

Ezra 1-2
Psalm 122
1 Corinthians 13

“A New Year’s Proclamation”

December 30, 2018

Over the years, I have preached a *lot* about the Exile.

In the last 17 years I have preached through all but six books of the Bible.
And since more than a third of the Bible is about the Exile,
I’ve preached a lot about the Exile!

But for some reason, I saved the post-exilic period for the end of my series.
I suppose I was thinking like a historian –
wanting to cover the earlier periods in OT history first,
and then conclude with the post-exilic era.
But it also meant that I generally thought of Ezra-Nehemiah
in terms of the Exile or in terms of the New Testament.

And in one sense that is appropriate!
The Exile is what comes before – the NT is what comes after!

But what did it mean for Zerubbabel, and Ezra, and Nehemiah?
What was the Word of the LORD to his people *at that time*?
And how does *that message* speak to *us*, today?

I had originally planned on starting the Ezra-Nehemiah series in Advent –
since I think that I tended to view Ezra-Nehemiah as a sort of “failed restoration” –
and therefore, the obvious point of Ezra-Nehemiah is “we need Jesus!”

Now, the *last point* – “we need Jesus!” – is certainly true!!
But as I started working on the Ezra-Nehemiah series,
it became painfully clear to me that the idea of a “failed restoration”
was entirely wrong.
Ezra-Nehemiah do not tell the story of a *failed* restoration,
but a *partial* restoration.

The Venerable Bede (in the 7th century) was the first commentator on the text of Ezra-Nehemiah.
Bede was an English monk who wrote a history of the English church.
Briton had once been a Christian nation.
But then came the Angles and the Saxons –
barbarian Germans who nearly wiped out the Christian church.
But the gospel did its work –
and Bede tells the story of the restoration of Christianity in England.

But it was messy.

Britons and English didn't like each other very much at first!
And while the *gospel* triumphed,
things were still not the way they should be...

So perhaps it is no wonder that no one in the early church, until the 7th century,
was drawn to a text like Ezra!

Our Psalm of response comes from the songs of ascents.

Psalm 122 gives the cry of the redeemed exile's heart –

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”

Yes, there is still a long way to go.

We are not yet what we should be –

but we are on the path!

Sing Psalm 122A

Read 1 Corinthians 13

Introduction: A Restoration “in Part” (1 Cor. 13)

‘Tis the season where many people make “new year’s resolutions.”

It would be easy to laugh and say,

“yes, but how of many of those resolutions actually work?”

But what is the alternative?

If we recognize that we are sinners – that we fall short of God’s standard –
the alternative is to say,

“eh, I can’t change – who cares? – I’ll just stay the way I am!”

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13

to people – like you and me – who recognize that we are only part-way there.

“We know in part and we prophesy in part,

but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.”

Paul says that what we have *right now* is only “in part.”

The gift of the Holy Spirit is a *precious gift!*

We have the presence of the resurrected and exalted Savior with us –

Jesus himself is with us! –

but Paul says that “now we see in a mirror dimly.”

Yes, what we have is *better* than what Ezra had,

but we still only have the down payment of the inheritance!

The story of Ezra and Nehemiah fits very well with the theme of new beginnings –
and so it makes to start the series as we look forward to a New Year.

What is the story of Ezra-Nehemiah all about?

It is all about the rebuilding of the temple and the renewal of obedience to God's Law.

Temple and Torah.

The temple is all about God presence with his people.

The Torah – the Law – is all about the people of God being *holy* –

the people of God being *like* their God – “be holy as I am holy”!

And it is worth noting that Ezra's reforms *actually work!*

All through the period of the Judges and the Kings,

Israel did *not* worship God faithfully –

they were not faithful to God's Law.

But after the time of Ezra,

Israel improves considerably!

And think about this –

without the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra-Nehemiah,

there would have been no temple for Jesus to cleanse!

How could Jesus have said “destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it in three days?”

Without the renewal of Torah under Ezra,

how could Jesus have claimed to fulfill the law –

if there had never been a serious attempt to obey the law at all!?

