

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
July 28, 2013

Consecrated to God

Read Ezra 8:24-36

Key verse: “And I said to them, ‘You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your ancestors’” (Ezra 8:28).—

I heard about a woman who taught pre-school children in Sunday School. The teacher’s favorite hymn to sing with her class was “Oh, the Consecrated Cross I Bear.” One Sunday, a concerned mother questioned the teacher about a song her child had learned in Sunday School. The little girl had come home singing, “Oh, the constipated, cross-eyed bear”!

Understandably, the word “consecrated” may sound foreign to three-and-four-year-olds. But it is an important concept for Christian disciples. Ezra 8:24-36 speaks to us today about the importance of *consecration* and of *stewardship*.

This passage is, of course, part of the larger story of God restoring the Jewish exiles to their Promised Land. King Artaxerxes had decreed that Ezra should lead the second group of exiles back to Jerusalem. (The first group had returned 80 years earlier, led by Zerubbabel.)

The King not only gave permission for the return led by Ezra, but he also gave the returning exiles a large gift of silver, gold, and other treasure. In addition, a freewill offering taken from the Jews in Babylon was entrusted to Ezra and his group to be used for the temple in Jerusalem.

Ezra 8:26-27 describes these combined gifts: “...six hundred fifty talents of silver, and one hundred silver vessels...and one hundred talents of gold, twenty gold bowls worth a thousand darics, and two vessels of fine polished bronze as precious as gold.”

This was a huge amount of treasure. The 650 talents of silver weighed about 25 tons, and just the 100 talents of gold would be worth some 20 million dollars today!

Ezra put 12 “leading priests” in charge of the treasure. They were responsible to see that it all made it safely to Jerusalem. Upon arrival there, all the treasure was carefully weighed and counted, and the priests were held

accountable to see that the exact amount of treasure entrusted to each of them made it to Jerusalem.

When Ezra entrusted the treasure to the priests, however, he made it clear that their job was more than an accounting transaction. Rather, they were being set apart by God—*consecrated*—for a holy purpose: “You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your ancestors” (Ezra 8:28).

Every vessel, every object, to be used in temple worship was consecrated to God. Each treasured item was holy—set apart for God and for God’s use, to be guarded carefully and protected. That’s *consecration*.

In a similar way, the stuff we own—our money and our possessions—it’s really God’s stuff! To be good stewards means taking special care of whatever stuff God has entrusted to us. And being good stewards means that we always see what God has given to us as coming from God and belonging to God. That’s *consecration* and that’s *stewardship*.

Michael Quillen shared this personal testimony: “I met my wife, Julia, at a Bible study where 30 or 40 people gathered every Friday night to sing, break into small groups, and then come together for fellowship afterwards.

“I became one of the regular musicians in the group. I played an old guitar and was beginning to think about a new one. A friend of mine in the Bible study had two nice guitars, and he lent me one. It was the nicest guitar I had ever played. I cherished it as if it were a newborn child (I was single, after all). I was careful not to bang it into things. I gently wiped down the strings and body after playing. I tenderly placed the guitar in its velvet-lined case. I worried about things such as the humidity of the room where the guitar was kept.

“I borrowed the guitar for months and was thinking of buying it. Meanwhile, Julia and I became engaged. One day, as our wedding approached, Julia said, ‘The guitar is yours. I bought it for you weeks ago as an early wedding present.’

“My first reaction was ecstasy. The most beautiful guitar I had ever played was mine. My second reaction was relief. Since the guitar was mine, I could stop babying the thing. I didn’t have to treat it so gently or clean it so carefully.

“Then Julia got me. She asked, ‘Isn’t it really God’s? Shouldn’t you take good care of it like you did when it was yours, but you didn’t think it was?’ What I had been doing without knowing it was stewardship. Stewardship is taking care of what we have as if it is on loan from someone else, because everything *is* on loan to us—from God” (as published in *PreachingToday*).

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