

Hall of Faith (not Fame)

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- [0 : 00] But we are going to turn now to the Bible and to our reading for this evening. And last week, Paul began a new series in the book of Ezra.
- Ezra made me through the Old Testament. I think it's page 389 or 390 thereabout in the Visitor's Bibles, if you have those. Ezra and Nehemiah, two history books that come after the Kings and the Chronicles.
- And they fill in the story of the history of the return from exile. We were not long ago preaching through Prophet Ezekiel, one of the great prophets of the exile.
- And speaking about the times that lay ahead when at last those people would return. And that's what's happening here in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. And last week we looked at chapter 1.
- We're going to read chapter 2, and I'm going to abbreviate a little bit for your benefit and for mine. As you'll see, there are lots of names and lots of numbers.
- [1 : 08] And we will skate over that a little bit, but hopefully not so as to not get the point of the passage. I'm going to read Ezra chapter 2 then at verse 1. 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 came with Zerubbabel, Yeshua, Nehemiah, Sariah, Reliah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvi, Rehum, and Banah.
- And the number of the men of the people of Israel was all of these names and families and numbers that followed down to verse 35.
- The sons of Senah, 3,630. Then are listed the priests, the son of Jediah of the house of Jeshua, 973.
- The sons of Inmer, 1,052. The sons of Pashur, 1,247. The sons of Harim, 1,017.
- [2 : 15] The priests, that is. And then the Levites, the sons of Jeshua and Kadmil, the sons of Hodaviah, 74. And their singers, the sons of Asaph.
- And then the sons of the gatekeepers. And these others in all 139. And then the temple servants. A very long list of all of those.
- Verse 55, the sons of Solomon's servants. Sons of Sotai, the sons of Hasbeth and Peruda and so on. And verse 58, all the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.
- And then verse 59, the following were those who came up from Telmila, Telhasha, Cherub, Adan and Inmer. Though they could not prove their father's houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel.
- The sons of Deliah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nakoda, 652. Also of the sons of the priests, the sons of Habiah, the sons of Hakozi, the sons of Barzillai, who were taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was called by their name.
- [3 : 29] 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.

The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food until there should be a priest to consult the Urim and Thummim. And I take it Paul's going to explain to us what that means.

Verse 64, the whole assembly together was 42,360. Besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337.

And they had 200 male and 200 female singers. Their horses were 736. Their mules, 245. Their camels, 435.

And their donkeys, 6,720. A lot of donkeys. Some of the heads of the 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.

[4 : 36] According to their ability, they gave to the treasury of the works 61,000 derricks of gold, 5,000 miners of silver, and 100 priests' garments.

Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns. And all Israel in their towns.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, please have Ezra chapter 2 open in front of you.

Be a great help as we consider this chapter together this evening. Now, unless the people are known to you, a list of names doesn't tend to capture the imagination.

That may have been your experience. A few moments ago, as Willie read, I was disappointed I didn't read the whole thing, Willie, actually. I was hoping to read every single name on the list. But it doesn't capture the imagination.

[5 : 55] See, our names are not on that list. And so it doesn't quite hold the interest we might have if our names were on it. So we'd be very interested if our names were included on that list.

It's tricky to pronounce some of these names. It seems irrelevant. What does this list of people from thousands of years ago got to tell us today? Well, let me illustrate with a list of names and numbers.

And let's see if this captivates you. Rhea, 37. Gvardiol, 33. Alexander Arnold, 43.

Masuri, 27. Saka, 54. Luis Diaz, 55. Salah, 74. Palmer, 69. DeLapp, 33. Wood, 46. And Welbeck, 50. Now, that, of course, is my fantasy football team.

And the total number of points each player has accumulated. It's gone up a bit. I wrote this the other day. It hasn't taken today's results into account. Now, this will be of extreme interest, about 3% of you.

[6 : 58] I can see your faces lighting up as I hear the wisdom of my team. But for many others of you in the room, it's totally irrelevant. Now, I'm currently languishing mid-table in what we call the Trompianship.

That's the Tron Church Fantasy Football League. I'm very much the St. Mirren of the Trompianship. And my point is that the list I just read out is only of interest to the fantasy football geeks out there amongst you.

You are really interested to hear about my team. But for the rest of you, irrelevant. But when it comes to the names of the list in Ezra Chapter 2, we should all view it as if we are mad keen fantasy football geeks.

