

Ezra chapter 7. Ezra chapter 7. Now last week we finished by looking at Ezra chapter 6. And as Ezra chapter 6 came to a conclusion, we saw that God's people were full of joy. And the reason God's people were full of joy was because of God's worship, God's redemption, and God's sovereignty. Perhaps you will recall that they were joyful ultimately not because of their circumstances, but because of who God is and because they were getting to worship him and they were getting to acknowledge the redemption that they had. because of God and they were being acknowledging his sovereignty, his lordship over all that happens in life. And this brought them great joy. But as you come to chapter seven, it begins with these three little words, now after this.

Now what might be easy to miss as you go from the end of chapter six to the beginning of chapter seven, is that there's actually about a 60 year gap between the end of chapter six and the beginning of chapter 7. Lots of things, of course, happened during those 60 years. God did not cease working during those 60 years. For example, the book of Esther took place during that 60-year time period.

But God wants us to move forward in the book of Ezra to meet Ezra himself. And so when you come to chapter 7, you're actually introduced for the first time in the book to the man Ezra himself, the actual person after whom this book gets its name, the book of Ezra. You meet him for the first time here in chapter 7. And as we begin to look at this chapter tonight, we want to ask the question, who is Ezra? Who is he? Why is he significant? Why is he an important person?

And we'll consider that together in just a few moments. But before we read God's word tonight, let us pray and ask him to help. We beseech you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because the truth is we can't rightly understand your word apart from your spirit.

God, there are scholars who can quote many portions of the Bible, even just people, maybe who don't have an academic training, who can quote many portions of the Bible. but they don't know Jesus. And God, we don't want to be that way. We want to be those who receive the Word of God as what it really is, the Word of God, the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would receive it, that we would love it, that we'd store it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives. And this is something that we need you to grant us. So grant us that this night, that as we look at Ezra 7, we might understand it We might love what you teach us, and you might help us by your power to live in accordance with what we learn. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. We come tonight to Ezra chapter 7, verses 1 through 28, the entirety of the chapter. This is the word of God.

Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra, the son of Sariah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shalom, son of Zadok, son of Ahetub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Miriath, son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abushua, son of Phineas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, the chief priest. This Ezra went up from Babylonia.

He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. And the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. And there went up also to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel. and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the temple servants. And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For on the first day of the first month, he began to go up from Babylonia. And on the first day of the fifth month, he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him.

For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven. Peace.

And now I make a decree that any one of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who freely offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah in Jerusalem. according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem. With all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem. With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem. Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.

And I, Artaxerxes, the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province beyond the river. Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cores of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants or other servants of this house of God. And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province beyond the river, all such as know the laws of your God.

And those who do not know them, you shall teach. Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment. Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me. sends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless now the proclamation of it to our lives.

As we come to our text this evening, we want to consider this question, who is Ezra? As we try to unpack this a bit, we're going to do so underneath two headings. First, we're going to consider his resume. And second, we're going to consider his task. So we're going to consider tonight, first, Ezra's resume, and second, Ezra's task. So first, Ezra's resume. Well, Ezra is immediately set forth in the first five verses of Ezra chapter 7. as being significant.

And he's set forth as being significant because his genealogy goes right back to Aaron, the chief priest. Now this is, of course, Aaron, the brother of Moses, the Aaron who helped to bring the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land.

That had happened about 1,000 years prior to this, and yet you see that God is still being faithful to these people. God had not forgotten Aaron. God had not forgotten the children of Aaron. Not of all of the children of Aaron were godly, but God was being faithful and he's now raising up about 1,000 years later this man named Ezra.

It's even suggested by some that Ezra's being tied back to Aaron may suggest that you should think of Ezra as being something like a second Exodus. Just as God had raised up Aaron and Moses to help lead God's people out of Egyptian slavery into the promised land, so about a thousand years later God is raising up Ezra, one of Aaron's descendants, to help lead some of the remaining Jewish people who were in Babylon back from Babylon into the Promised Land.

Now, whether that is a connection you ought to make or not, it is clear that in any case, the fact that his lineage goes back to Aaron is valuable, that is significant. It's significant because it means that he is a legitimate priest, and he is a Levite. He's allowed to serve in this role as a priest because he is a priest after the order of Aaron, a Levite.

