

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of October 11, 2009
"Past or Future – What We See"**

[Today's message explains that if we are too preoccupied in the past of either bad or good things, we will most likely miss new opportunities that God is presenting to us.]

[Topics: Living in the Present Not the Past; Receptive to God's prompting]

Excerpt: Pastor Glen wants to begin this message by re-telling a story most of you have heard before or read about before. And we're also going to take a little different look at it today as we get into the message.

About 3,000 years ago, the king of Israel – King David – determined he wanted to build a temple to God. In his prayers to God he said, "God, I want to build you a house. You should no longer be in the Tabernacle and so I want to build you a glorious house."

And God said, "David, I love your heart and I'm willing but you can't do it. You have too much blood on your hands. You've had too many wars. You've followed your neighbors too much, so you can't do it. But I'll tell you what – I'll let your son Solomon do it.

Now David didn't say, "OK, well I'm done." He spent the remainder of his life saving up for the temple. And he began to collect the gold and the silver and obtaining a lot of the implements made for the temple. He did many other things to gather up and to prepare for that to happen.

Eventually David died and Solomon grows up and takes over. And Solomon has been given great wisdom from God and he begins to add to all the wealth that his father had gathered up. The nation was very prosperous at the time and Solomon asked the people to bring gold, silver and other materials for the temple. They brought so much that Solomon finally had to tell them to stop.

Solomon also bought huge cedars of Lebanon and other precious woods for the temple. And every stone had to be cut at the quarry to fit on the spot in Jerusalem. We need to think about the fact that no sound of a hammer or other building instruments was allowed to be heard in Jerusalem. Everything had to fit perfectly. And we're talking about gigantic pieces of stone.

And then they brought the gold and other materials in. Solomon probably built the most beautiful and most expensive building that has ever existed. It was an absolutely amazing building. Inside they covered everything with more than just gold leaf. They covered it with hammered gold, as well.

The main Temple area was 60 cubits or 90 feet long by 20 cubits or 30 feet wide – a little smaller than our sanctuary. Imagine all the walls of our sanctuary coated in solid gold! And the outside of Salomon's temple had gold on it as well as other precious stones. And so they had this fabulous building.

And when Solomon dedicates the temple in **2 Chronicles 7**, it says that everybody came and praised God for this and that the glory of God came into the building so strong that priests couldn't work – they couldn't move – they were literally weak at the knees from the power of God in that building.

Yes, God had moved in. But you know in all that beauty, in all that magnificence and even in all that glory of God's presence, it didn't help the people worship any better. They kept turning away from God. It didn't cause people's hearts to be right.

As Les just talked about in the offering, it's about the heart, what kind of love do we have for God and what kind of relationship do we have? And even though the people had this beautiful fantastic place to go worship God, they didn't worship any better there.

And so they kept turning away from God. Eventually the 10 tribes to the north seceded from Judah. They took off with Jeroboam. And after a few years the King of Assyria swooped down and took the 10 tribes to Assyria and they are completely in captivity. And all that's left are 2-3 tribes around Jerusalem, depending how you count them. And they aren't obeying God either.

So God says – guess what, the Babylonians are going to come. And the Babylonians came down, took over the Jews and destroyed that beautiful building. They pack up all the gold, the precious stones, the bowels and serving utensils and took them to Babylon. And the temple is now just a pile of rocks.

What was once such a beautiful place to honor and worship God had become a disgrace. There were a few poor people left behind around Jerusalem to look after the place. And that was it.

It's such a sad story. So the Jews spent 70 years in captivity. They were having a hard time at first, because a lot of their prophets were saying – don't get settled in, God's going to take us right back to Jerusalem.

Finally God had to send a word to Jeremiah and said, "Listen, you stay there and become attached to this land of Babylon and you bless it and you pray for it, because when it's blessed, you'll be blessed and I'll bring you back when I'm good and ready."

And so the Jews settle into the land and they begin to prosper. But then Babylon gets taken over by the Persians. And Cyrus, king of Persia, wants to honor all the gods so that things will go well for him. And he realized that the God of Israel wasn't being honored. It wasn't that he had a conversion. He wanted blessings.

So Cyrus said he was going to write a decree so that the Jews could go back home and rebuild that temple. So the Jews come back from captivity and started rebuilding the temple. Let's pick up the story in **Ezra 3**, because it talks to us about this rebuilding.

10) "When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel." So these builders now have just begun to pour the footings so to speak in

modern language. They are going to praise God because now the temple is going to rise out of the ashes again. Everything will be wonderful.

11) "With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid." The returning captives were so excited, but not all, as we read in verse 12.