This list of names ought to hold that degree of interest as it does to Andrew Whitmarsh, who is near the top of the Trompianship. It should hold our interest.

This list of names contains our spiritual ancestors. It is a list of great interest to us today. This is our history. This is part of our story as God's people.

[8 : 06] This is our people. And what we see with this list in Ezra 2 is our spiritual ancestors becoming once again the people who God had called them to be.

You see, knowing who we really are and knowing what we're here on this planet to do is absolutely key, isn't it? To see yourself not as a free-floating, atomized individual, locating your meaning from within yourself.

That is the sure path to despair and loneliness. But rather to see yourself as someone with purpose. To live a life as part of a glorious, greater reality.

That is one of the most glorious things that we discover when we become a Christian. The discovery that you are known and loved by your Creator, who is also your Savior, your Father, your Lord.

That He has a plan and purpose for your life and for the world to come. You step into a rich heritage as you become a Christian. An eternal heritage.

[9 : 12] And with this story tonight, as we look at Ezra 2, we're going to see how this Old Testament people of God, the Jews of Ezra's day, recovered their confidence in who they really were.

Why they were on this planet. What their purpose was. We see who they are and what they've come to do. And they've discovered, again, what it is they're on this planet for.

You see, they're nearly lost at all in exile in Babylon. They've had been lost at all. They've had been lost at all. Bleak years, decades of confusion, depression, fear that God had abandoned them. Cast them off forever because of their sins.

But God has marvelously brought them back out of exile. We saw that last week. They are returning. The door's been opened for them to go back to the land of promise.

God made promises to his people. And he has kept them. There is always a way back with God.

[10 : 18] And so we're going to walk quite quickly through this text tonight. I want to speed through this list, draw out a few things, but then stand back and discern three key lessons as we consider this list of names.

So that's what we're going to. We're going to go quite quickly through the text and then draw some key lessons about what God is teaching us about his people here in Ezra chapter 2. So we're going to speed through and look with me at verse 2.

And the list is grouped into different sections of different types of returners. The first group is the leaders, verse 2. Ezra begins with the names of the leaders of the returned exiles, of which there are 11 listed here in Nehemiah, which is really a continuation of the book of Ezra.

They're one book. In Nehemiah, you've got the same list with the addition of Nahamani. So that brings the number to 12. I don't know why the list in Ezra is missing that. But overall, there were 12 leaders, at least according to Nehemiah, that led the people back from exile to Jerusalem.

And that number 12 is, of course, significant. It was a sign of the continuity of God's people. This really was God's people returning out of exile, returning to the land.

[11 : 37] These returners with 12 leaders really are the people of God. Think of the 12 tribes. Think of the 12 apostles. Think in Revelation. The number 12 is significant.

It symbolizes the whole people of God. And to reinforce the point, the first name there is Zerubbabel, who is the grandson of King Jehoiachin.

He's representing the Davidic kingly line. And the next name is Jeshua, son of the high priest. And so here you have the people of God at the front, the kingly line and the priestly line.

It's a clear indication this is God's people as a whole who are returning. It is an orderly return from exile. This wasn't haphazard. No, there's 12 leaders with a kingly leader and a priestly leader at the front.

Next, from verse 3 down to verse 35, you have the people of Israel. And they're described in two ways. They're described either by their lineage or by their location.

[12 : 43] And the majority are by lineage. Just look at verse 3. The sons of Parosh. Verse 4. The sons of Shathiah. So people are identified as being the sons of so-and-so.

Others are identified by their location. So have a look at verse 22. The men of Netephar. And then verse 23. The men of Anathoth. So it's the location of where they're from.

They're original towns in the land of Judah. And in the background, as we read these two things, their lineage and their location.

In the background, Hums, the promise of God. First spoken to Abraham. And promises of a people. And promises of a land. And here in this list, both aspects are present.

There's the people aspect. There's also the place aspect. This is the whole people of God returning. Fulfilling God's ancient promises.

[13 : 44] The third group begins at verse 36. And this is the priests. And we see the total number is almost 4,300.

And that constitutes about 10% of the total number of returnees. You get the total number down in verse 64. The priests were about 10%. Why so many? That's quite a large proportion.

Why so many priests? Well, doubtless, it's because they longed to serve at the altar in the restored temple.

Which they could not do in exile. Their whole purpose, their whole reason for being priests was to lead the worship in the temple. And they couldn't do that in exile.