(Levering, 34)

The story of Zerubbabel and Ezra and Nehemiah is not a story of a failed restoration –

but a partial restoration –

one which gives us a model of the sort of faithful endurance

that our Lord Jesus calls us to as well!

1. God Stirs Up the Spirits of Men to Build the House of the LORD (1:1-11)

a. The Word of the LORD by the Mouth of Jeremiah (v1)

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

Ezra begins where the book of Chronicles ends.

This is a verbatim quotation from the end of the Book of Chronicles.

Or, as likely as not, Chronicles is quoting from the book of Ezra!

At the end of Chronicles, it served to give a message of hope –

there is a future for the people of God!

At the beginning of Ezra-Nehemiah, it also gives a message of hope –

but it is also programmatic for what comes after.

I say “Ezra-Nehemiah” because in the Hebrew text it was originally one book.

The first half of the book (what we call Ezra) has two parts –
the documents surrounding the return to Jerusalem from the time of Cyrus
until the building of the temple in the time of Darius (Ezra 1-6);
and then the story of Ezra’s coming to Jerusalem sixty years later.
Then the second half of the book (what we call Nehemiah)
focuses on the story of Nehemiah.

We could just call it “1 Ezra and 2 Ezra” – like 1 Kings and 2 Kings
(in fact, 1 Ezra and 2 Ezra *is* one of the historic names for this book!),
but since 2 Ezra focuses on the story of Nehemiah,
we might as well just call them “Ezra” and “Nehemiah.”

Ezra and Nehemiah each have the same basic structure:
chapters 1-6 of each book focus on the holy land;
and then chapters 7 to the end focus on the holy people.

And the decree of Cyrus, here at the beginning sets up the whole pattern.

But *before* we get to Cyrus,
Ezra makes sure that *we first* hear the *word of the LORD!*

Because the word of the LORD endures.

God had spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah (v1) and God’s word came to pass.
“Nothing of what has happened is outside the plan of God.
Indeed, none of it is outside his *declared* plan.” (Willcock, 286)
The people of God may rest secure in knowing
that God’s word continues to govern all things.

We are leaving tomorrow morning to visit Ginger’s family.
They have endured hell on earth for the last six months.
Jeremiah the prophet described ‘hell on earth’ –
the invasion of Jerusalem –
the desolation of the land –
the destruction of the temple –
the slaughter of the people –
and the end of the house of David!

But into the midst of all the sin and misery of this age,
a new year dawns –
the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia!

And before we hear the decree of Cyrus,
we discover that all of this took place
“that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.”

And Jeremiah had said that the land would lie desolate for 70 years.

But the *land* is still there.

Yes, it lay desolate for 70 years –
But this is still the *place* where God spoke –
the land that he promised to Abraham,
the land that Moses saw,
the land that Joshua caused Israel to possess –
and where David reigned, and Solomon built the temple.

The land is an abiding witness to the work of God *in history*.
Yes, time wears down all things –
but you can still stand in the hills of Moab
and look out over the promised land, like Moses did.

And now the promised *seed* – the holy people of God –
are returning to the promised *land*.

But there is one more thing that Ezra may well be hinting at:
We’ve been talking about the *land* and the *seed*.
What about the third part of the promise to Abraham?

The blessing to the nations?

Isaiah had said, “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees,
of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined (Is. 25:6).

But this feast is more than just food!

Isaiah continues,
“He will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death for ever,
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.” (Is 25:7-8)

The feast on the mountain of the LORD is nothing less than the eschatological feast!
God will make everything right!

The return of Israel to the promised land was a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

And here, it all starts with a Gentile king!

Some people think that Ezra-Nehemiah takes a dim view of the Gentiles.

But remember what God had promised to Abraham:

“those who bless you will be blessed; and those who curse you I will curse.”

Just because Ezra and Nehemiah take action against *some* Gentiles
does not mean that they have a dim view of Gentiles!

If some Gentiles are trying to destroy the people of God (curse the people of God!) –
then God’s curse rests upon those Gentiles!

