

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

CHURCH IN THE FAST LANE

“Thank you for choosing to worship today. May I take your order?” Fast food restaurants have capitalized on the “get in, get fed, get out” philosophy and now it has moved into religion. Can you believe it? Drive-thru church has made its appearance for those who cannot spare enough time for a “traditional” worship service. Here is how it works: First, you pull up into the parking lot and are handed a daily Scripture and a take home sermon. Next, you will be given communion and have the opportunity to make a free will offering. Finally, you may choose to get out of your car and sing with the “informal choir” or (if you are really busy that day) you may take your special parting gift and leave. Do you think this is ridiculous? Do you think God is pleased? How long will it be before the church of our Lord participates in such? I am afraid that many Christian would already like for the church of Christ to be in the fast lane. Thus attitude is manifested by some who constantly push for worship to move faster,

Fast Sermon

Every good preacher knows that in order to be effective he must stand up, speak up, and shut up. Thus, rather than having to say something, he has something to say and his message is of the utmost importance. Even so, this does not mean that his sermon will be fast. The fact is, that some sermon subjects need more explanation than others; therefore, every sermon cannot be timed exactly the same. When Paul was preaching in Troas upon the first day of the week it is said that he was “long preaching” (Acts 20:9). It is not recorded that anyone complained about the length of his sermon, nor are we told that anyone got up and left early even though he preached until midnight. Those disciples who were gathered together wanted to be there to worship the Lord, they wanted to hear the Gospel, and they did not care that the sermon was not a fast one. Furthermore, in Ezra’s day “all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street” (Nehemiah 8:1) to hear the Law of Moses. They had no padded pews, there was no air conditioning, and not even a colorful power-point presentation upon which to gaze; but, “all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” while Ezra read from morning until midday (Nehemiah 8:3). Drive-thru Christians would have a problem sparing enough time to listen to the apostle Paul and Ezra.

Fast Singing

Time and again someone will say, “I don’t see why we have to sing three or four verses of each song. Why don’t we just sing one or two?” Once again, the idea is to worship the Lord, but do it quickly. Singing is one of the best ways to praise God (Hebrews 2:12) and He places no time restrictions upon praising Him. The Psalmist said, “From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD’S name is to be praised” (Psalm 113:3). Furthermore, sometimes it is necessary that more than one verse of a song be sung. For example, the song, *None of Self and All of Thee* would not be powerful at all if we were to only sing the first verse. In fact, it would leave us proudly saying to Jesus, “All of self and none of thee.” Thus, when the song is led, all four verses must be sung in order for the progressive message of the song to have any meaning (I.e., all of self...some of self...less of self...none of self, all of thee). Other songs such as: *What Did HE Do, I Gave My Life for Thee*, and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* also have important messages that can only be taught if all the verses are sung. Finally fast singing is not effective when applied to the invitation song. Sometimes it takes more than one or two verses for a penitent soul to make the decision to come forward and obey the Lord. How sad it would be to leave a soul almost persuaded by cutting the invitation song short! Fast singing may be popular for Drive-thru churches but it is not effective in the church of our Lord.

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

THANKSGIVING = “THANKS-LIVING”

Text: _____

I. _____ Thanksgiving

A. _____ it in _____

B. _____ it in _____

C. _____ it in _____

II. _____ Thanksgiving

A. _____ it through _____

B. _____ it through _____

III. _____ Thanksgiving

A. An _____ of _____ Thanksgiving

B. An _____ of _____ Thanksgiving

JUDAH’S READY RETURN

Text: _____

I. Cyrus’ _____

A. It was a _____ of _____

B. It was a _____ of _____

II. Zerubbabel’s _____

A. A _____ of _____

B. A _____ of _____

III. Ezra’s _____

A. _____ the Law of the Lord

B. _____ the Law of the Lord

Fast Prayer

There are at least two principles which those who lead public prayers need to know. First, public prayers should not be made to please the assembly, nor are they led to the assembly. Second, public prayers should not be led for others to hear the great eloquence with which we speak. These two facts are evident from the prayer of Jesus. He taught the world to pray by simply acknowledging and praising the Father (Matthew 6:9), submitting to His will and not our own (Matthew 6:10), and asking for our daily needs along with strength and deliverance (Matthew 6:11-14). But, someone says, “See, Jesus prayed a prayer using only 66 words, so that means we ought to make all our prayers short and fast in the assembly so we can get home.” There is some truth to this statement. The public assembly is not the place for a man to “catch up” on his praying. However, our prayers to the Father should not be cut short just because of man-made time restraints or fidgety members. In fact, the same Jesus who taught us to pray with 66 words also “continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). Thus, the length of the prayer depends upon the occasion. Drive-thru Christians may be satisfied with a 10-second “vain repetition” (Matthew 6:7) but real prayers pour from the heart (Psalm 62:8).

