord, a dwelling place for God to live.
It was a symbol of God's presence among his people. It expressed God's desire to live amongst his children. You see, the presence of God was central.
That's why they made the temple a priority. Yes, their homes needed fixed. Yes, the city needed rebuilt, but what they most needed was the power of God's presence at work amongst them.
So the leaders began the work of building the foundations of the temple. You see, this is the story of the whole Bible, isn't it?
[19:17] Think with me. The beginning of the Bible, what do we read about? The first human beings, Adam and Eve, living together with God in the Garden of Eden, enjoying God's presence.

Tragically, because of their disobedience, they're removed from the garden. They're shut out from God's presence because sinful people can't live with God. And the rest of the Bible story from those early chapters in Genesis right the way through to the end is showing us how God's presence can be restored.
And when we get to the end in Revelation, what do we find? But God coming down to dwell with his people. You see, we need the presence of God in our lives.
Again, as I think about God's word, my desire to read it, my love for it, I need the presence of God, not just around about me, but in me, to enable me to love God's word, and to move me to obey God's word.
We need the presence of God's power in our life. It's the pattern for all God's people. Because whatever circumstances we are going through, no matter the trials and the hardships, and we've prayed about some of them today, if we're going to get through, don't we need the presence of God in our life to help us and to work through it?
[21:06] So, we rely on the gospel of God, we depend on the presence of God, and we rest in the faithfulness of God.

Look at verse 10. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they gathered together, the priests and the Levites, and they got their musical instruments, in this case, some trumpets and some cymbals.
Verse 11, and with praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord, God's love God's love towards Israel, that is, God's people, endures forever.
Now, that should shock us and surprise us. You see, the story of God's people can be summarised in one word, unfaithfulness.
century after century, decade after decade, year after year, God's people had promised again and again to obey God and to love God, to follow his word and to do what he says, but like a serial adulterer, they just went after other gods and other lovers.
[22:32] And despite warnings of judgment and promises of blessings, they ignored God and rejected God they were unfaithful. That's who they were.

But in contrast, the story of God towards his people can also be summarised in one word, not unfaithfulness, but faithfulness.
Despite all their failing and falling, God remained faithful. And here they are, gathered together back home in their land, proof that God is loyal and committed, that God is kind and good, that he is long-suffering and ever-patient, that he keeps his promises and continues to bless, that he acts in grace and responds with mercy.
You see, God's people are only where they are because, verse 11, God is good.
His love towards his people endures forever. ever. This is the God we know. He never gives up on his people.
[23:57] He is steadfast and dependable. The word there in verse 11 is that hesed word, the steadfast, committed love of God, the faithful love of God.

And look at the double response of the people as they reflect on the faithfulness of God. Rejoicing and longing or songs of joy and tears of longing.
Look at verse 11. The end of verse 11, and all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.
The temple was rebuilt or being rebuilt. The presence of God would soon be a reality. God is so, so good to his people. And the only response is joyful praise for all that God had done.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But do you notice they're not all rejoicing? There's also tears of longing. Verse 12. Many of the older priests and the Levites and the family heads who had seen the former temple.
[25:15] That was Solomon's temple. Well, they wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.

You see, the older, the grey haired, they had seen something better, and they longed for the past. The rebuilding of the temple that they saw now was, yes, it was good, but it wasn't as good as what it was before.
And so they wept. they longed for something better and greater. So there's both rejoicing and longing.
Verse 13. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise, and the sound was heard far away.
You see, as God's people respond to God's faithfulness, there is both songs of joy and tears of longing.
[26:23] In fact, for us today, as we respond to God's faithfulness, we have a greater rejoicing and an even deeper longing.

look at the greater rejoicing that we have. The Bible tells us that the sacrifices and temple building that we've just been looking at were only shadows of the reality.
The Apostle Paul put it like this. he says these, that's the sacrificial system and the temples were only a shadow of the things that were to come.
The reality, however, is found in Christ. So picture with me for a moment a dad and it's a glorious sunny day and he's with his toddler daughter.
Behind the dad is the son which casts this enormous shadow right in front of him. Now wouldn't it be strange for the daughter to find the shadow of her father and wrap her arms or at least try to wrap her arms around the shadow?
[27:42] No, the daughter follows the shadow until she reaches her dad and when she gets to the end of the shadow there he is and she embraces him for she's safe and secure in his arms treasured and loved.

