

Renewal is a Community Project

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[0 : 00] let's turn to the Lord in prayer our God and our Father we are glad to be a part of this community of believers a part of this church and Lord we know that you are a God who is eager who's excited to renew us as individuals as families and especially as a church and we ask Lord that you would open our hearts to receive this message that you have for us Lord God you have a great deal in store for us that we can't even begin to imagine and I pray Lord God that you would do far above far beyond all that we can ask or imagine so that your people would know that you are God and so that an unbelieving world would know that you alone have the power you alone have the authority you alone are a God who is mighty and glorious so that everyone will worship you everyone will center their lives on our God our Savior our

King amen okay renewal is a community project that's the title of the sermon and is it is a project or is it project what's the Canadian way of saying it yes either either one I'm really okay I'm really confused after living most of my life in the states you know you've got was it process and produce and that becomes process and produce and I don't know if project becomes pro project so I'm gonna probably get confused and go back and forth between the two of them so just bear with me hang in there the title of the sermon I stole from our journey class I definitely stole it wholesale so if you want to arrest me for plagiarism that's fine you can you can do that we're studying this material our course we're going through in the journey class I'll give a bit of a plug for it now 9 a.m. every Sunday morning about an hour and a half before the service meets it is well worth your time the material we're covering it's it's amazing has been dovetailing almost perfectly with what we're studying here in

Ezra and it'll give you a lot more details about how change how renewal happens among the people of God in practical ways in your own life in your families in your church and how that change can ripple out into our community one of the lessons the one that we went through last week one of the lessons was called change is a community project change is a community project and the idea is that if you want to change to become more like Christ and that's something every Christian wants that is the whole purpose of why we are here that is the whole purpose of our being is to change to become like Christ if you want that then you need community don't you you need community you need a community that is centered on Jesus Christ that is always looking to him reminding each other of him and you need a community that is centered on the gospel that the way that we live the way that we talk with one another is shaped by an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ what you and I need is we need to be counseled we need to be instructed we need to be encouraged by others in this community and in turn we need to counsel instruct and encourage others in the community both giving and taking and taking this and so we need to work together with one another in a single-minded manner and that's something the apostle Paul talks a lot about in the book of Philippians in chapter one he he writes this only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or

I'm absent I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents that manner of life standing firm in one spirit that brings about change that brings about a new mindset and the kind of change that we want is renewal we want renewal we want to be made new we want to be revived we want to experience new joy and energy we want to be restored to what we were made to be as individuals we want to be restored to how we were supposed to live as families we want to be restored to what God has in mind for his church and we want to bring that renewal to those who do not believe so they may see the new life that comes with Jesus Christ and we're going to learn from the biblical book of Ezra today that just as change is a community project so renewal is a community project as well and so this this I feel is a good follow-up to last week's sermon because last week we read Ezra chapters one and two we began our series on the book of Ezra on God's people renewed and last week we learned that renewal begins with God we learned that God renews his people by compelling genuine believers to worship him so in other words we can't force renewal to happen you and I can't just make it we can't hold a revival meeting and just whip it up we can't do strategic planning to engineer a whole system a methodology that can accomplish this we can't make renewal happen we can't make it happen by our efforts by our planning even by our community relationships and activities renewal begins with God God is the one who initiates it

God is the one that sees it through to completion and so our first response really needs to be prayer our first response really needs to be pleading with the Lord God asking him to renew us expectantly eagerly looking forward to the Lord God to renew his people to renew you and me but as we go on in Ezra chapter 3 we're going to learn that renewal doesn't come without human effort it doesn't come without it it doesn't come without community either and I think this is one of one of several major paradoxes things that seem to be contradictory but are in fact true this is one of several major paradoxes in the Christian faith it's this that God is sovereign that God is working in all the events of history that God is in control of all things and all the decisions we make good or bad and through them he will he will ultimately accomplish his purposes his will for the world but at the same time you and I are genuinely making those decisions and you and I are genuinely responsible for the decisions we make both things are true and so renewal does begin with God but at the same time renewal is a community project it requires human effort and it requires community and so we can rightly say this God renews his people through the efforts of a worshipping community

