

## Group Bible Study/Discussion:

1. Read Ezra 1:1-8 & Nehemiah 1:1-11. What strikes you as you read these two texts? What questions immediately come to mind?
2. Who is the primary “actor” in both the Ezra & Nehemiah texts? How do you know that?
3. Why is “holy discontent” with the status quo spiritually essential for every believer? How do you see that in both Ezra & Nehemiah? What do they do as a result? How is that evident in your life? What are you doing about it?
4. How can a Christian get his or her eyes off of their individual problems & onto God’s wider kingdom purpose of His glory?
5. Why were God’s people in exile? Did the 70 year punishment work? Please give reasons for your answer. What did Jesus discover & condemn among the Jews of his day that might help you explain your answer more fully?
6. Every time Cyrus is mentioned in Ezra, he is referred to as “King of Persia.” God is called, “The Lord, the God of heaven.” Why that distinction between them?
7. When God “*stirred Cyrus’ heart*” to fulfil his promise to bring the exiles back home again, how well equipped were they to rebuild their lives & worship back in Jerusalem? As we know if we read a bit farther in Ezra & from Nehemiah, what happened despite their being so well-provisioned?
8. Compare the difference between Hanani’s & Nehemiah’s response. They were both exposed to the same information (in fact Hanani got it first hand) but their responses are very different. What might be the reason for the difference? Which is the more effective reaction? Why?
9. Why is it significant that Nehemiah’s prayer begins with confession? Do you pray that way? Why/not? When you focus your heart on the Father, what do you discover about yourself? Then what?
10. The more Nehemiah prays, the more conscious he becomes of God’s faithfulness to his people. How will you use your prayer, Scripture reading, & meditational times this week to become more aware of your sinfulness, the needs & mission of the church here, and the power & provision of God to accomplish his will & work through you?

# *Living Water Fellowship*

*4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Epiphany – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2023*

*COME TO JESUS*

PRE-SERVICE MEDITATION    *WHAT LOVE, MY GOD (CITYALIGHT) - CCL Licence 384660*

**WELCOME & PRAYER:**

*GROW IN HIS GRACE*

**SONG:**        Hosanna

**BIBLE READING:**        Ezra 1:1-8

<sup>1</sup>In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>“This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:

“The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup>Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! <sup>4</sup>Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbours contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.”

<sup>5</sup>Then God stirred the hearts of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of the Lord. <sup>6</sup>And all their neighbors assisted by giving them articles of silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock. They gave them many valuable gifts in addition to all the voluntary offerings.

<sup>7</sup>King Cyrus himself brought out the articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord’s Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods. <sup>8</sup>Cyrus directed Mithredath, the treasurer of Persia, to count these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah.

**CHILDREN’S TIME:**

**BIBLE READING:**        Nehemiah 1:1-11

<sup>1</sup>These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. <sup>2</sup>Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>They said to me, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

<sup>4</sup>When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Then I said,

“O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unending love with those who love him and obey his commands, <sup>6</sup>listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! <sup>7</sup>We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.

<sup>8</sup>“Please remember what you told your servant Moses: ‘If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. <sup>9</sup>But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honoured.’

<sup>10</sup>“The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants.

<sup>11</sup>O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honouring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favourable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.”

In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer.

#### FAITH CHAT:

1. What promise have you seen God keep in your life, like Ezra did?
2. What in today’s world “brings you to tears” like Nehemiah?

**THE MESSAGE:** *BEYOND LIMITS: REIMAGINE*

**OFFERING SONG:** *How Deep the Father’s Love for Us*

#### PRAYERS:

#### THE COMMUNION:

*Preparation:*

All who are hungry & thirsty, come to the table! All who long for life abundant & eternal, come to the feast of victory over sin & death. In this meal God not only unites us to his promise to defeat sin, death & the devil, but also fulfills his plan of the ages to reunite the sin-broken universe under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

**Father, in Jesus Christ you expand the reach of your love & mercy to all people everywhere. In Jesus Christ you forgive sin & establish a new covenant between us. In Jesus Christ you call us to new life in your kingdom present now. In Jesus Christ you lead us in anticipation of the day when he will come again in power & glory.**

In this meal the risen Christ is present in bread & wine. As often as we eat this bread & drink this cup we proclaim Christ’s death until he comes again.

**Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!**

*The Words of Institution & The Lord’s Prayer:*

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, & the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

*Worship during Communion:*

VIDEO – ROCK OF AGES (Ruth Buchanan)- CCL Licence 384660

#### POST-COMMUNION BLESSING:

Come, Holy Spirit, to widen your reach among us. Expand your kingdom in our world. Confront our self-centered preoccupation & limited imagination.

***Where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of his special people?***

***You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unending love.***

***Once again you will have compassion on us.***

***You trample our sins under your feet***

***and throw them into the depths of the ocean!***

(Micah 7:18-19)

*GO IN HIS POWER*

#### THE BLESSING:

***(Name), † child of God,***

***The Father gives you the power to see yourself as He sees you:***

***beloved.***

***Amen.***

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**SONG:** *Amazing Grace (my chains are gone)*

*SHOW HIS LOVE*