Their desire was to rebuild that temple. To restore the public worship of God so they could serve where they were meant to serve. And they're lining up to go back.

[14 : 42] They want to go back. Their attitude must have been that of Psalm 84, which we sang at the beginning of our service. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of my Lord. They wanted nothing more. And to go back to Jerusalem, to see the temple built again, to lead worship to God.

The long years of exile had not dampened their desire to see God's temple restored. Their concern for the glory of God, the restoration of his temple, had not evaporated.

There was an understanding here that the key for God's people as the exile was ending, as they returned back to Jerusalem, absolutely key was the restoration of temple worship that had to take place.

That was of utmost importance. And it seems the returnees got that. They understood the importance of the temple and its worship. Hence, so many priests are part of the returners list.

[15 : 48] But, looking on to the next section, relatively few Levites. So have a look at verse 40 to 42. There are only 74 numbered here.

Now, what do we make of that? That is one Levite to every 58 priests. Now, a quick recap of who the Levites were.

Numbers gives us some background. Let me read to you from Numbers. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him.

They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons.

They are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. So here's what the Levites' whole purpose was for. They were to assist the priests.

[16 : 55] They were set apart with particular roles and responsibilities to serve in the temple. Isn't it striking that so few return? You have this huge number of priests, almost 4,000, and yet so few Levites.

Why would that be? Those people ought to have been at the front of the queue to go back, don't you think? Might it be, as one commentator suggests, that their prideful hearts resent the unseen nature of their calling?

They're not the priests. They weren't allowed to be. They're not at the center of the action. Theirs is to be an unseen supportive role. They were in the background.

And perhaps their hearts weren't really concerned with the glory of God, only with their own glory. Returning to Jerusalem had nothing for them. There was no advantage to going back.

And a good bit of our Christian work today is pretty plain and basic, isn't it?

[18 : 04] Not much drama or flair about it. We're not called to promote ourselves or to gain status and recognition. Yet an assisting role maybe doesn't appeal to our prize.

We don't want to play second fiddle. We want credit, recognition, thanks, praise, visibility. Maybe that's just me.

But don't we want that? Perhaps that's why so few Levites returned. Their pride was at stake. Looking on to verse 43 to 58, we see the temple servants.

392 all in, end of verse 58. According to Ezra chapter 8, David had given these temple servants to the Levites to assist them. So the priests were doing the key work in the temple.

The Levites were assisting them. And then the temple servants were assisting the Levites. And so their work would have consisted of pretty menial tasks in and around the temple. And it again shows us the focus of these returners that they had on the temple.

[19 : 17] That was why they were going back. The temple was absolutely central. And so they had to bring all these different groups of people to make sure the temple had enough staff to make it work. And included in this list of temple servants are plenty of foreign names.

As in not Jewish origin. And we'll come back to the observation later. But just to note that there's a lot of foreign names in that list of temple servants. The next group, from verse 59 to 63, is a rather curious list.

This final category of returners is those who have paperwork problems. Look with me again at that verse 59.

The following were those who came from Telmela, Telhasha, Cherub, Adan, and Imna. Though they could not prove their father's houses or their descent.

Whether they belonged to Israel. And there are two groups within this list. There are those in the general group of returners. Verse 59. Now, I don't know if you found that odd when it was read out earlier.

[20 : 39] But it shows us, I think, the seriousness with which the returners took the whole enterprise. Who you were really did matter.

Being able to demonstrate your lineage, your family history. That was really key. Because it would show the continuity of the people of God stretching all the way back. From Abraham all the way down.

And this was particularly important with regards to the priests. And number 16 helps us to see the seriousness of the matter. It says there, No outsider who is not of the descendants of Aaron should draw near to burn incense before the Lord.

In other words, you had to be part of the priestly family to go into the key parts of the temple. You couldn't go in unless you were a priest. And you see in Numbers the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abram.

And that stood as a solemn warning. As to what would happen if those who were not allowed to went in to certain parts of the temple. They were struck down by the Lord instantly.

[21 : 50] You could not force your way into the priesthood if you fancied it. No. You had to be of a priestly family. And the leaders of the returnees.

The fact they note this in the list. The leaders of the returnees had to make sure that all the priests or all those who claimed to be priests were actually legitimate.

And these people were excluded, verse 62, from the priesthood until it could be proved otherwise. Now, it's not to say that these people weren't Israelites or they weren't actually priests.