But here at the beginning of Ezra,

it is clear that Cyrus, king of Persia, is acting in obedience to the charge of the LORD.

b. The Word of Cyrus in Obedience to the Charge of the LORD (v2-4)

² *“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.*

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:

*‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth,
and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem...’*

It’s true that the Persians tended to be pretty eclectic and were willing to issue edicts
in the names of the gods of the nations,
in order to curry favor with the peoples,
but even so our text shows how the kings of the earth submit to the LORD.

Cyrus is the king whom God raised up to bring judgment upon Babylon.

And no sooner does Cyrus overthrow Babylon

but he issues a decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

This is very much in keeping with what we know of Cyrus’s religious policy.

Cyrus had conquered a large empire –

and so he wanted to win favor from as many of his new subjects as possible.

By allowing people to return to their own lands and worship their own gods,

the Persians guaranteed that their new subjects would prefer them
to any sort of Babylonian ruler!

And so Cyrus told his Jewish subjects:

³ *Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.*

You can hear that Cyrus is not necessarily identifying *himself* as a Yahweh-worshiper.
For Cyrus, Yahweh is the God of Israel – the God who is in Jerusalem.

But we should not be too hard on Cyrus.

After all, Cyrus does better than any other Gentile King in a thousand years!

Pharaoh had said, ‘Who is Yahweh? I will not let your people go!’

In this “new Exodus,” Cyrus is one *who blesses the Seed of Abraham!*

In the first Exodus, Israel “plundered the Egyptians”
who were forced to let Israel go by the plagues.

But now in the new Exodus, the King decrees:

⁴ And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

Now the nations give freely for the second temple.

And in verses 5-11 we hear the response of Sheshbazzar and people of Judah.

c. The Response of Sheshbazzar and the Exiles (v5-11)

⁵ Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. ⁶ And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. ⁷ Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. ⁸ Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. ⁹ And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, ¹⁰ 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; ¹¹ all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

Cyrus returns the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away.

Such is the favor of this Gentile King –

he returns the holy vessels!

(The Babylonians had used the holy vessels in their feasts – according to Daniel –
but the Persians show respect!)

And Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, led a group of exiles home.

But we don't know much about that return.

All we know is that they returned.

Chapter 2 then moves forward another generation to the days of Zerubbabel.

2. “In Part” – The Return of Zerubbabel (2:1-70)

a. They Returned to Jerusalem and Judah (v1-35)

Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. ² They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

In chapter 2, we are now a generation after Cyrus.

Sheshbazzar had led one group home.

Now Zerubbabel leads a second wave.

It wasn't an easy thing in those days to just pick up and go home!

When Cyrus issued his decree, Judah *was* under his rule,
but Egypt was not!

And Egypt had a long-standing claim on Palestine!

Cyrus couldn't protect you from the Egyptians!

Further, Cyrus had only just established his rule.

Would the Babylonians revolt and restore Babylonian rule?

If so, anyone who was too cozy with the Persians might suffer!

There would be *lots* of reasons to stay in Babylon for a while!

It's not safe to go home!

Chapter 2 largely consists of an accounting of the return of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel was of the house of David –

so this is the account of the return of the house of David to Jerusalem.

The number of the men of the people of Israel: ³ the sons of Parosh, 2,172. ⁴ The sons of Shephatiah, 372. ⁵ The sons of Arah, 775. ⁶ The sons of Pahath-moab, namely the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,812. ⁷ The sons of Elam, 1,254. ⁸ The sons of Zattu, 945. ⁹ The sons of Zaccai, 760. ¹⁰ The sons of Bani, 642. ¹¹ The sons of Bebai, 623. ¹² The sons of Azgad, 1,222. ¹³ The sons of Adonikam, 666. ¹⁴ The sons of Bigvai, 2,056. ¹⁵ The sons of Adin, 454. ¹⁶ The sons of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, 98. ¹⁷ The sons of Bezai, 323. ¹⁸ The sons of Jorah, 112. ¹⁹ The sons of Hashum, 223. ²⁰ The sons of Gibbar, 95. ²¹ The sons of Bethlehem, 123. ²² The men of Netophah, 56. ²³ The men of Anathoth, 128. ²⁴ The sons of Azmaveth, 42. ²⁵ The sons of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743. ²⁶ The sons of Ramah and Geba, 621. ²⁷ The men of Michmas, 122. ²⁸ The men of Bethel and Ai, 223. ²⁹ The sons of Nebo, 52. ³⁰ The sons of Magbish, 156. ³¹ The sons of the other Elam, 1,254. ³² The sons of Harim, 320. ³³ The sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 725. ³⁴ The sons of Jericho, 345. ³⁵ The sons of Senaah, 3,630.