-Derrick Coble

EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO KNOW IN LIFE I LEARNED FROM A JIGSAW PUZZLE

1. Don’t force a fit. If something is meant to be, it will come together naturally.
2. When things aren’t going so well, take a break. Everything will look different when you return.
3. Be sure to look at the big picture. Getting hung up on the little piece leads to frustration.
4. Perseverance pays off. Every important puzzle went together bit by bit, piece by piece.
5. When one spots stops working, move to another. But be sure to come back later (see # 4).
6. The creator of the puzzle gave you the picture as a guidebook.
7. Variety is the spice of life. It’s the different colors and patterns that make the puzzle interesting.
8. Working together with friends and family makes any task fun.
9. Establish the border first. Boundaries give a sense of security and order.
10. Don’t be afraid to try different combinations. Some matches are surprising.
11. Take time often to celebrate your successes, even little ones.

THE BOOK OF RETURN

The book of Ezra continues the chronological progression of the Old Testament that began all the way back in Genesis. Thus far has been recorded the creation of the universe and man in it, the beginning of Israel and their bondage in Egypt, Israel's exodus from Egypt and eventual forty year wandering in the Sinai wilderness, their conquer and habitation of the land of Canaan promised so long ago, the prosperity of the kingdom leading up to its divided demise, and then their long awaited captivities in Assyria and Babylon. At the end of II Chronicles the southern nation of Judah who had been exiled to Babylon were then proclaimed free to return home by the now reigning Cyrus of Persia. The closing words of II Chronicles are almost word for word similar to those found in Ezra 1:1-2 where it was written, *"Now 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, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."* So now it is 536 B.C. Judah had been in Babylon for seventy years, as promised by God. However now it is time for them to go home.

If the heart of Cyrus was stirred by the Lord to release Judah, by what means might that have been accomplished? Over two hundred years before Cyrus was born, Isaiah had written of one to come that would proclaim freedom for the children of God: *"That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid"* (Isaiah 44:28). It is possible, as believed by most scholars, that Cyrus at some point read this prophecy that called him by name, and the power of God's omniscience stirred Cyrus to proclaim freedom unto the people.

However, it was in 536 B.C., seventy years after the first departure into Babylon, that the first of three groups of Jews returned to Canaan. The first group of approximately 50,000 was led back by Zerubbabel as recorded in Ezra 1-6. This group began work on the temple upon their arrival, but after laying the foundation the work laid dormant for many years. Then in Ezra 7, Artaxerxes, the successor to Cyrus, commissioned a scribe by the name of Ezra to lead another willing group back home. At this time, around 458 B.C., Ezra led some 1,750 Jews back. Then about thirteen years later, Nehemiah returned with a few more Jews, at which time the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt. As relating to the narrative of Ezra, the first two returns are recorded in addition to the temple work.

There is no doubt in most true Bible students' minds that this book is ascribed to the one whose name it bears. In fact Ezra is believed to be the author of both this book as well as I and II Chronicles. There is no substantial evidence to deny this long-standing claim, and thus Ezra is recognized as the author.

The purpose of Ezra's writing this book revolved around one main point: God's faithfulness. After God had sent His children into Babylon so many years earlier, He had sent Jeremiah with the message that they would return. *"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it"* (Jeremiah 30:1-3). Just as surely as they went in God said they would come out. Ezra wrote to prove that just as God always had been true to His word, so would He be regarding their release. And true to His word He was, because all who so desired were allowed departure to return home.

A problem that might arise from one's reading Ezra is the meager mentions of Ezra himself. Unlike other books of the Old Testament thus far written in which the author is prominently mentioned, Ezra's account is more historical than autobiographical. In fact the first sixty percent of the book's focus is on the work of a different man altogether named Zerubbabel. But Ezra did not write to inform people about his life and work, but to inform people about Israel's return and the circumstances that revolved around it.

Christ is pictured in Ezra in two distinct ways. First of all He is seen through relation. Zerubbabel, who led the first group of captives home, was the grandson of Jeconiah, and is mentioned in Matthew 1:12-13 as one through whom the Christ came incarnate. But also, Ezra's record is an account of God's fulfilling promise unto His children as part of the ongoing process of redemption coming into the world, ultimately through Christ.

Ezra is a book of great purpose and power to the student of the Bible in attempting to grasp the connection of the Bible as a complete book. Its continued history and proof of God's word aid greatly in our understanding of God's redemptive scheme.