But being born a Levite did not automatically mean that Ezra would grow up to be a godly adult. Plenty of times the Bible tells you stories about people who grow up even in the family of priests who do not end up being godly adults. It's not automatic. Just because he had this great lineage did not guarantee that he would grow up to be a godly adult, that he would be a Christian, that he would be converted.

For example, you read about Eli's sons in 1 Samuel. Eli was a priest in 1 Samuel, and when his sons are introduced in the book of 1 Samuel, this is how his sons are introduced. Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. How would you like that for an introduction to your children? Now, the sons of fill-in-the-blank were worthless men. That's how Eli's own children, a priest, are introduced. Hophni and Phinehas proved themselves to be worthless men.

And just a few chapters later, you actually see, sadly, the same sort of thing in the life of Samuel. Samuel, the prophet and judge, it is said of his children that they turned aside after gain. So just because Ezra was born into this great heritage, this great lineage, did not mean that he would automatically grow up to be a godly man. Well, what this means for you, as you consider your own children or your grandchildren, is that you must encourage them to seek the Lord for themselves.

You, by God's grace, have in large measure, I understand, been faithful parents. You all have taken your children to church. And those who are still bringing their children to church, you're taking your children to church. You've read the Bible with them. You've prayed for them. You've tried to love Jesus in front of them. But you can't raise your children from the dead. They must seek the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves. Your diligent efforts are good. This lineage which you have, this heritage that you have raised them in is good. But they must come to know the Lord themselves.

And that's actually what you see Ezra doing. Here in our text we read in verse 6 he is described as a scribe skilled in the law. In verse 10 we read of him that he had a heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. So Ezra did not just wake up one day as an adult and he was zapped to being a godly man.

He was a man who sought the Lord for himself. He did not rely upon his heritage as some sort of automatic, automatic sort of godly producing thing in his life, as if he didn't need to pour forth his effort and seek the Lord himself. And so similarly, for your children, for your grandchildren, They need to be encouraged to seek the Lord for themselves as you bring them to church. Are you encouraged in the ways of the Lord? They also must be praying to the Lord.

And you can begin. Arthur, you can begin to seek the Lord even as a little boy. You don't have to wait until you're a grown man. And I would say that to any of your grandchildren. They don't have to wait until they're grown and old to begin to seek the Lord. They can seek the Lord even as little children. They can be encouraged to pray to their Heavenly Father. to give thanks to their Heavenly Father for the good things that He gives them. They can begin, even as little boys and little girls, to ask God for forgiveness when they sin against Him.

You know, it's fascinating when you consider the life of King Josiah in the Old Testament. Maybe you remember King Josiah. He's maybe the godliest king in all of the Old Testament. If not the godliest, certainly one of the godliest. But what's so striking about him is when he's introduced in the Bible, you read that when he was eight years old, he began to seek God. You see, he was just a little boy, a young man. And when he grew up to be this exceedingly godly king, that was the result of him being a faithful little boy who was seeking the Lord even as a young, young person.

But what about you here this evening? You're not perhaps a little boy or a little girl anymore, perhaps grown. Have you ceased to seek the Lord? You know, if you look in my Bible, in the margins next to that introduction to Josiah, I have written, are you being outdone by an eight-year-old? And that's a good question to ask yourself. In all sincerity, are you being outdone by an eight-year-old? Josiah was eight years old and he was seeking the Lord.

Perhaps you sought the Lord and you know the Lord by God's grace, but It's a little bit hard to stay in the disciplines of the means of grace. You're growing weary. Well, seek the Lord. Keep seeking the Lord. Don't be outdone by an eight-year-old. See that as a good challenge. Seek him in your older age or in your younger age. At whatever stage you are, you need to be seeking the Lord. But why was Ezra so godly? I mean, was it merely his lineage and his diligence? No, that's not ultimately why he was so godly. Not to off-put those things and the value of those things, but ultimately he was so godly because of the grace of God.