Verses 3-19 speak of the “sons” of various family groups,
whereas verses 20-35 speak of the “sons” or “men” of various cities.
This list is important because it signifies a claim to the Holy Land.

b. The Return of the Priests, a Few Levites, and Servants (v36-58)

³⁶ *The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, 973.* ³⁷ *The sons of Immer, 1,052.*

³⁸ *The sons of Pashhur, 1,247.* ³⁹ *The sons of Harim, 1,017.*

⁴⁰ *The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.* ⁴¹ *The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128.* ⁴² *The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, in all 139.*

⁴³ *The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,* ⁴⁴ *the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,* ⁴⁵ *the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,* ⁴⁶ *the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shamlai, the sons of Hanan,* ⁴⁷ *the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah,* ⁴⁸ *the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam,* ⁴⁹ *the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai,* ⁵⁰ *the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephisim,* ⁵¹ *the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,* ⁵² *the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,* ⁵³ *the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,* ⁵⁴ *the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha.*

⁵⁵ *The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Hassophereth, the sons of Peruda,* ⁵⁶ *the sons of Jaalah, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,* ⁵⁷ *the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, and the sons of Ami.*

⁵⁸ *All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.*

Verses 36-39 tell us that over 4,000 priests returned.

They were eager to return and rebuild the temple!

But then verses 40-42 tell us that fewer than 350 Levites returned!

And verses 43-58 tell us that there were only 392 temple servants
or the sons of Solomon’s servants.

The Levites were just as essential to the proper operation of the temple,
but their work wasn’t nearly as glamorous as the priests.

So they were not nearly as eager to return.

They had made a decent life for themselves in Babylon.

Why go back to a menial job in Jerusalem?

We’ll hear more about this later – when Ezra tries to convince more Levites to return (ch 8).

But it’s a good reminder that faithful worship – faithful obedience to God –

requires us to be willing to make sacrifices in order to love God and others.

We are often willing to do “important things” for Jesus!

But are we willing to do “little things”?

Menial things.

There was a book written a number of years ago –
“Do Hard Things.”

Too often we interpret that to mean “do big things”!

What if the “hard thing” is taking care of an elderly relative?

Cleaning them up after they’ve messed their pants –
that’s hard!

What if the “hard thing” is working with difficult people?

Loving difficult people?

The restoration in Ezra-Nehemiah is a *partial restoration* –
because they did not *love* the way that God loved us!

c. Awaiting a Priest: Jews and Priests of Uncertain Genealogy (v59-63)

⁵⁹ *The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel:* ⁶⁰ *the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, 652.* ⁶¹ *Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name).*

⁶² *These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.* ⁶³ *The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.*

Then verses 59-63 tell us about an uncertain group.

Verse 60 tells us about three tribes who couldn’t prove their fathers’ houses.

Did they really belong to Israel?

Why does this matter?

If it is just a matter of “we want to worship Yahweh” –
then it doesn’t matter!

They are welcome to come!

But that’s not what this list is all about!

This list is a claim to the Holy Land.

When they arrive in Jerusalem,

they are making a claim on lands where *other people* are living!

If someone says, “That’s my land – give it to me!”

It is only reasonable to ask them to prove that they are who they say they are!

Notice that Zerubbabel does not say “You can’t come” –

rather they are allowed to come and be part of the community –

but with the caveat that they can’t prove their ancestry.

And it would not be right to give them someone else's inheritance!

Of course, this is more important when it comes to the priesthood in verses 61-63.

There are three families who claim to be among the priests,
but their genealogy wasn't found in the records,
and so they were excluded from the priesthood.

⁶³ The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

Only after the restoration of the priesthood could their case be determined.

