

-Bumper Video

1st TH1ngs F1RST title

Happy New Year! Congratulations! You have survived the year 2014! That is no small accomplishment... and here you at Redemption Church on the 1st Sunday in the year 2015.

I am very glad you are here today. I realize the Dallas Cowboys are playing a playoff game right now and I promise that I won't preach so long that you don't get to see the end of the game. I will be quick, but I want you to receive all that God has for you today.

My name is Chris Fluitt, I am the lead pastor here at Redemption Church, and like many of you, I have been thinking about the last year and how I want this year to be different... to be better.

Every new year we have thoughts of change. We call them resolutions.

SHARE YOUR RESOLUTION

Perhaps you have a resolution or goals for the new year. We would like you to share it with us. We want you to achieve your goal and make 2015 the best year you have ever lived. Please text us on our anonymous line (214-856-0550) or perhaps you would be willing to publicly share your resolution on social media. Just hashtag it #F1RST so we can find it..

It's not bad to resolve to change and to make goals for the year... but... sometimes it can feel overwhelming.

There are times when we look at our life and see more things we don't like than things we do like. Sometimes we see more weakness than strength... more wreckage than beauty.. more failure than success.

This can feel defeating and hopeless.. We are often left asking...

WHERE TO START?

The other day... check that... every day... I walk into a living room that has been hit with 2 tornados called William & Hudson. Toys everywhere (And there are way more of them since the holidays)... The couch cushions anywhere but actually on the couch... Spill-proof sippy cups that have not lived up to their name... Kids screaming, tvs & computers blaring...

I look around and wonder... Where do I even start? Is selling this house and finding another house an option?

The mess was everywhere... and the mess was at such a high level... that I although I knew SOMETHING NEEDED TO BE DONE... I didn't know where to start.

Our lives can be in such a mess that we are left asking... Where do we start? What should we clean up or change first?

Would you be honest enough to admit that there is something in your life, in your home, in yourself, in your career, in a relationship, that needs to change... LET ME SEE YOUR HANDS. ..somewhere in the landscape of your existence there is at least one thing that needs to change. C'mon hands up.

I have hope for you today. Your Bible has a lot to say about this situation. Israel was in a mess of a situation that left them asking WHERE TO START.

We need some background on this story...

The nation of Israel had a covenant relationship with God. They walked with God and he protected and provided. *SWEET DEAL* But along the way Israel stopped being in Relationship with their God... They started worshipping other god's... They no longer obeyed God... they disobeyed...

It got so bad that they no longer recognized God's presence. God felt unwanted in His own temple... so He left... and no one noticed... so God walked further to the gates of the city... no one noticed or cared... so then God left the city of Jerusalem.

As God left out one gate, a large army from Babylon stormed though the opposite gate and destroyed the city. They took all the Israelites into captivity... they burnt their homes... they tore down the city walls... they even destroyed God's home... the temple that was built by Solomon. It was considered at the time to be a wonder of the world... and now it was gone... nothing but rubble remained of the city of Jerusalem.

Most of the people of Israel were ripped from their homeland and sent into exile in a foreign land. They were slaves to the nation of Babylon.

Now King Nebuchadnezzar and the nation of Babylon were good at this sort of thing. They were conquering the globe and had destroyed many other nations and taken their citizens as slaves... They had destroyed many other cultures and burnt their temples to the ground... THERE WAS NEVER ANY COMING BACK FROM BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY.

To my knowledge no country had ever survived the rule of Babylon.

...But God had made a promise. God promised Abraham that His seed would become a mighty nation that would have no end... That all the world would be blessed by Israel.

So God sent word to the Prophet Jeremiah...

Jeremiah 29:10 This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.(NIV)

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.(NIV)

Jeremiah 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.(NIV)

The 70th year had arrived and just as God promised, King Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylon and sent every Israelite back to Israel. He sent them back with all the Gold and artifacts that had been taken from their temple. No one was left behind. God had remained faithful.

Ok, that is the background.. now let's read...

Ezra 3:1 When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem.(NIV)

After the long journey from Babylon to Israel, people settled in their towns... and then 7 months they all gathered in the capital city of their once proud nation... Jerusalem.

They were hit with a **Where to Start** moment. They stood in a city that had been destroyed and then left to decay for 70 years. Roads were grown over with trees, houses were completely ruined, the walls were all gone, the temple... You know the place where God lived was just a pile of rubble...

The entire nation stood in this broken mess of a city and had a WHERE TO START moment. Where do you think they should start? What is the 1st thing that you would rebuild?

I am talking to people today that do not have perfect lives. Perhaps I talking to someone, that when you look around your marriage you see a mess... When you look around your finances you see brokenness... When you look inside yourself you don't see anything worth salvaging... You look around and wonder – Where to start. What is the 1st thing you should rebuild?

There is a starting place. Watch what those gathered in Israel put 1st!

Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.(NIV)

They built an Altar FIRST

Out of everything they could have done... they chose to build an altar 1st.

There is amazing spiritual significance to the Altar.