But they just couldn't demonstrate it. They didn't have the paperwork. For whatever reason, the records were missing. They couldn't show their family history. So, the problem is not their status.

It's not that it wasn't genuine. They just couldn't prove it. And it really mattered. They had to be sure. Otherwise, disaster would fall. Now, they could resume their duties, verse 63, in the proper way by consulting the Urim and Thummim.

[22 : 59] Now, I wasn't going to mention this, but Willie put me on the spot. So, I probably should explain what it is. But the high priest would have these two things attached to his breastplate, two little kind of tablets called the Urim and Thummim.

And it was a way in which they could consult the will of the Lord if there was an uncertain question. And the way in which the Urim and Thummim landed, it's a bit like one side says yes, the other side, depends how it landed, would provide clarity.

So, with these priests, they would come before the priests with the Urim and Thummim, and they would determine whether these people really were genuine or not. So, there we go. That's the Urim and Thummim. Of also interest, verse 61.

It's a slightly unusual detail we get. It's unique in the whole list about the sons of Barzillai. And you see in brackets, who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name.

Now, why that detail? Well, what seems to have happened is that a young man from a priestly family has married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite.

[24 : 07] And as he's married the girl, he's taken the unusual step of taking her family name. Now, that seems to have cast some doubt on his priestly pedigree.

He can't prove his lineage. Now, in one sense, you can understand why he did it. The guy, Barzillai, is a bit of a legend. His name crops up in 2 Samuel.

And it turns out that he had been of great help to King David. In times of trouble, Barzillai had come alongside King David and helped him. And this is what David says to Solomon about Barzillai.

He says this. So this guy, Barzillai, was on very, very good terms with King David.

He was a wealthy man. And on top of that, his name, Barzillai, means man of strong iron. It's a good name, isn't it? If you're looking for a name for your yet-to-be-born son, Barzillai could be top of the list.

[25 : 20] Now, you can understand why this young priest who marries into this family would want to take that name. It's a great name. But there's an unintended consequence years down the line by the time we come to Ezra chapter 2.

The priestly legitimacy of his line is in doubt. It's in question. It seemed like a good idea at the time. The man is a legend. I want to be known as one of his.

But for his son-in-law, it would have perhaps been better to keep his priestly name. Rather than take on the name of his wife, Barzillai the Gileadite, he should have kept his own name rather than try to borrow glory from Barzillai.

And there's perhaps a gentle warning to us to perhaps not seek the assurance of our place and the people of God outside of our true identity in Christ.

Beware trying to gain credibility from who you associate with or the position you can carve out for yourself. Don't rely on that for your standing.

[26 : 29] No, no, your identity is in Christ alone. I wonder if that's the significance of that little paraphrase, that little bit in the brackets. It's unusual that it would be mentioned, but I wonder if that's part of the point.

But looking on to verse 64, we get the conclusion of the list, the total numbers, and also some details about gifts to the treasuries for the temple building.

Again, it shows us that's the real focus, the temple. The restoration of the temple as the people go back, that's the utmost priority. That's what they're coming to do. So there's a fairly swift summary of the text.

But so what? What is all this about? What are the implications for us? What does it have to say to us today? Well, we're being shown here in this chapter in great detail.

What are people stirred up by God look like? Remember chapter 1, verse 5. Have a look at that. Chapter 1, verse 5 says, And then chapter 2, verse 1.

[27 : 56] So here are the flesh and blood, people whose hearts have been so stirred by the Lord that they determined to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Here is what a people stirred up by God look like. Here's the list. Here they are. Now back then it was, as I said, they were going to rebuild the temple. That was what they were being stirred up to do.

A physical rebuilding. But for us today, we are engaged. We are still engaged in a building project. But the temple we are building is the living temple of God.

Living stones grafted together in the eternal people of God, the church. That's our building project. Now our tools aren't bricks and mortar, but the living word of God.

Our task is to reach out to the people around us in the city and beyond, to evangelize them, to build them up, to make disciples. Baptizing people in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and teaching them to obey all that he's commanded.

[29 : 04] That's our building project. So what does a people stirred up by God look like? What is Ezra chapter 2 in our Bibles to teach us?

Because remember, as the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 15, for whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

So what is there here for us? Well, three things. A people stirred up by God to the task of building his church is a people with, number one, a concern for the glory of God.

A concern for the glory of God. These people in this list were stirred by concern for the glory of God and to see right worship in the temple re-established.

