

Synagogue & Temple

by Stephen Kaung

Stephen Kaung's sermon emphasizes the need for believers to return to God's purpose by rebuilding His temple rather than settling for the convenience of synagogues.

Duration: 31:35

Scripture: Ezra 1:1, Ezra 3:2-3, Ezra 3:8, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 12:27, 1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 21:22

Topics: "Synagogue"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the purpose of our existence as believers. He highlights that many Christians are living in a state of confusion and lack a clear understanding of God's purpose for their lives. The speaker urges believers to return to simplicity and purity, away from the complexities of the world. He encourages them to rebuild their spiritual lives and dedicate themselves fully to God, just as the remnant in the book of Ezra did. The sermon emphasizes the need for self-examination and a recommitment to God's purpose for our lives.

Transcript

During the past few days, when we gathered and waited upon the Lord, it impressed upon my heart some words from the book of Ezra. So will you please turn to the book of Ezra. We'll read from the first chapter, beginning with the first verse.

Ezra chapter 1 verse 1. And in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, and he made a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath Jehovah the God of the heavens given to me, and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Jehovah the God of Israel, he is God, which is at Jerusalem. And whosoever remains in any place where he sojourns, let the man of his place help him with silver and with gold, and with goods and with beasts, besides the voluntary offering for the house of God, which is at Jerusalem.

And the chief fathers of Judah and Benjamin rose up, and the priests and the Levites, even all those whose spirit God has stirred, to go up to build the house of Jehovah, which is at Jerusalem. I believe that we are all familiar with the history of it. The people of Judah, the Jews, were taken into captivity, and they were in Babylon for seventy years.

And when they were fulfilled, God stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus to make a proclamation to allow the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God. During those seventy years that the Jews sojourned in the land of captivity, they gradually had settled down to their life. They began to build houses for themselves, they built up their businesses, they had their lands, and they were given quite a high degree of liberty in every respect.

I believe we all know that the great system of synagogues was instituted during that period. Of course the temple in Jerusalem was utterly destroyed. Jerusalem was in ruin.

But those people who were in captivity, they were still allowed to continue their worship of the Lord. So there they had many synagogues. In the synagogues they could read the Bible, they could pray the Bible, they could sing their praises, they could pray, they could do a lot of things to satisfy their heart of worship towards God.

But after seventy years, the call came from God. Return to Jerusalem and rebuild. When the call came to rebuild the house of the Jews, only a remnant responded in their spirit, and returned to build the house of God.

Most of the people were well settled in Babylon. They felt quite comfortable there. It wasn't their native land, but they were used to it, they were rooted in it, and they lived in the land.

And if they were not given any religious liberty, I believe most of them would go back. But they were given a great degree of liberty. They had synagogues everywhere.

It was even more convenient than the days when they were in the land of Judah. Because at that time they had to travel a long distance to Jerusalem if they wanted to worship, to sacrifice, to offer. But now within walking distance, they could just gather together and there they had their time of worship.

So most of them were quite happy with their lives. Most of them were quite contented, satisfied. Materially they were very well, prosperous, and spiritually they had that amount of worship that was quite satisfying if their religion or religious life was centered upon themselves.

So when the call of God came, very few were stirred in their spirit to go back. Jerusalem was in ruin. The neighboring nations were not friendly.

The temple was utterly destroyed, and to be uprooted from the place that they had sojourned for 70 years, to travel that dangerous journey, and to settle down in a ruined place, and to build from nothing, wasn't a very appealing thing. Why couldn't they just settle down in the land of captivity? Could they not worship God as they did before? It wasn't perfect. That was true.

There was no temple, therefore they could not offer sacrifice. Yet they still could worship God. They could still read the book, the Torah, and sing songs, and pray to God.

Why not just settle down, and make the most out of it? Why must they go back to Jerusalem, and to rebuild? To those who live for themselves. The life in the land of captivity was good enough. The synagogue was good enough for them, in their relationship with God.

But for those few, not many, whose spirits God has stirred, they could not sit there, and watch Jerusalem in ruin. And the temple, it was a call from God. It was not a cry from men, crying for Jerusalem, crying for...

It was a cry from God.

God's heart was crying. He was not contented with what synagogues could offer to him. Synagogue was a human invention.

A very ingenious one. It was a great invention. It was a good substitute.

A very good imitation. Not the perfect, not the best, but the best that man could offer. Quite satisfying.

Quite convenient. A matter of expediency. And it seemed to meet the need of many.

But God was not satisfied. God was not satisfied with that ingenious human invention of synagogue. He wanted one thing.

He wanted one thing. His own house. The temple.

In which the sacrifice could be offered. In that house he could put his name and rest there. There he could be worshipped as he desired.

Dear friends, it was not a call from man. Not a cry from man. It was a call from God.

A cry from the heart of God. Go back to Jerusalem and rebuild. Why could they not build the temple in Babylon? It would be much easier.

But the temple could only be built in one place. Jerusalem. Babylon, which means Confucian.

On the ground of Confucian you can only build synagogues. But not temples. The temple, the house of God, could only be built in Jerusalem.