[7:17] God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community several hundred years but God has now allowed them to be conquered by the empire of Babylon and God allowed this to happen because the people of Israel his people had been unfaithful to him they had turned from him and started worshiping other gods instead and as a result not only are they worshiping other gods and offending him with their behavior but they've been disobeying his commandments they've been allowing injustice to flourish in their land as a result and so God's act of judgment on them is to bring the Babylonians on them and they think that they are secure as long as they have the temple of God they think they are secure God will protect them he would never allow anything to happen to the city of Jerusalem to his temple and God calls them on their bluff he allows the Babylonians to tear the city and the temple to the ground to burn them down and the Babylonians lead nearly all of the nation into exile and so they spend 70 years in the land of Babylon they are far from the promised land that the Lord their God had given to them as a place of kindness and a place of blessing but God did not reject his people he did not forget his people and so after that 70 year period he raised up a new world leader a man named Cyrus who is king of the Persian Empire and this man conquered Babylon and what he did was he returned God's people to the promised land he returned them to Canaan with orders that they would renew the worship of God they would rebuild the temple and reestablish the worship of God so renewal begins with God with his work to accomplish renewal and renewal comes through worship it comes through centering our lives around God not centering our lives around ourselves and our own little plans and our own little dreams and our own little mission but centering our lives around God and what he has in store for us as the people of God and so that brings us to Ezra chapter 3 so I'll be reading this from the English Standard Version of the Bible if you are reading from another translation then just please follow along with me here this is the word of the Lord when the seventh month came and the children of Israel were in the towns the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem then arose Joshua the son of Josedach with his fellow priests and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen and they built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God they set the altar in its place for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord burnt offerings morning and evening and they kept the feast of booths as it is written and offered the daily burnt offerings by number

according to the rule as each day required and after that the regular burnt offerings the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the Lord and the offerings of everyone who made a free will offering to the Lord from the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord but the foundations of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid so they gave money to the masons and the carpenters and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea to Joppa according to the grants that they had from Cyrus king of Persia now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Josedach made a beginning together with the rest of their kinsmen the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity they appointed the Levites from twenty years old and upward to supervise the work of the house of the Lord and Jeshua with his sons and his brothers and Cadmiel and his sons the sons of Judah together supervised the workmen in the house of God along with the sons of Hinnadad and the Levites their sons and brothers and when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets and the Levites the sons of Asaph with symbols to praise the Lord according to the directions of David king of Israel and they sang responsively praising and giving thanks to the Lord for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid but many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers houses old men who had seen the first house wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid though many shouted aloud for joy so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping for the people shouted with a great shout and the sound was heard far away these are the words that God the Holy Spirit is using to teach you and me today and there's really a lot to learn from these words we're certainly not going to be able to cover everything what we're going to try to do is to focus on the central themes of this chapter and the first central theme of Ezra chapter 3 is that renewal requires human effort renewal requires human effort

God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community and I'm putting the emphasis there on the word efforts renewal doesn't just happen automatically maybe a response of one possible response to last week's sermon when we say that renewal begins with God is by saying oh great God's going to do all the work and then you go out on your back patio sip lemonade and kind of I don't know turn on the radio and wait to hear about God's renewing work that he's going to do but that's not how it works we don't just sit back and wait for it to happen renewal does require human effort and the effort here it has to start with a proper attitude and the attitude that we see among the people of Israel is an attitude of resolve part of the worship of God is by centering our lives on him and living lives that are characterized by resolve by commitment and notice this decisive attitude of Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the priest verse 2 right from the start they quite literally rise up to get work started on the altar in verse 8 they are exercising leadership when it comes to laying the foundations of the temple these men and their families they are absolutely committed to the building project they are not just sitting around waiting for all the brick for all the stones to assemble themselves they are committed to renewing God's people they are all in you can see that God's priorities for his people are shared by these leaders of his people

God's priorities are their priorities renewal requires human effort this effort begins with an attitude of resolve it begins with commitment and then the effort continues with action when we center our lives on God in worship that doesn't mean we abandon planning and action far from it I mean this passage doesn't go into a great deal of detail but it's really kind of impossible to do all of the things that we see here without planning without action without hard work you can see that right from the beginning verse 1 you have administrators someone's got to plan this gathering and communicate it verses 2 and 3 you have to have designers and stone workers to build the altar verses 4 through 6 you have to have family leaders and priests organizing this gigantic festival and all the offerings that are taking place verse 7 you have to have merchants negotiating prices and timetables for construction materials verses 8 and 9 you have families led by Jeshua