12) "But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy."

In 1978 when we moved to Prince George, British Columbia (where Rod Gula is from), we began construction on a new home. We were one of the first houses in a new subdivision, so for the next year or so construction was constantly going on around us.

Connie and I would walk through the poured foundations and see what type of house they were going to be building on that foundation, whether it would be a split level or 2 story house, etc. You can tell a lot about what a house will look like by the design of its foundation.

Well, in Jerusalem we have a temple that's about to be built. One group of people is shouting for joy and the other group is weeping. All the old people between 70 and 90 years of age are sad, because they don't like what they see in this new foundation.

They could see from the foundation that the new temple was going to be NOTHING in comparison to Solomon's temple – which some of them had seen before leaving Jerusalem 70 years before. They said, "Oh, woe is us. If we could only go back to the good old days."

Sometimes don't WE wish for the good old days, if we could just skip the legalism? Most of us experienced a pretty good time in our past. Pastor Glen had the weirdest experience last week. Last Saturday the Feast of Tabernacles popped up on his calendar. And he had this huge longing to go to the Feast of Tabernacles. Kept thinking about the many good times they did as a family of about 30 people or so.

Some of us experience good feelings of the past when we drive by the Auditorium or the college campus today. But we need to realize that God is building a new foundation with us. Grace Communion isn't going to be the same old building as Worldwide.

Hopefully we will still have some of the same old things that the old building had, but it's going to be a new building with new things. Sometimes we can struggle with some of the differences between old and new. What we need to do is look at what God is now doing.

So, back in Jerusalem, what did the younger generation see? They saw that God was on the move. The new temple foundation was laid and that they were back home from captivity. Yes, God was certainly on the move.

And the older generation said it sure looking crummy to what it was in the past. It's interesting that the Book of Ecclesiastes says not to look back to "the good old days",

because when we do, we forget about the bad old days that are stuck in the middle of those good old days.

13) "No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away."

Here are some excerpts from a book titled, *An Unstoppable Force* written by Erwin McManus, the pastor of Mosaic Church in LA. He's writing about this incident recorded in Ezra 3. This is on page 83-85.

The younger generation had never seen the first temple, had never stood in the midst of that majestic structure. All they knew were the stories. Their lack of tears could be seen as a lack of disrespect toward a loss that was so sacred.

But in actuality their celebration was sincere. They were celebrating because the foundation was a promise of a new place to meet with God. It didn't matter to them that it did not look like the first temple. It didn't matter to them that it would pale in regard of any human measure.

The purpose of the temple was to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin, and to worship the one true living God. The purpose of the temple was to meet God face to face and they shouted for joy.

If there was a tragedy, it lay in the fact that the former priests and family leaders could not overcome their own sense of loss to celebrate what was now being passed on to their children.

You know that sometimes some of us, if we take the church out of the picture, can get so focused on the things that we have lost, what hurt us, etc., that we forget what we are passing on to the next generation. And we get to mope around and focus inward instead of saying, "Regardless of that divorce, regardless the fact that my spouse died, regardless that this happened or that happened, I have a life to live moving forward. And I have to sow into the next generation what God has offered." Let's not get stuck in the past.

Sometimes the most painful reality of change is that we have to leave behind the things that were of great value to us. If only change left alone those places that were sacred to us and just touched the worst part of us.

Wouldn't it be nice if change only impacted the bad part of us and all the good stuff just kept moving along with us? But, often times we need to leave behind the good stuff.

But many times the most difficult things to give up are those things that we've identified with God's blessing and presence in our lives.

That's what the first temple was – a blessing of God. But now the new blessing of God is going to be different. It's still the blessing of God, but we've got to move on to a new place, to a new opportunity.

The prophets were also voices of change. Whenever God's people moved into the waters of stagnant religion, God raised up voices to become once again followers of the living God.

So, Israel would get caught up in their religiosity and the prophets would have to come along and give them a good shake and say, "Wake up, we've got to go to a new place. We've got to go to go to a new understanding." And they would move them on. And that's what God does to us.

And then there's Jesus. As a religious teacher, he was expected to be an advocate of the status quo. His orthodoxy in their view was measured by his willingness to conform to the established religion. Any expression or application of the Scriptures that did not conform to the already established policies and procedures was considered heresy. According to Jesus' assessment, the Word of God had been turned into an instrument of death rather than life.

The religious leaders used the Bible to beat people up; they used the temple to beat people up and to hold them away from God and to put heavy burdens on them. Jesus was giving them a hard time about their religiosity had set in. Jesus was bringing change.