Well the purpose of these sacrifices in the temple is like a shadow leading us to embrace Jesus. You see all these sacrifices that went on year after year, day after day, were just a reminder of sin. They could actually never deal with sin. How could an animal take away sins of people? Every sacrifice that was made was a constant reminder, you're guilty, you're full of shame, you've failed, you've messed up, you've blown it.
Every festival was a constant reminder that yes we're trusting in God to provide, but I've failed again and I've messed up. Day after day, morning and evening, every year, and the temple, well let's get real, how could the temple be contained by God who is over the whole universe?
At best it was a symbol of God's partial presence. They could never see him in the temple, they could never be with him, in fact their constant sin threatened his very presence.
[29:19] so we don't want to be people who go on about sacrificial systems or building temples. We today have the reality.

You see, in Jesus we find the true sacrifice who dies in our place. Remember what John the Baptist saw or said when he saw Jesus?
look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It's an invitation to come to Jesus to confess all of our sin, knowing that he will forgive all of our sin.
It's a once and for all sacrifice, a sufficient sacrifice. And as we come to him, he washes away all our guilt and all our shame.
But more than that, as we come to Jesus, he makes a wonderful promise to us. Remember it? It's there on the screen.
[30:24] Jesus says, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.

We don't need to go into a special building or a temple. to find God. If we are trusting in the Lord Jesus, God comes to dwell in us by his spirit.
Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are made clean and pure so that God, the creator of the universe, would dwell within us.
This is the gospel in all its fullness. this is why we rely on the gospel of God. This is why we depend on the presence of God who fills us and enables us and moves us to obey God's word and to follow

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

his truth.
You see, this is why we have a greater rejoicing. Look again at the middle of verse 11. we can say, as we look to Jesus, the true reality, that he is good and his love towards his people endures forever.
[31:49] Do you hear those words? If you today are relying and depending on Jesus, this is your song, this is your theme tune for your life.

Whatever circumstances are going on in your life, you can shout this out. God is good. His love towards you insert your name.
It endures forever. It endures forever. But we don't just have a greater rejoicing, we actually have a deeper longing.
God is God's people. God is God's people. God is great. We can have the Lord Jesus Christ. But you know what? The best is yet to come.
We don't long for the past, but we long for the future, don't we? We long for that day when we will be with Jesus, to see him, and to be finally like him, to be rid of sin once and for all, and to know his presence with us.
[33:09] We will see the risen Lord Jesus. That day is coming. One day the Lord Jesus will return, and our tears of longing will be replaced with tears of joy.

As we go through our hardships and our trials, and we wonder, will it ever end? hear the promise that God will dwell with his people, and we will enjoy him forever.
Together, all God's people of all times and all ages will gather as one, and we will sing the theme tune, that God is good, his love towards his people endures forever.
End of verse 11. and all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord. You see, there are tears of longing and there are songs of joy for God's people.
The songs of joy in all that Jesus has done for us, but there are tears of longing as we wait for what is to come. But praise God, what we have today is good and what is coming is even better.
[34:39] Let's pray together. our Father God, we thank you that you indeed have not left us in the dark, but you have spoken the truth of your word.

Lord, we pray that this will be the foundation of our life and that you would bring us back time and time again to rely on your mercy and grace, to depend upon your presence in us and to know the faithfulness of our God, that he is good and his love towards us endures forever.
Thank you for what we have today in Christ and we praise you for all that is to come. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host