

The First Chapter

A Story of Revival, Ezra 3:1-4:5

Introduction

- According to a handful of online checklists the 1st chapter of a successful story must introduce the protagonist, establish the setting, & initiate the main conflict.
 - In the Book of Ezra, the protagonist is God, the setting is the province of Judah after the Exile, & the conflict is whether or not the people Jews will worship God again.
 - The overall story is about revival, but the 1st real chapter is all about worship.
 - Ezra 1 & 2 serve as preface explaining how & who traveled back to the Promised Land in and around Jerusalem.
 - Ezra 3 begins with the familiar phrase “when the 7th month came.”
 - This means that some time has passed since the Jews settled in.
 - It also seems to be a deliberate reference to 1 Kings 8:2 where King Solomon started to build the first temple.
- In the years before the Exile, King Hezekiah encouraged revival by repairing the temple & resuming worship services there. (2 Chron. 29-31)
- In the Book of Acts, the disciples were worshipping the Lord in continual prayer when the Holy Spirit fell and revival swept through Jerusalem. (Acts 1-2)
- The fires of revival risen up many times since then in almost every case there’s a group of God’s people fanning the flames through vibrant worship.
- As we go back to Ezra, I want to emphasize the pattern we see time and time again: **The first chapter of the story of revival is about worship.**
 - But what kind of worship are we talking about?
 - Are we talking about liturgical worship? Hand-raising worship? Time-warp worship? Hipster worship? Dialogic worship? Snake handling worship?
 - This passage contains 4 descriptions of worship – limitations we need today!

Body

I. Biblical Worship (3:1-6)

- A. Jeshua, Zerubbabel, and their brothers built afresh altar so they could once again offer burnt offerings to God.
- B. They celebrated the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) in the 7th month of Tishri, along with all the other offerings and festivals.
- C. They were “terrified” of the peoples in the lands around them, but they were more afraid of God, so they did what was written in the law of Moses.
 - 1. The Law was their Bible at that time.
 - 2. It defined who they were and what God wanted from them.
- D. We have the benefit of the full OT & NT, and it does the same thing for us today – it defines who we are and what God want from us.
 - 1. Thankfully, JC fulfilled the need for sacrificial offerings once for all. (Heb. 10:10)
 - 2. Today, the NT calls for activities like preaching/teaching, prayer, singing, giving, serving, fellowship, along w/ the ordinances of Communion & Baptism.
 - 3. We want our gathered worship to match the NT as closely as we can!
 - 4. This includes “engaging in worship,” as we aren’t mean to be passive spectators.

II. Unified Worship (3:7-9)

- A. In v. 1 is says they were “gathered together as one man.”
- B. Verses 7-9 describe the extent of their unity in worship.
 - 1. They money & supplies to the workmen who were building the temple.
 - 2. They engaged in some of the work themselves and appointed the Levites over certain age to oversee the rest of the project.
 - 3. They kept it up on into the 2nd year of their return to Jerusalem.
- C. Unity in spirit & practice is a key part of congregational worship.
 - 1. It’s a reflection of God’s character (The Trinity, Christ w/ the Father)
 - 2. It validates the gospel we preach (We are transformed & united)
 - 3. It promotes a healthy and focused environment (Petty differences)
 - 4. It’s a witness to the world (What do unbelievers see in us?)

III. God-honoring Worship (3:10-13)

- A. The people worshipped together when the temple was started.
 - 1. They priests & Levites took their posts.
 - 2. The people sang songs about “the goodness of God.” (Ps. 100:4-5)
 - 3. The people shouted outload with a mixture of sorrow & joy.
- B. They organized their service “according to the directions of King David” who wrote the majority of the Psalms & celebrated the goodness of God.
- C. When we call out “God is good all the time” & respond with “All the time, God is good,” we are honoring God for His moral perfection, His kind-hearted nature, & His consistency – He is good no matter what happens to us!

IV. Exclusive Worship (4:1-5)

- A. The shouting was so loud the peoples in the neighboring lands heard them.
- B. They asked to join with them because they had been “worshipping” for a long time, but Zerubbabel and Jeshua refused.
 - 1. They were enemies posing as allies.
 - 2. They were people who worshipped a variety of gods as people who were resettled in that land by the Assyrians.
- C. The Jewish people had intermingled their families & their worshipped many times before, and they couldn’t risk it happening again.
- D. You can give glory to God, or you can give glory to someone else, but you can’t do both; God won’t share His glory. (Is. 42:8)

Conclusion

- God is the One who sends revival to His people, but there are certain things we can do to invite it, & worshipping together is one of those things.
- These descriptions of worship are really limitations for worship. (L step on our toes)
 - Biblical means we will intentionally let the Bible be our guide our worship.
 - Unified means we will work to eliminate distractions or divisions. (You too)
 - God-honoring means our motivation for worship comes from Him, not us.
 - Exclusive worship is the hardest because it means consistently identifying & eliminating false idols that steal God’s glory.
- This is important b/c **The 1st chapter of the story of revival is about worship.**