Jesus was establishing a missiological interpretation while the religionists of the day had taken on a theological interpretation. They were saying this is what God says. And Jesus was saying – this is how God wants us to go. This is how God wants us to outreach.

And you know that's kind of what's happened to us. Up until a few years ago, our focus was – what's the truth? We wanted to be right even in our wrongness. But now, we're talking about how can we get out more in the community? How do we impact others? How do we have a relationship with others? It's a different focus. Now we still want to be right and we still send out booklets filled with theology. But it's not our focus.

Our focus is like Jesus'. How do we impact others? How are we being missionologists? How are we reaching out to the community with the mission of Jesus Christ? And so Jesus challenges us to go out there.

(Pages 86-87). In Acts 15, at the council at Jerusalem, a question of change brought together Paul, Barnabus, Peter and James. The question was whether the church would adopt itself to the new cultures she was engaging or the new cultures had to reform themselves to match the culture of the first converts of the church.

As the church carried the gospel of Jesus Christ into Greece, Rome, Spain, did the church expect them to become Jewish in the process? This is what the conference was all about.

The first major council was not, as we often understand it, about theology. It was not about issues of morality or even a primary doctrinal position. It was about how the church would engage culture.

That's a lot of our focus now. In our last couple of regional conferences and many articles in Odyssey Magazine, the emphasis is more than just understanding every point of doctrine, it's

also about -- how are we engaging the culture; how are we connecting with the people around us; how do we talk to someone who doesn't know Jesus yet; how do we make a difference in their lives? And so Jesus is calling us and challenging us to do that.

And so the temple example from Ezra here should make us think because it's so easy to get caught up in the past. Pastor Glen has been asked why aren't we teaching about prophecy anymore? That's because we are teaching about how to live life. Our focus on prophecy in the past was badly skewed.

It's more important to focus on what we do today, not what Jesus is going to do tomorrow, because Jesus is working with the church now. So do we hold on to the past or look to the present and the future?

For example, if someone kicked you in the shins yesterday and you are spending all of today frustrated about what happened yesterday, guess what you are not enjoying today – your present, never mind your future.

Do you know how many of us don't live in the present but in the past? We shouldn't have a hard time enjoying the present. Now we're not saying never look to the future. Pastor Glen was recently talking with one of the members recently and he said, "Wow, I'm looking forward when I'll be in the next life and I won't have to deal with this old body."

There's not a problem with that, but we also have to live in and enjoy the present. Very few of us get caught up living in the future. Most of us are caught up living in the past. And that's the hard part, because bad things happen to ALL of us. Now granted some of you have had worse things happen to you than others. But when you get down to it, bad things happen to all of us, don't they?

Now back to story of **Ezra 3**. Those older people in Jerusalem were stuck in the past. Now they were stuck on good things. It was a beautiful temple. It was a wonderful thing. For us it's sometimes bad things that we get caught up in. And so we have a hard time enjoying the present and living in the present to the full, which Jesus wants us to do and preparing for our future. So Jesus calls us to live that out.

So what does the present and the future hold for us? What is God offering us? What's he asking us to do? If we really experience what he has for us now and tomorrow, what does that look like? We don't know totally. But we don't want to be stuck looking back to the good old days or the bad old days, which keeps us looking in our rear view mirror all the time.

God brought the church forward to help people change, didn't he? We're called to change and to help others to be changed by God. Through the Holy Spirit there's going to be a transformation – broken people will become healed

Now for our last section of quotes from Erwin McManus, page 88. *Without question, the church was established on the promise of change. Hearts would be changed, families would be changed, marriages would be changed, communities would be changed, cities would be changed, and, yes, even the entire history of humanity and the earth itself would be changed by those swept up in this movement of God. This should be seen as a cause for celebration not consternation.*

But so many of us are so comfortable where we were in the past and find it so hard to move forward.

The reality of change is rooted in God's promise that he will work in and through our lives. What would happen if we began to hear the words of God in the context of a promise for change?

When we hear God do we think that he is moving us forward, that he's taking us somewhere, that he is actually doing something with us? We need to be excited about what God is doing and where he is taking us.

To cry out to God and ask him to act is an invitation for God to bring us radical change in our lives. God promises Haggai that he will act and change history. "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory'" (Haggai 2:6-8).

This is Haggai writing to those people who were saying that this new temple is nothing compared to the first one. The first house was beautiful; this house is nothing. And Haggai is saying, "Hey, catch the vision. The desired of the nations is going to come to this house and fill it with his glory."