Cadmiel Hanadad they have to supervise the construction of the temple's foundation in verse 10 it has to be masons and carpenters laying the foundation verses 10 and 11 priests and musicians have to be organizing leading a ceremony of celebration so all of this requires a tremendous amount of planning a tremendous amount of execution renewal does require human effort and this effort includes planning this effort includes action includes hard work and so I was just thinking through this and looking at this and I think this really offers both a warning and an encouragement so we'll begin with the warning when it comes to renewal so there's some people here I'm just I don't have any names in mind except possibly my own but in a group this size you're always going to have some folks like this who love to think and love to talk about God's renewing work they love to think and think and think and talk and talk and talk about it at their coffee shop with you know their double shot double shot Americano and man we feel really good that we just had this conversation isn't it great how renewal begins with God that's awesome

[17 : 59] I'll take this double shot Americano to go put my little sleeve in there to keep my hands safe and I feel really good about talking about it and then you don't bother to actually do anything right some of you maybe are tend towards this kind of personality and you know what you know I don't want to be too hard on you because we do need thinkers we do need talkers in our church I promise I'll make it up to you in another sermon and be nice to you there okay but if you're a thinker if you're a talker don't mistake good intentions intentions for action okay good intentions by themselves are useless in fact actually I would say they are worse than useless if they're just by themselves because they leave you with this illusion and this good feeling that something good has happened and so then because you have that good feeling you don't actually do anything you're satisfied with the good feeling but good feelings exist right right in here and nowhere else in the universe right renewal renewal requires effort not good feelings renewal requires actual work and that leads us to the encouragement part because I know that some of you and now I am thinking of specific names

I know that some of you are men and women of action you're making strategic plans you're executing them you're organizing ministries in the church you're sending out emails to schedule volunteers you're bringing over meals offering an open ear to somebody who's grieving you're putting your reputation on the line by sharing the gospel with an unbelieving friend or co-worker or family member you're finding practical ways to fix up the church property or your neighbor's house you're generous with your money all of these are practical ways of loving people and renewal requires that renewal includes this work if this is the kind of person you are I want to emphasize this God's renewing work isn't something that's limited to the pastors and to the teachers of the church it isn't limited to the intellectuals it needs you you are just as much a part of God's renewing work in his church you have your place that's why God gave us the body of Christ we're all gifted in different ways and we all work together and partner together to build and develop the body of Christ so you can do this work to serve the Lord planning and action they are an act of worship as well you can plan and you can act in a way that is centered on God with his priorities in mind with his glory as your goal and so the first central theme of this chapter is that renewal requires human effort

God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community and then the second central theme of this chapter is this that renewal requires community renewal requires community God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community and I need to be careful to include that qualifier the word worshiping because there is quite a bit of talk in our culture I hear from place to place about the need for community you hear that from people talking about how we're just individuals we need community to support each other and so forth and I think that's good but it's entirely possible to be in the wrong sort of community did your mom ever tell you if your friends jumped off a bridge would you do it too is that something that moms say right if your community jumped off a bridge would you jump off with them it's possible to be in the wrong sort of community a community that will lead you astray that will lead you in the wrong direction that will lead to not only the destruction of the community but of you as an individual

God renews his people not through any community through the efforts of a worshiping community a community that is fixed on the Lord God that is fixed on Jesus Christ as a center that is guided by the word of God this is a community that's been brought together by the Holy Spirit and it is it has as its mission following Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations it's a worshiping community and it's the community of the local church it's the community of this church and here is how God uses community as a means to renewal first first of all community gives us a partnership for the future community gives us a partnership for the future or in other words it gives us a mission we're seeing that all throughout Ezra 3 right the people are partnering together I challenge you look through

