

COMING HOME

A STUDY OF EZRA



EZRA: Refusal and Resistance

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Ezra 4: 1-5

Good morning, Doxa. We are going to be reading scripture from the book of Ezra, chapter four verses one to five. Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you for, we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria who brought us here." But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses in Israel said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

All right. Good morning, everyone. Yes! Such a good reception. Hey, uh, real quick, Happy Father's Day to everyone. Good to see you all. Hey, I wanted to give a special shout out to pastor Paul Dean. Paul, where you at? You in here, Paul? There he is. Hey Paul. Pastor Paul-those of you that don't know Paul, he's spoken at Doxa before. He is a pastor at Soma Eastside over in Issaquah, so we're always glad to have sort of the fathers in the faith come and join us, hang out and be a part of what we're doing. So we're thankful for you, buddy. Thank you so much for being here. Yeah, absolutely. And he came on Father's Day no less, which is amazing. It's amazing for me.

Happy Father's Day to all of you. Hey, listen. Father's Day-there's a tension with a day like this for all of us, right? For those of you that are fathers, praise God. It's awesome. I'm so happy that you guys are all fathers. I'm a father of probably four too many children. I have four and I'm thankful that I get to do that

and get to love them. And I know that there is a tension here because so many of us you've either had poor dads or maybe have an estranged relationship with our father or have a strange relationship with our kids or one of those things. Or you maybe can't have kids. We want to recognize that tension. That's a difficult spot to be in. We love you. We're thankful for all of you, whatever season you find yourselves in. But I will say for being a father, it is a tough space to be a father today, particularly when fatherhood is not-even though it is quite a problem and it has caused a lot of problems-it's not recognized as being a solution. And so we do need to step up as fathers and be good men. But I just want to say, I want to encourage you in it. It's hard. It's a hard walk, but we have a good heavenly father that loves us and we can always look to him as our example okay?

Could you join me? Can I pray over all of our fathers, our future fathers, or would be fathers? Can I do that? Okay. Well Lord, I'm so thankful that in my own story, you've showed yourself as a great father, because I would have no idea how to raise my children. You've showed yourself as a wonderful example and you've commissioned many of us to oversee a family, to steward a wife and to raise children. And it is a hard walk. And so Lord God, I pray for your power and your boldness over them and your excitement and also your sensitivity as fathers to continue to fight through what opposition may lie ahead for a culture like this and fatherhood. We love you. We're thankful for you and ask that we can also have some good fun. So we pray for some fun as well in our father's hearts, in Jesus' name, Amen.

All right. All right. If you have a Bible, please open up to Ezra chapter four. If you have an app, I guess you can open your app and look at Ezra chapter four. We typically read out of the English Standard Version. If you're new and books like this, oftentimes can be incredibly nuanced or complicated. So if you weren't here last week, or you just need to refresher, let's get you caught up to where we're at in a story in an obscure Old Testament book like Ezra. Now, as we go through books like this, it's helpful to know that the entire Bible is one story from Genesis to Revelation, 37 Old Testament books, 29 New Testament books. It is one long story about God fixing the broken relationship between him and between humanity and eventually restoring the earth, the place that we all live to a place without loss or brokenness or difficulty.

Okay. So where is Ezra at in that story? Glad you asked. Early on in history, humanity lived in a great relationship with God. Okay. Perfect relationship. Not like one we have today. They knew God. They were always in his presence. They would never die. Everything was perfect. Okay, perfect. And then humanity, rebels. They get a little ahead of themselves and they decide they want to define good evil for themselves. They rebel and they go haywire, but God, he's a loving God. He wants to fix the broken relationship between him and between humanity. He wants to come after them because he loves them and he cares for them. And he wants to bring this wonderful restoration process through humanity, through this place called Jerusalem to the people of Israel. And he wants to bring a heavenly king to help fix that relationship.

Now this heavenly king Jesus, right, he was a kingly Messiah, and he would come through this people, right? He would come absolutely through this people. And the way he would reunite the world was to die for humanity's, sin. He wanted to destroy sins power over all humanity. So Israel was really excited that they were going to have this Messiah, but they got ahead of themselves. They had multiple Kings and all of the Kings were sinners and many of them were downright evil. They led Israel into debauchery. So God in his righteous judgment says, I've got to scatter these people. I'm going to scatter

Israel out of the place I was going to bring this Messiah. And so they're scattered throughout foreign lands. But judgment is never the final word for God's people. And so he says, I'm going to call them back out of exile after several decades. And I want to bring them back to the place to rebuild my city so I can bring the Messiah through. Okay. And that's where we find ourselves in the book of Ezra.