They were so concerned that that wasn't taking place, they were prepared to uproot their families and return all those miles away to Jerusalem to take great risk to go.

[30 : 10] They were so concerned that God be worshipped rightly that they determined to go. And their names are rightly recorded here. They are worthy of honor.

This was a costly endeavor. And the reality was, not that many returned. We see the total number here of about 40,000.

And that seems like a lot. It's St. Mirren's Stadium filled five times over. Or Old Trafford half full. But that was a fraction of the total number of those in exile.

This is a small remnant in reality. So many remained unmoved. So many did not return. Unwilling. Uninterested to go back.

A couple of generations have passed since the exile with the Babylonians. Perhaps God's people had grown comfortable in their new surroundings. Only a remnant return. But there's always been the way.

[31 : 16] All through the history of God's people, it's always been a remnant. James Philip. It is always a remnant that responds to the challenge of the ongoing work of God.

When the challenge comes to rebuild the waste places in the life of the church, it is always only a remnant that responds. So don't be discouraged.

Don't be disheartened when you find your own heart stirred by God. You're moved for the glory of God. Your concern is for His glory, His name, His worship.

Particularly for the gathered worship of God's people on a Sunday. And yet others around you seem utterly unmoved. Don't be surprised.

Perhaps it's, as an individual, you look around. Or as a church, we look around. Who's with us? Who's with us? What we'll likely observe is a remnant.

[32 : 22] Don't be surprised. Don't be disappointed. That's always been the way it's been in the life of God's people. It tends to be a remnant who respond.

A remnant who are concerned for the glory of God. But at the same time, don't neglect to give thanks for those who are with you. This list in Ezra 2 is a celebration of those who went back.

This is the post-exilic hall of faith. Yes, many didn't return, but these ones did. And their names are in our Bibles. These ones did go back. Each of these families is worth naming, worthy of honor.

Each of these returning exiles was to look around and give thanks for all the others who were going back with them. Standing shoulder to shoulder with them. It means so much to us, doesn't it, when our names are on a list.

Perhaps your team gets recognition at work. And your name is there. At the end of year awards, your name is there. It means so much to you, doesn't it? Or you win an award in your industry.

[33 : 32] Or your graduation. 3,000 names get read out. But your name is there. And your parents are eager to hear your name. You can imagine the grandchildren of the returners grabbing a copy of Ezra when it was released.

And they're looking up. They're going to chapter 2. They're finding their family name. And there it is, buried in verse 42. The sons of Shalom. That's my grandfather. Makes you proud.

And each one of these names is precious in God's sight. And they're to be precious in our sight. These people returned. Their hearts were stirred by God.

And let's be thankful for those around us. For each one of us in this room tonight. Look around. Be thankful. Here are others concerned for the glory of God.

Give thanks for the faithful remnant. For those who are prepared to take up their cross. Those who are courageous to stand in the building work that we are called to do.

[34 : 38] Give thanks for one another. That's the first thing. That's the first mark of a people stirred by God. There's concern for the glory of God. Number two. There's a desire to carefully obey all God's commands.

Now this list and the way it's been put together. The way it's been arranged. The detailed nature of it. It speaks of care and diligence, doesn't it? There is nothing haphazard about this.

This wasn't just written off in a five minute note. No, there's care that's gone into working out who all these people are. Carefully noting the numbers. Putting it in order. This list is the fruit of painstaking careful work.

It speaks of organization and diligence of excellence and care. And this will be a mark of a people stirred by God for the work of gospel building.

Careful diligence as opposed to slapdash casualness. That will be an evidence in a people stirred by God. Attention to detail as opposed to negligent sloppiness.

[35 : 47] That will be the mark of a church stirred by God. And that's a general observation of the chapter as a whole. But more specifically, there are real carefulness with regard to the authenticity of certain families.

We saw that. That slightly odd section. Going through those families and the priesthood. It seems a bit strange and fussy to us. But what that indicates is that all these people, these returners, were being very careful in their obedience to all of God's word.

To all his commands. They weren't picking and choosing. They were being careful to obey every single part of it. God was very clear.

Only sons of Aaron could serve as priests. The consequences of failing to observe that were serious. That's why they needed clarity on the lineage. That's why these people are sort of being held back before they can serve as priests.

The people were not cutting corners. That's the point. They were taking God at his word. Doing what he had said. Exactly. And likewise today, a mark of a people stirred up by God.