Because you read in verse 6, in verse 9, in verse 28, and in chapter 8, you see this three more times. This phrase, or a similar phrase, the hand of the Lord his God was on him. The hand of the Lord his God was on him. In total, it's six times, three times in chapter seven, three times in chapter eight. And what this reminds us of is the fact that it was God who was ultimately working in little Ezra's life or big Ezra as he's getting older. It's God who is working in him. It was God who is making him the man that he was becoming.

And so the best upbringing in the world and the most diligence in the world, all it can produce at best is a Pharisee. Somebody who has the outside all cleaned up, but a heart that doesn't love Jesus. What man needs is to be born again. They need to be made a Christian. They need to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so while for our children and our grandchildren, we do pray with all earnestness, I suspect, for diligence. We want them to love Jesus and we want them to be in the word and we want them to really take seriously the local church and fill in the blank all those good things that you desire. You know, I hope, that God is the one who must raise them from the dead. It's like we saw in the passage that Chad Graber read for us in the prayer meeting.

It was God who had to get rid of that spirit in the life of that woman who came to him and said, my daughter has an unclean spirit. She couldn't ultimately rid her daughter of the unclean spirit. Her daughter couldn't rid herself of the unclean spirit. But they came to the one who could.

And so as you consider your children and your grandchildren, we bless the Lord for the heritage that y'all, I do, that y'all have set forth for them. But as good as that heritage and lineage is, as good as their diligence may be, we know that what they really need and what we must pray for for them is that they would themselves know the Jesus of the scriptures and love him, be raised from the dead and walk in his ways.

Let's zero in for a moment considering again still his resume on verse 10. What a profound verse this is that describes Ezra. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. You see this great trifecta here.

He studied the Bible, he lived the Bible, and he taught the Bible. Studied, lived, and taught. It's not as though he simply studied it and then went and lived however he wanted. Nor, as can actually so often happen, did he just try to go do a bunch of really good things. without considering whether or not those things were good according to the word of God. That happens a lot, doesn't it?

People have this sort of longing in their heart to go out and serve and do, and they're sincere, but they're sincerely wrong because they often end up serving and doing all sorts of things, whether it's their intention or not, that are actually not good. They're not according to God's word. And so they support institutions or movements that are evil. Even if their own desires are to try to do something that's good, it's not being checked against the authoritative Word of God. And so Ezra wasn't like that.

If he went out and tried to do, he made sure the doing that he did was in accordance with the Word of God, which was his authority. And then when he taught the Word of God, he didn't just teach ideas that he had learned from books. He did do that, but he taught things that he had actually come to know. He knew the God about whom he spoke. He didn't just teach ideas that he had learned, but experiences that had affirmed and confirmed those ideas that were true according to the Word of God. He knew God. He loved the Bible, he taught the Bible, and he lived the Bible.

And that's a model for everyone in this room here. If you know Jesus Christ, first know Christ. That's the most important. Repent, know Jesus Christ. But should you all know Christ, there is a model here for your life. Study the Bible. Live the Bible. Teach the Bible.

Now that's going to look different in your different ages and stages of life, your different spheres of influence, but that's a good model for any Christian. And I really think it matters. It doesn't even really matter if you're a little person. If you're a young person, you can already begin to teach the Bible in the way that you live and in the things that you say. However old you are, whatever stage you are, strive to implement this great example.

But we also want to see, secondly, his task. We see a task here in the text. Ezra's task. In verses 7 through 9, you see that Ezra and his entourage begin to move from Babylonia all the way back to the Promised Land in Jerusalem. It took them about four months. It's about a 900-mile journey. But he didn't just travel with a company of people. He traveled with a letter in his hands.

And that letter was a letter from King Artaxerxes of Persia. The king of Persia, the mighty empire of that day, had given to Ezra the priest and scribe this letter to carry to Jerusalem. And in this letter that Artaxerxes gave to Ezra, there were several big tasks that he gives to Ezra. Ezra here in this letter contains what I want you to do when you get to Jerusalem. And let's consider a few of those things that Ezra was commissioned to do by Artaxerxes, king of Persia. Now verses 11 through 20, we learn that this letter tells Ezra that not only does he get to go back to Jerusalem, but anyone else who wants to go back to Jerusalem is welcome to join him.