Seeking a relationship with God starts at an altar. **The ALTAR is a place to acknowledge a meeting with God or a cry that such a meeting is necessary.**

Many memorable and significant spiritual experiences in Scripture happened at an altar of worship and sacrifice.

Noah marked his covenant with God by sacrificing at an altar (Genesis 8:20). Abraham's spiritual journey was signified by his altar experiences. Everywhere Abraham followed God in obedience he built an altar to the Lord. You could have followed Abraham by simply following the altars He erected. It was only in the times when Abraham disobeyed God and left the land of promise and ventured into Egypt that we have no record of him building an altar. He built no altar in Egypt. Egypt is a type and shadow of the world, rebellious against God. But Abraham, as he obeyed and followed God, always built an altar. Even when times were difficult for him and he could not clearly see the promise and plan of God...

He built an altar and renewed his relationship with God. He acknowledged his meeting with God and cried out for a renewed encounter.

Abraham's example carried into the next generations in the altar experiences of his son and grandson. The same God who had appeared to Abraham also appeared to his son, Isaac, at Beersheba and also gave him wonderful promises.

The result was this in **Genesis 26:25** - Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord.

It was not enough for Isaac to know about the altars that his father Abraham had built... Isaac needed to build his own altar. **We cannot rely on our predecessors altar, we must build our own altar to the Lord.**

Jacob, the son of Isaac, had his name changed by God. No longer Jacob which means the deceiver, his name is now Israel which means prince with God! In the midst of this transformation... Jacob builds an altar.

The spiritual vitality and life success in the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were based in their altar experiences.

On and on the stories we could share about someone seeking God at an altar...

Exodus 20:24 "Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.(NIV)

There is a visitation... there is blessing... and God's name is honored.

But now it was a new generation's opportunity to build an altar in the broken down city of Jerusalem. They built the altar first.

Have you built an altar?

Without an altar there is no atonement for sin.

Hebrews 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.(NIV)

It is on the altar that an innocent life is placed. The blood that is shed purchased the atonement.

In Genesis 22 Abraham was commanded to take his only son, Isaac and place him on an altar and to spill his blood. When Abraham's only son was on that altar... as Abraham lifted up the knife that would take Isaac's life... GOD STOPPED HIM. God provided his own sacrifice... God provided His own son... Jesus Christ.

The altar points us to Calvary... where the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world was slain. The cross of Christ was the greatest altar ever... Here is why...

Hebrews 10:4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.(NIV)

Hebrews 10:5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world..

The sacrifice of bulls and goats merely pushed back the sin... but watch what the sacrifice of Jesus provides..

Hebrews 10:10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.(NIV)

Hebrews 10:11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.(NIV)

Hebrews 10:12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.(NIV)

Not only are you supposed to build an altar... through Christ you are supposed to be like Isaac and allow yourself to be placed on the altar.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.(NIV)

Things that get placed on the altar die.. so this sounds bad.. but through Christ this does not end in death.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.(NIV)

Crucified yet alive! On an altar of death yet NEVER MORE ALIVE. Only through Christ.

Building an altar doesn't mean you are going to die. It means you are going to live!

Jerusalem built an altar 1st! I have told you how the altar is spiritually significant in having relationship with God. I have told you about the atonement for sin that happens with an altar.

I have one more reason why they built the altar first...

Altars are easy to build

You build an altar first... because there is spiritual power there... but also they are easy to build and can be built quickly.

Altars could be complex... They could be bronze which would take some work... But they could be stone worked and carved.. again that would be some work... or they could actually be even simpler than that.

The altar could just be an elevated platform... like a pile of rocks... or a raised mound of dirt.

How quick could they build this altar? Anyone have a shovel? Any carpenters nearby who could basically build a simple table?

Had they chosen to build the walls of the city first... that would have taken teams of people working for months... for years. Had they chosen to build their homes it would taken longer and been self serving. They could have tried to finish the temple before the altar...

As you look around your life you will tempted to build other things...

Your Job

Your Relationships

Your Health

Your Habits... bad habits

I can't promise that you can walk out of here free from an addiction you have fed for the last decade... But I can promise you that you can build an altar RIGHT NOW and have direct access to God.

I can't promise you that your relationship that has suffered disrepair for far too long is going to be instantly healed... But I can promise you a visitation from God that will bring blessing and will honor His name.

Does anyone want to build an altar today?

The truth is this... **What good is a _____ with out an altar?**

What good is a completed Jerusalem... without an altar..

What good is a completed temple without an altar...

What good is a new house and money in the bank without an altar...

The Altar works all by itself. You don't have to have a completed perfect city for the altar to be effective. You don't have to have Solomon's temple replicated in order to have the meeting place called an altar.

Change your priority list this year. Build an altar first!

Have you ever built an altar? **The ALTAR is a place to acknowledge a meeting with God or a cry that such a meeting is necessary.**

Has your spouse ever witnessed you building an altar? Your kids?

Redemption Church... we need to build an altar.

Linus Story/prayer

We do 3 things every time we come together.. We worship, We receive the word, and we build an altar...

MUSICIAN