The city of peace. Peace with God. Harmony with God.

The ground of purity. Humanly, many would argue and say why not? It was more convenient. And they would not be in hostile surroundings.

It could be built easier and quicker. But the call of God was go back to Jerusalem and build my house there. A remnant rose up.

A remnant rose up. They were willing to be uprooted. They were willing to face all the dangers and perils of the road.

They went back to that ruined city because their spirits were still there. They were a people. The only reason for their going back was to rebuild the house.

Not for their own comfort. They were quite comfortable in the land of captivity. They went back for just one reason for God.

For His satisfaction. For the fulfillment of His will. That God might have His heart desire.

And in order to let God have His heart desire, they were willing to go through many heartbreaks and pains and sorrows. They were a people living for God. And for God's sake.

They didn't care what happened to them. Nothing could hold them back. Their hearts were holding.

And it was this people that finally rebuilt. Of course the story of the rebuilding of the house of God is very interesting. But I don't think we'll go into that.

The thing that is on my heart is very simple. Dear friends, what is the purpose of our being today? I often feel that from time to time we need to go back to God and reconsider, or better word, re-examine our position. Why are we here? Why are we here on earth in the first place? Why are we here in this way in the second place? What's the reason of our existence? What is the explanation of our existence? For our conduct? For our way of life? Is there any purpose? Many of God's children today are living in the land of captivity.

That's spiritual battle. Many of God's people are settled down in the land of confusion. I think the confusion in Christianity is the confusion in Christianity today.

It's so great that many do not feel it anymore. If you are just a little bit confused, you are confused. If you are too much confused, you are not confused at all.

You think that that's what it is. What else do you have? What else can you expect? Those who were born in the land of captivity, that's what they experience every day. And what more do you want? You have food, you have business, you can carry on, and you can worship.

And what's good is you can worship in the way that you want to. There is great opportunity there. Dear friends, many children of God today live in the land of confusion.

Many children of God today live for themselves. They are the Lord's. True children of God.

But they live for themselves. Yes, they worship God. Worship God in a way that is.

Worship God in a way that is satisfying to human desire. You know there is within man an instinct for God. Man must worship.

And sinning God is the best invention. People today go to church, read the Bible, sing praises, sing hymns, and pray. And what more do you want? You have your religious life, and you are worshipping the true God.

Everything is convenient for dear brothers and sisters. The question is, are you really satisfied? Are you really satisfied with the situation you are in? Have you forgotten Jerusalem? Have you forgotten the house of God? Your need may be met. Your heart may be satisfied.

Your heart may be fulfilled by God's love. Is that all life is? What is the purpose? From God's viewpoint, you live even if you go to sin. From God's viewpoint, it is without purpose.

There is only one purpose. And that purpose is God's purpose. If your life is linked to God's purpose, you live a purpose.

If not, your life is purpose. Sooner or later, you will feel its emptiness. Sooner or later, you will be frustrated.

Sooner or later, you discover there is no meaning in it. What is God's purpose for His people? What is God's purpose for His people throughout the ages and the generations? What is God's purpose from eternity to eternity? Is our life related to that purpose? If your life is to be related to that purpose, you have

to be uprooted. God does not allow us to settle down.

God will destroy that He may teach us how to live. The call has come. Go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Return to purity. Return to the simplicity of Christ. Life in Babylon is very complex.

That is the center of the world civilization at that time. Return to Jerusalem, the place of simplicity, of purity. I think there is nothing more important than this today for God's people.

Return to simplicity. Away from all the complicity and complex of life of so-called Christianity. Go back to purity.

That oneness, unity, life with God. As we leave everything and return to that simple life with God, you will find there, dear friends, are we willing to, from everything that we are familiar with, from everything traditional to us, convention and community, are we willing to let go of everything and just return to the simplicity of Christ? To live for God, for God's purpose and nothing else. It is costly.

Whenever the call of God comes, it is costly. God never requires us to achieve it. But are we ready? Has the spirit of God stirred us? We must.

Out of Babylon into Jerusalem. Out of Jerusalem into Jerusalem. Out of confusion into peace.

Out of complicity into simplicity. Do we respond? And dear brothers and sisters, it is there, it is over. Not just to meet the need of man.

That can be met in the synagogues. But something to be built that can meet the heart. Something which is complete.

There you will find the preeminence. King takes the first place as the head. And there you will find a spiritual house, the holy priesthood, where all the members of the body are free to function as the spirit to serve.

When the people that remnant returned to Jerusalem, you will find that the first thing they did was to offer themselves. The first thing they built was to offer. And the first thing they kept was to offer burnt offerings and so forth.

In other words, the whole picture was of people dedicated for one thing. They all were there just for God. Dear brothers and sisters, so this is upon my heart.

After these days of prayer, I do not know if it will come as a confirmation to your heart that as we re-examine our position before God, both as individuals and also as a company of God's. May the Lord lead us back to examine ourselves in this way. Have we been lost in that? Are we now? What are we building? Are we building synagogues that can partially meet the need of man, but certainly not God's need? Or are we here by the grace of God, building this house that will satisfy God first and of course.

So may the Lord lead

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