This reminds us that we *need* a priest to stand before God in our place.

The house of Aaron had been selected to do this in the OT.

In this *partial* restoration, the priests were restored to their service.

But only until the great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ,
entered the heavenly Holy of Holies.

Now *he continues a priest forever* since he ever lives to stand before God
and intercede for us!

d. The Poverty of the Assembly (v64-70)

⁶⁴ The whole assembly together was 42,360, ⁶⁵ besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. ⁶⁶ Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, ⁶⁷ their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720.

Verse 64 tells us that the whole assembly numbered only 42,360.

Now, we know that there is a lot of hyperbole used in biblical numbers.

But, in part because of that, the *smallness* of this census is striking!

When Israel came out of Egypt, the census numbered 600,000 men.

In the time of David, there were supposed to be 800,000 men of war in Israel,
and 500,000 in Judah!

Now, when the son of David is bringing about the restoration
that the prophets had said would be even greater than the Exodus!...

“their horses were 736, their mules were 245, their camels were 435,
and their donkeys were 6,720.”

In other words, they have one beast of burden for every 5 households –
and most of those are donkeys –
the poor man's beast of burden.

Oh, it's a fairly good size group!

They have sufficient numbers to travel across the open lands.

They won't have to worry about bandits...

But mostly that's because they are a large, rag-tag, motley band!

And as if to confirm this picture, we hear in verse 68:

⁶⁸ Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. ⁶⁹ According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics^[a] of gold, 5,000 minas^[b] of silver, and 100 priests' garments.

They came to the old location of "house of the LORD" in Jerusalem –
in order to make free offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site.

And we are told that *some* of the heads of families made freewill offerings.

That's hardly surprising.

If a family can't afford a donkey to make a 900 mile journey,
they probably can't afford much else!

61,000 darics is around 50 talents.

When David was preparing to build the temple,

1 Chronicles 29 tells us that the leaders of the fathers' houses gave
5,000 talents (and 10,000 darics) of gold.

Now the heads of families give around 1% that amount.

Ezra is not *condemning* these people!

After all, *they are here!*

They made a 900 mile journey – through bandit-infested territory –
in order to come back to the Promised Land
and rebuild the temple of the LORD!

They are not *cheap*.

They are *poor!*

Never mind that we don't have the material resources to build the temple!

We're here.

It reminds me of a story of church planting in New York City during the Great Depression.

The OPC started in 1936 – in the middle of the Great Depression.

And they wanted to plant a church in New York City.

So they sent a church planter.

But they didn't have enough money to pay him.

So instead, the churches in the Philadelphia area

took up a collection of food and clothing and money every week
to send him and his family.

You don't need money to do the work of the gospel!
Oh, it comes in handy!
But the thing that is necessary is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus!

I can't help but think of the study that Willow Creek Church did a few years ago.
They wanted to find out which of their programs
was most effective in making disciples.
(They spent millions of dollars every year on their programs!)
What the study found was that the programs that worked best
were the ones that focused on bible study and prayer.

(In other words, the ones that didn't really cost anything!)

⁷⁰ *Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel^[c] in their towns.*

It's the *ordinary things* that matter.
Verse 70 tells us that when they returned to the land,
everyone lived in their towns.
That may seem obvious.
But think about it!
For 70 years they had lived in Babylon!

For 70 years.

In other words, almost *none* of these people had *ever* "lived in their towns."
These people had been born in Babylon.
A few of the older folk might have been small children before the exile –
but for 90% of the people,
they had only heard of these towns from their parents and grandparents!

Now they are living *in their towns*.
The Holy People – the people chosen and set apart by God –
are back in the Holy Land – the land that God promised to Abraham.
And through them, the blessing of God will come to the nations.

In Jesus the Holy Seed and the Holy Land have come together in one place.
He is the Seed of Abraham – and he is the temple –
he is the place where earth and heaven meet.
And because we have been united to him by faith,
he now brings the blessing of God to the nations *through us*.

What will that look like for us in this coming year?

Do we get comfortable living in Babylon?

If we are serious about living as a holy people –

a people who live and who love the way that Jesus lived and loved –

then why do our lives not look more like his?