Additionally, he tells Ezra that, when you get there, I'm commissioning you to diagnose the spiritual health of the people according to the law of God. He is to go and get a sense of how the people of Jerusalem are living in accordance with the law of God.

And then he tells him, this one other thing I want you to do, and that is this, I'm going to give you a lot of money. I'm going to give you a bunch of money and my seven counselors are going to give you a bunch of money. And with that money, Ezra, I want you to buy a bunch of animals that you can offer to the Lord in the house of Jerusalem when you arrive. And in addition, if you realize that you don't have enough animals or you need more money, you can go get more money from the king's treasury.

Then in verses 21 and through 24, Artaxerxes decrees that the treasurers who live in the land beyond the river, that is in the Jerusalem region, that the treasurers are to do whatever Ezra asks them to do. And all the people who are associated with the house of the Lord, the priests, the gatekeepers, the singers, they're tax exempt.

Verses 25 and 26 are Xerxes' decrees that Ezra must appoint magistrates and judges in Jerusalem who know and obey the Word of God. And those who do not know it and do not obey it, he is to make sure they are taught. He is to teach them. And all who do not obey the Word of God, they are to be disciplined in accordance with their disobedience.

Well, you can imagine Ezra receiving this great task could have easily let it get to his head. He could have become prideful. He's been given a ton of authority. He's been given a lot of power. And it could have been tempting for Ezra to think to himself, looky here, I've studied the word of God harder than anyone else. I've been more faithful at

obeying the word of God than anyone else. I've been teaching the word of God more faithfully than anyone else. I deserve all this power. I've earned it.

And such a temptation is one that can creep in when God blesses his people. Hosea 4, 7 has struck me for many years now. The more they increased, finish the sentence, the more they increased, the more they sinned against me. The more God gave to his people, the more God's people disobeyed him. That's essentially what Hosea 4, 7 says. And that sort of thinking can easily happen in the lives of God's people. Ezra could have started to think that way. I've got all of this because I've worked so hard. I shared in the prayer meeting on Friday morning with the men's prayer breakfast, this story from 2 Chronicles with King Uzziah. We read this about King Uzziah.

His fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud to his own destruction. You see, when King Uzziah had grown strong, he grew prideful. He grew self-reliant. He began to think that he was something when he was nothing. He began to think that the power that he had acquired in this life was a result of his own abilities, his own intellect, his own skills.

And this can happen easily in your life too. You acquire wealth and you might think to yourself, I deserve this. I've earned this. Or you might acquire a victory in some battle against sin. And then what are you tempted to do? Let down your guard because after all you've beat that sin. You don't need to keep fighting it, do you? That's what the evil one wants you to think. And so you let down your guard, you go strong and in your strength you grow prideful and so you fall. But such was not the case with Ezra.

You see throughout this narrative that he is always giving credit to whom credit is due. Whether the victory was big or small, the success was big or small, Ezra is constantly giving credit to God. You see this in verse 6, why did the king grant him this grand decree? According to verse 6, it was this fact, the hand of the Lord his God was on him. You can think of verse 9, why did Ezra and company safely make it to Jerusalem as they're traveling? Well, according to verse 9, it is, for the good hand of his God was on him. And then in verse 28, after the long stretch of Artaxerxes' letter, in verse 28, we read Ezra say this, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me. Ezra is constantly giving credit in his life to God for the success that he experiences.

I wonder, how is it in your life? In your life, are you giving credit to God for whatever even seemingly small victories or progress you might see, whether it be physically, whether it be financially, whether it be spiritually? You're increasing in your love for the Lord ever so slightly. You're being a slightly more faithful husband or wife or child. Are you giving credit to God? Are you thanking him for the growth that you do see in whatever area, whether materially or physically or spiritually?

One particular area in which it is easy to fail to give God credit is in the answering of your prayers. And I know if you're anything like this person, myself, you know this to be true. You pray for something, God answers that prayer, and then you forget to thank him for answering the thing, for answering the prayer. He answers it, you pray for it, he answers it, and then you don't give him thanks.