[37 : 02] Is that they will be careful to obey all of God's commands. All of them. His commands about not neglecting to meet together. His commands about sexual ethics.

As we saw last week on Sunday morning in Ephesians 5. Not neglecting his commands about family life. Careful obedience to all of God's word. That's what we see in this list.

There's a careful obedience of God's word. Number three. Number three. The final mark of a people stirred by God. They will demonstrate a generous spirit with regards to their possessions and people.

So yes, there was careful obedience. But that does not equate to coldness or harshness. There was real evidence of generosity amongst this people.

They give generously. Look at verse 66 and following. They give very generously for the work of the rebuilding of the temple. That is always a mark of a people stirred by God.

[38 : 08] When the word of God melts, the hearts of his people also loosens their wallets. And verse 69. We're told they gave according to their ability.

And so we might ask ourselves. Do we need to review our own giving for the building of the church? That may involve bricks and mortar.

But our key task is building living stones, people. Are we giving for the work of the gospel according to our ability?

So there's a generosity with regards to possessions. But also in terms of people. The list includes, as I mentioned earlier, many foreign names. Many non-Jewish names are in that list.

And this is an indication of God's kindness. His inclusion to those who wanted to be part of God's family of faith. Israel was always meant to be a light to the nations. It was to draw in the surrounding people.

- [39 : 13] To follow the one true God. And the fact that that seems to be an evidence in this returning remnant is significant. In Ezra chapter 6, we read this.

The Passover was eaten by the people of Israel. Who just turned from exile. And also by everyone who had joined them. And separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel.

So once the people are back, the temple is re-established. End of chapter 6, they celebrate Passover. And there, people of Israel, but also those who've come from outside.

They've joined in with God's people. That's always been the case. And that always ought to be the mark of a people stirred by God. Newcomers being drawn in all the time.

New folk being added. New folk coming to faith in the Lord Jesus. They're to be welcomed in gladly. Like these folk in Ezra were. They're included.

- [40 : 18] There's a generosity to the outsider to come and join and worship. And I think that is a mark of our church family. And may it continue all the more.

But just note it. It's one of the marks of a people stirred by God. Generosity. Generosity with possessions. But also generosity with people. Three marks of a church stirred by God.

Three marks of a church where the evidence is for his concern, for his glory. Eager to obey his word and marked by generosity. But above all these things, there's another truth to be grasped.

And it's this. We saw it last week. God is keeping his promises. God's keeping his promises. And here is the flesh and blood reality of it.

Ezra 2 demonstrates and lists with real care the return of God's people to God's place. This is huge. This is a great moment in the history of God's people. He's bringing them back to the land he promised.

- [41 : 26] And those promises made to Abraham have not been derailed by exile. Not at all. Here are the returners. Under the leadership of 12 men.

Returning to the cities from which they were exiles. But God is keeping his promises. And that's the wonderful, great, overarching reality of this book.

God's word does not fail. He will do as he's promised. And he's promised us great things. And eternity with him forever. And as we close, one final simple observation.

And it's this. Those whose hearts were stirred by God responded. Their names were on a list. So can I ask, has your heart been stirred?

We've thought about our corporate response as a church. But as individuals, has your heart been stirred to renewed service of the Lord?

- [42 : 34] To be engaged once again in that work of building? Or perhaps you're not yet one who follows Jesus. Has your heart been stirred?

Because God calls all of us. No matter where we've been, what we've done. He calls all of us to return to him. He calls all of us to repent. And believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the forgiveness of our sins. And for the gift of eternal life. And all who do that. All who do respond to that call. Whose hearts are stirred. Well, you'll know your name is on a list.

You read about that list in Revelation. It's the Lamb's book of life. Is your name on that list? Are you sure? You can be.

If you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the forgiveness of your sins. For the gift of eternal life. Has your heart been stirred? And maybe it has been tonight.

[43 : 41] But if it has been stirred. Return to him. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that you.

Are a faithful God. That you are a God who keeps his promises. And we thank you for. This very real.

Example. In flesh and blood. Of the fact that you do keep your promises. That you will do. Exactly as you said. And so help each one of us.

To hear your words of promise. And to trust you. Both now as we. Go about the task. Of building for your kingdom.

But also for eternity. As we look on. To our promised home. With you forever. So please help us to be a people. That respond in faith.

[44 : 49] To your great promises. We ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.