

THE Story

THE RETURN HOME – PART 1

Wayne Alguire, May 8, 2022

Israel is released from exile

God wants His people to declare that He is their first priority as they return.

TEXT

The Story, Chapter 19: The Return Home (pages 263 - 270)

TALK ABOUT IT

1. What is your favourite kind of story?
2. How is God unfolding His grand purpose and plan through the exile experience of Israel?
3. How is God moving your heart towards new priorities today?

LOOK TO THE WORD

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm...” Ezra 1:1 (*The Story*, pg 263)

- What is the role of the prophet Jeremiah within the exiled people of God?
- Why does God work through Jeremiah and Cyrus together?
- What do we learn from God’s work through a foreign king of Persia?

Cyrus says... The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah... build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. Ezra 1:2 (*The Story*, pg 263)

- Why does Cyrus believe God has “given me all the kingdoms of the earth”?



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- Why does Cyrus want a temple to be built for God in Jerusalem?
- As a foreign king, why would Cyrus recognize “The LORD, the God of Heaven”?

“When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD...and the Levites with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, ... With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: ‘He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.’ Ezra 3:10, The Story, pg 265)

- What do we learn from these early moments of the temple? (e.g. worship, praise, the role of the priests, etc.)?
- Why are there specific jobs embedded in the worship practices of Israel?

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 of the family heads...wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid... Ezra 3:10-13 (The Story pg 265)

- Why was there weeping from some in the crowd?
- What do we know about the old temple versus the new one?
- What was God doing, through the weeping, to inspire His people?

“Because my house lies unfinished and in ruins as you work on your own!” Haggai 1:1-9 (The Story, pg 266-267)

- Why was God disappointed that the people were working to re-establish themselves in the Promised Land?

LOOK INWARD

Wayne said, “God is still unfolding His plan today. God is still moving hearts right now.

- How might God be moving your heart?
 - How does God reveal His plan to your heart? (e.g. Scripture, prayer, dream, vision, word, picture, community, etc?)
- Why does God have a plan for your life?
- What does it mean that God “moves in our hearts”?



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Considering Israel's return: they build an altar and lay the foundations for the Temple. They make God's first thing their first thing.

- What is God's first thing for you in your life?
- What does your reaction to God's first thing tell you about yourself?
- What does your approach to God's first thing tell others about your priorities and values? (e.g. The foreign nations understood God's first thing by watching the way Israel responded)

Wayne said, "After a while, God's first thing is now Israel's second (or third) thing."

- What are some reasons people give when they choose something else over God's first thing? (e.g. the timing isn't right, life was busy, the house needs upgrading, etc.)
- What steps can someone take to get God's first thing back as our first thing?

As God stirs our hearts...

- How does someone go deeper with Him in their faith?
- How does someone trust God even in a hard season?
- How does someone explore the Christian faith?

LOOK OUTWARD

Wayne shared the prophets' words "The truth is..."

- *You have abandoned the rebuilding of the Temple because you are pursuing your own dreams.*
- *You are building bigger and fancier houses.*
- *You are expanding your fields and herds.*
- *You are buying more clothes and fine wines.*
- *You are earning lots and spending even more.*
- *You are never satisfied and are not being blessed.*

⇒ What does it communicate about God when we choose any of the above?

⇒ Is there an impact on others that is directly associated when we choose any of the above?



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How might God be moving your heart these days?

- To seek forgiveness and be reconciled with someone.
- To reach out to someone with kindness and compassion.
 - God's first things are for reconciliation. How does someone seek reconciliation God's way?
 - Why does God call us to embody kindness and compassion?

SO WHAT...

God moves the human heart to accomplish His Grand and Holy Narrative.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Listening Prayer

As you reflect on keeping God's first thing your first thing, make a list of your current roles, responsibilities and relationships. Ask God to show you ways to keep His first things your first things in the midst of your life.

NEVER STOP PRAYING

- Praise God that His first things is best
- Praise God for the ways He is moving in our communities
- Pray that God would continue to build communities through Open Table & Community Groups
- Pray that God would protect & guide the workers onsite as our auditorium is renewed and restored.
- Pray that God would continue to heal those needing healing and restore those needing restoration
- Pray for our search committee as they lead our process for a new senior pastor
- Pray for those who are letting their name stand as potential elders for the upcoming ministry year

NEXT WEEK'S READING

- *The Story, The Return Home, pgs 270-273*