This is what happened even to Hezekiah, who was generally a remarkably godly man, Hezekiah, the king of Judah. In 2 Chronicles 32, we read this of King Hezekiah. In those days, Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of

death. So what does somebody do when they're sick and at their point of death? They pray. That's what Hezekiah did. And he prayed to the Lord. And what did the Lord do? He was very gracious. He answered him and gave him a sign. So Hezekiah is sick. He prays. God answers his prayer. What happens next?

But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him. What does that mean? He failed to bless God for answering his prayer. He failed to give God thanks, for his heart was proud. Therefore, wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. Hezekiah did not bless the Lord and thank him for answering his prayers. He acted like one of the nine lepers in the story that you read about in Luke 17, where 10 lepers come to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ heals all 10 lepers. and only one leper comes back to tell him thank you.

That's the way King Hezekiah acted. But what are you to do if you see this evening that thankless, prideful heart in yourself? What are you to do? Well, the story of Hezekiah tells you what to do. Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, but he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah." You humble yourself. You repent. Own your sin. Call it what it is. If you're thankless and you see that, call it out before the Lord. Acknowledge it. Ask him for forgiveness.

He is a forgiving God. He loves to forgive us, to sanctify us, But where you see thanklessness in your heart, call it out, repent, and look to Jesus Christ. You know, God is so good to us, but are we in the habit of thanking him for his goodness to us?

Every day he keeps you from 10,000 sins you don't even know about. Think about that. Every day you are kept from utterly destroying your soul. In addition to that, He does keep you from a tremendous number of calamities and earthly miseries that we deserve. You deserve a miserable life, and God has been pleased to grant you one with a lot less miseries than we deserve. And so, you should be thankful. You should be a thankful person as a Christian because God's given you so much you should be cultivating a heart of thanksgiving according to this text.

This is what Ezra is doing. He's always being thankful because he's giving credit to God. You see that most clearly in those final two verses. Blessed be the Lord the God of our fathers who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king. He knew it was God. He thanks God for what he did in the heart of the king to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, he says, I was strengthened, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me." So he is constantly being thankful.

But tonight as we consider who is Ezra, we do see his resume, and we see his task. But one thing that shines through very clearly in the life of Ezra is that he understood that he owed God everything because God was the one who did everything for him. If you went to Ezra and you saw this remarkable example, because surely he was a remarkable man if you knew him. If you went to him and you said, Ezra, you've done so much for God. How do you think Ezra would respond? Ezra would say no. It's God who has done so much for me.

And you see, that's what Mr. Bill was getting at, I think, in a prayer he prayed earlier today in the prayer meeting when he was quoting the Apostle Paul. I am what I am because of the grace of God. Ezra understood that. It's so

obvious because he's constantly giving credit to God. He obviously understood that he did not deserve to be a man of God. He knew that he deserved punishment for his sins, and he's amazed, really, with how good God is being to him in his life. He understands something of the grace of God and he's looking to the promised Messiah to come. He knows that he deserves punishment and yet God is treating him graciously. And that's something that every Christian has to understand at some level. That you deserve God's wrath and yet he has shown you his mercy because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so you say to yourself, like Ezra would have surely said, I could never repay God. I could never do too much for him. He has done everything for me. And you live out of that fact that God has saved you and redeemed you and given you eternal life. And so now, what can you ever do that begins to really pay him back?

Strive to live faithfully, just like Ezra, who knew that he had a God who saved him. Let us pray. Almighty God, we do come before you with gratitude and thanksgiving because Jesus, your son, has done for us that which we couldn't do for ourselves. We praise you with thanksgiving for this example insofar as it is a good model for us to think about for our own lives that we would be a thankful people, that we would be a people who give you gratitude and praise for all you do for us. But we praise you not ultimately for the life of Ezra, a godly man for whom we are thankful. We praise you ultimately for the God who would save a man who couldn't save himself like Ezra.

Lord God, men and women like us who know that there is no life in ourselves, we have been redeemed and bought by Jesus's blood. And so we pray that we would give you our all because you have given all that we need to us. All for your glory, we pray that we would live in Jesus's name. Amen.