Ezra chapter 3 can you find any action taken that is taken purely by an individual acting alone Zerubbabel is always accompanied by his kinsmen Jeshua is always accompanied by his fellow priests twice they're mentioned doing the same action together in verses 2 and 8 in verse 9 Jeshua is there again this time he's accompanied by Cadmiel they're both accompanied by their sons and brothers they're accompanied by another group called the sons of Hanadad and they're surrounded by Levites verse 7 construction is carried out by masons and carpenters working together verse 10 music is led by the priests and the Levites working together there is not a single action in this chapter that is taken by individuals alone and that shouldn't be a surprise to us last week we went all the way through Ezra 2 and you'll notice that the people were listed there are very few individuals listed it was almost always groups of people families and once again in Ezra chapter 3 nobody's working by themselves there are no lone rangers kind of doing their own thing doing their own work serving God you know all by themselves in their own way this is very much like that verse from Philippians that we read at the very beginning of the message they are with one mind striving side by side and they are partnering together for the future they are partnering together for the future of God's people they are rebuilding the altar they are rebuilding the temple they are reestablishing these yearly rhythms of worship among the people of God among this worshiping community and so it is with us as the people of God you know you and I we just can't think of ourselves any longer as purely as individuals as though we are living siloed off from one another that I have my life you have your life what happens in my life doesn't affect you we can't think of ourselves as though church is some sort of club that we have this loose affiliation with that maybe we show up on Sunday morning sometimes that our lives just go on as normal throughout the week disconnected from the community of the church church is not a club the local church is not a club it is much more like a clan it is much more like a family it is much more like a partnership we are looking forward to seeing the gospel extending its influence among us influencing our thinking and our decision making and then going out to the world that's our mission that's our future that's why we are called to be with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel our efforts are directed towards a future in which the gospel community is devoted in worship to Jesus Christ and to one another and so community gives us a partnership for the future and second it also gives us a remembrance of the past it gives us an identity in other words and this is very clear in Ezra chapter 3 verse 11 notice the community singing this this song for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel it's adapted from

[26 : 43] Psalm 100 it's a psalm written by King David what they're doing is they are grounding their faith in the love that the Lord has shown towards their ancestors and toward them they're using this song that was written for the people of Israel and then even clearer in verse 4 they begin celebrating what my translation calls the feast of booths maybe yours says something like the festival of tabernacles I guess it had a lot of different names there's a lot of ways you could translate that basically what's happening is this is a yearly festival held in Israel and what would happen is the men of Israel would get together and they would all gather together and hold a feast and this week long feast would take place in sort of an encampment where they would take branches from trees and they would build little shacks out of them and they'd build these like temporary shelters because obviously they didn't have nice tents that they could buy at Walmart or whatever anything like that right so what they did was they would find a tree that looked like it had a really nice shack worthy branches whatever that was like and they would build these little shelters and the idea was that this was done to remind them of what their life was like the life of their ancestors was like during the exodus from Egypt when they didn't have a permanent place to live when they didn't have a house to live in there's something about living in a temporary shelter that makes you grateful for all that the Lord has given to you right in Surrey there's this yearly charity event that's held

I can't remember if it's January or February it's called the coldest night of the year and what happens is the people participating in it they spend the night in the middle of January or February whether it's raining or snowing or whatever they spend it in a cardboard box out in the open and the reason they do that is they are experiencing what life is like for someone who is homeless what life is like for someone without a home now this is like the coldest night of the year except for seven days straight that's what this feast is and the men of Israel would do the same thing they would do that to remember what life was like for their ancestors and how the Lord protected them how the Lord brought them safely into the promised land and how God is still doing the same for his people today and so you and I we need this worshipping community to give us remembrance of the past it's not something that we do just by ourselves we need to remind one another we're here to remind each other through singing we're here to remind each other through the reading and preaching of God's word in particular we're here to remind each other when we celebrate the Lord's supper we're here to remind each other what we were saved from and who saved us and what he has done for us what we remember is that we were once a part of this world we were once a part of this culture in which we lived to please ourselves we lived to satisfy ourselves we lived with ourselves at the center and so we rebelled against the way of life that God created us to live in the way of life that God has called us to live in but what God did is he rescued you and he rescued me those of us who are believers he rescued us from this sin from this rebellion and he led us on an exodus he led us on an exodus out of that slavery to sin out of that mindset of this present world and he brought us into his family into this family that he loves and he did this by sacrificing his dearly loved son

Jesus Christ our Lord who took our sins on himself who was punished so that we would be freed from the penalty for our sins for our rebellion so that we would be accepted by God loved by God devoted to God and Jesus rose from the dead so that we would have new life in God's family so that we would be renewed in a worshipping community and so as part of this community we remember that we have a remembrance of the past that past gives us an identity as children of God and it also gives us a partnership for the future remember it gives us our mission to make disciples so the worshipping community is critical to our faith and it's critical for renewal and there's a third thing that the worshipping community does the worshipping community of our church gives us honesty in the present gives us honesty in the present this is kind of the note that ends our chapter here if you look at verses 11 through 13 we find the community of God's people being very honest in their worship

I'll read verses 11 through 13 here they sang responsibly praising and giving thanks to the Lord for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid but many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers houses old men who had seen the first house wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid though many shouted aloud for joy so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping for the people shouted with a great shout and the sound was heard far away now when you read this chapter how did you expect it to end when we first went through it here's what I would have expected I would have expected a note of pure unadulterated joy pure celebration because the construction of the temple has begun