So they went ahead and built that temple. And you know it wasn't anything compared to Solomon's. But that's the temple Jesus came to and walked in and cleansed and took the Father's glory there. It might not be what it could have been, but it was one that Jesus used to impact history.

And you know, maybe our church will take on a completely different form. Maybe we'll have small congregations instead of great big congregations. Maybe God will have us doing house churches. We simply don't know yet. But the one thing we do know is that Jesus wants to do something awesome in our church if we're willing to walk with him and not in the past either in our pain or in our great memories.

"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house" says the Lord Almighty" (Haggai 2:9).

So God is saying that the building isn't much. But let me tell you what I'm going to do in it is much more awesome. And so the lesson for us today is to live in the present. Prepare for the future, but live the present. What's God doing in your life today? If we live in the present, it will set your future. If abuse or other bad things happened to you, live the present.

Let God take the pain. Jesus hung on that cross and when he died, he said, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they do." And when he woke up in the resurrection, he didn't say, "Let me get my hands on those creeps." No, he tried to love on them and care for them. He did not revile when he was reviled.

But so many of us in our pain and in our hurt, spend our time reviling and holding on to that past. And so we can't enjoy our present and therefore we can't look to a future, because the pain of the past is too bad. We have to be prepared to move on. We have

to give it to Jesus and say, "You're going to have to take care of whoever has hurt me. You're going to have to deal with what's ever going on in my life. I'm going to have my present and my future with you and I'm going to move on."

McManus goes on to say. *God is continuously inviting us that his future is better than any past we have experienced with him. Can you believe that the glory of this present moment can be greater than the glory of your best memory?*

God's got things ahead for us, and we should want to be a part of that and to move on to that. There are times that we wish we could be number one on television again but this time with the right message. But that's not where we are, is it? God is going to do something else. It may be greater than that. But it will be different. And so we look to him.

McManus concludes this section: *The future cannot be experienced without embracing and experiencing change.*

We have to change to get to the future. If nothing else, you'll have to get one day older to get to your future. We're all facing the future, aren't we? But we need to enjoy our present. We need to live in the present of what God wants us to do right now, because WE are the temple now. WE are now the temple that Jesus is walking in. WE are the temple that the "desired of Israel" has come to. WE are that temple, he's living in. And God wants to do greater things yet in us.

Let's turn to **Zechariah 4:6. So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.**

Then God tells Zerubbabel how he going to work through him to rebuild the temple. And then in verse 10, God asks, "**who will despise the day of small things.**"

You see, the people were despising the smaller temple weren't they? God continues, "**Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.**" Yes, they will begin to rejoice when they see God is working through a leader who is beginning to move things.

It broke Pastor Glen's heart because we closed a whole bunch of congregations last year. Numerous of them didn't need to close. Yet people decided that they were too small and too old and so they folded up their tent and went home. Why do we tend to despise the small things? It seems we can talk ourselves out of the present God wants to have in our life.

There's nothing worse than teens and even older people who lose the vision of what they can do. We need to challenge them and tell them that God can do awesome things in them. God's got things in store for you. Keep moving forward.

So don't despise the day of small things. Say, "God, we're little, but you're big. And you can do things. You can transform things. You can take small things like a mustard seed and make them grow. You can take our tiny little denomination of 20,000 people and you can do amazing things."

But to do that, it's going to take all of us living in our present and looking to the future of what God has in mind for us. We've got to leave that bad past behind as well as the good past behind. We can tell God that they were wonderful, but we're moving on, because we believe you've got something even better things in mind – just as Haggai said, **"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house."**

And God wants to move us forward. God's got things for us to do. Don't decide you're finished. Let God decide when you're finished. In the meantime, say, "God I'm here, I'm alive, what do you want of me? How can I serve you? How can I be available?"

If we have that attitude, God will touch people through us to make a difference.

Key Scripture: Ezra 3: 10-13, "When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. 11) With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12) But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. 13) No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away."

General Group Question: As the foundation of the second temple was being laid, how did the younger generation view the situation as compared to the older generation? Who was correct and why?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Why is it not such a good idea to constantly look back to the "good old days"?
2. Did Jesus come to confirm the religious status quo or to bring change? Briefly explain your answer.
3. Please summarize the purpose of the council at Jerusalem found in Acts 15?
4. Does dwelling in the past affect how Jesus wants us to live our lives in the present? If so how?
5. Did God bring the church into existence to be an isolated entity or to help people change? Briefly explain.
6. How does God bring about change in people?
7. In your opinion, what is the lesson for us today concerning Ezra 3:10-13?

8. What can we do to be more effective to live in the present of what God wants us to do today?

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