

Ezra – Restoration (Rebuilding the Temple)

Sometime the things you lose are restored to you.

It's one thing to lose something, but another to lose a relationship.

Yesterday I went ice-skating with my family at Sunset Arena.

While I was skating one of the staff members called my name...

Howard Ng...

Israel had lost everything.

The story so far... (show timeline chart)

Land, people, political existence.

But most of all, it had lost its relationships with God.

It had abandoned the one who had created and called them.

And they suffered the consequences.

They didn't want him and he simply gave them what they wished for.

But now, after exile they returned under Cyrus according to prophesy.

They settled into the land again, and it was a meagre existence.

They knew it was God who called them to himself in that land.

And so they started to rebuild the temple.

The symbol of their relationship with God.

And so they rebuilt the foundations.

But they met with opposition.

People of different faith wanted to get involved.

When the returnees declined the offer, these people took offence.

They stopped the work through political intrigue.

For 16 years the temple was nothing more than a foundation.

But God had other things in mind.

Through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, he told them to rebuild.

They obeyed and the governor asked what they were doing.

A bit distressed, the Governor then wrote to the emperor.

Darius went through the royal archives and found his predecessor Cyrus's decree about the rebuilding of the temple.

All resources of the Persian Empire were to be put at the disposal of the building of the Temple!

And so the temple was completed.

Ezra – Reformation (Turning the People from Compromise)

But not all was well in Israel.

The temple had been built, the symbols of religion had been restored.

But the hearts of the people were not in it.

The one thing that occurred was that they began to intermarry with those who were around them.

Now this was not just an issue of ethnic mixing, but really the denial of being set apart for God.

The concern is not about ethnicity but about core identity.

About who you belong to.

The Israelites were marrying with those who worshipped other Gods.

Kouresh, my Moslem friend who wanted to date a Christian.

What I teach my children – marry someone who loves God.

When you say yes to Jesus, you are saying no to many others things.

When you say yes to your husband or wife, you are saying no to all others.

We are not to compromise our obedience to Christ.

We believe in the sacredness of life, those of the unborn or disabled.

We believe that sexual relationships are reserved for the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman.

It is not because we are saying no to everything but because we have said yes to something greater than our own or popular opinion.

And yes, when you follow the teaching of Jesus, you will be smeared.

Love your enemy. Pray for them. Let good overcome evil.

But do not compromise.