God's meeting place with his people will soon be finished God is renewing his people this is a cause for celebration after hundreds of years of idolatry after 70 years of exile God is at work and in fact that is true there is celebration there is this deafening these exuberant shouts of joy coming from the crowd they obviously weren't very good baptists they were very expressive very full of celebration but along with this joy comes weeping and this weeping is coming from the old men it is coming from men who are 75, 80, 90 years old and they remember they remember that first temple they remember the temple built by King Solomon they remember the gold the silver the fine craftsmanship of the metals of the stone the wood the incredible scale and grandeur of it it was a wonder of the world and they realize this new temple is not that it's pretty good it's just a pale imitation it's just a shadow of that first temple the prophet

[34 : 12] Haggai writes to these men who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory how do you see it now is it not as nothing in your eyes they are disappointed with the work of renewal that the Lord is doing and that's true isn't it that's true of us because what happens is these men they had high expectations and those expectations were not met by reality and that gap between expectations and reality is called disappointment so they wept at disappointment because of the way that things were turning out sometimes when God does his renewing work it doesn't turn out quite as we'd expect it doesn't have the deep impact that we want it to have it doesn't our lives as a whole pretty much never turn out as we expect do they and when we see

God at work in our lives we often wonder there's so much more that could have taken place my life could have been God could have been at work in this way in this way in this way where is the Lord why isn't he showing up why isn't he accomplishing what I'm aching for and what our church is aching for what do we do with disappointment because the reality is the Lord is often at work in ways that we don't understand and even though we think we have this idea in mind of what the Lord should be doing he doesn't always do that and brothers and sisters a worshipping community is not afraid to be honest about that a worshipping community is not afraid to be honest in the present I think we are though I think and I'm thinking in particular of just the church in North America we are afraid to be honest well first of all we are afraid to be honest about our joy a lot of times

I kind of made fun of Baptists for that but you know sometimes we're afraid to be too exuberant in our singing to be too excited in our conversations you know we look like dorks right nobody wants to look like that and so we kind of you know you tone it down you just make sure that you look reasonable you look even keeled so people don't write you off as a crazy right but I think there's an even bigger problem that is that we are often afraid to be honest about our sorrow and about our disappointment if you look through the Psalms you will find that many of these Psalms are what Bible scholars call Psalms of lament they are prayers and songs of sadness and of grief where the Psalmist is just bearing his heart to the Lord and speaking out of just tremendous torment I feel like there's this unspoken rule in our churches that songs of lament conversations of lament don't belong if you ever listen to Christian radio or you go to church after church how many worship songs are you going to find that express lament almost none it's always just pure it's just pure celebration all the time but that's not where we are is it

God doesn't want fake you he wants real you to really speak to him from your heart and he doesn't want us to hide what's going on in our lives if you are experiencing disappointment and sorrow in your life he doesn't want you to bottle it up and hide it inside he wants you to speak it to him and he wants you to share it with others so they can encourage and pray for you God renews his people through the efforts of a worshiping community and that's a community that is honest in the present we are not afraid to be honest because we have something that they did not have they had this rather disappointing second temple but if you read the prophet Haggai and his response to them he told them that there was greater glory to come and we have it we have the greater temple we have Jesus Christ our Lord he accomplished everything the temple was meant to do he is the place where we meet with God he is the one who gives us access to

God he is the place where we experience the blessing and favor of the Lord and he is the one who has begun this renewing work in and among us he is the one who will see it completed when he returns and so you can be even though you who are weighed down with sadness you will come home to your Lord with shouts of joy that is the renewing work of God it is accomplished in Jesus Christ and he works it through the efforts of a worshiping community let's turn to the Lord in prayer our God and our Father we thank you that you have not left us alone that you have given us your spirit and that he is at work not in just me and not just in each one of us as individuals but us as a community we as a community of believers are renewed through your work Lord God and yet you call us to partner together with you and with one another in this work what an amazing privilege

[39 : 59] I pray Lord God that we would take full advantage of all that we have been given in Christ Jesus we would take full advantage of his spirit's work within us full advantage of your word the Bible full advantage of the community of believers that we would work hard knowing that you are at work in and among us we ask for renewal we ask for new life here in this church in our families in our own hearts may you do this work Lord we pray amen thank you bye thank you Thank you.