Now so far in Ezra we've seen Israel freed from exile. We've seen them return to Jerusalem and we've seen them begin the process of rebuilding that temple. Today, Ezra four-just a notoriously complex chapter, by the way, just notoriously complex. Just strap your helmet on. Okay. This is just crazy. We find Israel knee deep in conflict with foreign people in the land while they are trying to do their work. Now they're in conflict. They're trying to do God's work. They're trying to rebuild the temple and all of a sudden opposition shows itself. And I think, here's the question we ask after reading Ezra, chapter four, why is following God's call on our lives so freaking hard. It is hard. Have you ever tried to follow God's will for your life? Have you ever tried to do that? Have you ever asked, or have you ever moved when God asked you to move or, you know, stay pure before marriage or marry the right person? How difficult is that? You ever share the gospel with anybody or be consistent in your community? How'd that go? Just perfect? No opposition? No resistance at all?

Of course not, right? No matter what a person does as they try to follow Jesus-following Jesus always meets opposition. And this is the story of Ezra chapter four. Now they're trying to be obedient. They're trying to get this temple rebuilt and then opposition comes. So here's the lesson of the chapter. God's people will always find opposition when doing God's work. Ezra chapter four is the story of people that are trying to be faithful and yet the complex world that they live in creates resistance and the outcomes of our conflicts and opposition ends up murky. Okay. Now the fact is that people of God, when doing God's work, they've actually faced opposition at every step of the way from the beginning, Adam and Eve, we just talked about their folly, all the way until now. And so for us today, you have to know this.

If you try to live a godly life, you're going to meet resistance. That's part of the journey. But this doesn't have to be a bummer of a conclusion. Okay? It doesn't. Opposition is not the end of the story of God's people. How we respond to that opposition though will determine the outcome of our stories-how we respond to opposition. So, so Ezra four teaches us three principles about dealing with opposition, particularly in what feels like an increasingly confusing and difficult world to live in. Am I the only one that feels that way? I didn't think so. Okay. What's the first thing we can learn about opposition? Let's go to the text, verse one of chapter four. "Now, when the adversaries (that's scary) of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, let us build with you for, we worship your God as you do. And we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here." Okay? So, our bud Zerubbabel, he's still here, and the rest of the people they're building this temple and some people from the land that aren't part of their crew, they approach them and say, can we build the temple with you? Now, that seems like a totally reasonable request, right? Hey, it looks like you need some help. Can we help? How does Israel respond? Verse three, but Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses in Israel said to them, you have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God. But we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel as king Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us. What jerks! What jerks! I mean, that's so rude. They were just being nice, right? They were just saying, hey man, it looks like things are not going great. I could give you a glass of lemonade. I would love to jump on the line and help you. And they even say, hey, let us build with you. We worship the same God as you do. I mean, what arrogance of Israel,

like they didn't let other people play. How intolerant. How exclusive. How bigoted. They're bigots. Should go to Twitter and handle this. Have them canceled. But see this is where discernment comes in when meeting opposition. Context is everything.

Now I'm about to go down a little bit of a rabbit trail because the names are complicated, but just bear with me. It's funny they mention this guy Esarhaddon the king of Assyria. It's a foreign land. We'll probably never hear about this guy ever again. But his name does show up elsewhere in the Bible. Second King's chapter 17. There he's mentioned. Now this is what's called a hyperlink. The Bible is giving us a little link we can click on and go back to a different part of the Bible to understand its connectivity. Second King's 17 actually teaches us a little more about the context of the people they're dealing with. Okay. Let's look at verse 24 in Second Kings. Now check this out. "And the king of Assyria (there he is) brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities." So they were placed in the holy land. These other people or the Israel was scattered about and these foreign people from foreign lands were sent into this land.

Now, a little context on this...because they moved into the holy land, God wasn't happy. And all of a sudden his sovereign protection was not over that place. There was no iron dome over Jerusalem in this day, right? The Holy Spirit-it wasn't there. So all of a sudden lions came and they started eating people. There was just a run of lions eating people in this region. I'm telling you, this is what happened. And so they got a little bit worried. So they're like, who was the God of this place again? Oh, Yahweh? Let's go find some Israelites. Let's get a priest. Let's get them in here and teach us that stuff so we can stop getting eaten by lions. So they did. They went and found an Israelite priest. They brought him in. They started coaching him up. They're like, okay, this is how we do it. Great. We don't want to die anymore. So let's pick up in verse 32. How does it keep going? So those people, "they also feared the Lord and appointed from among themselves, all sorts of priests of the high places who sacrificed for them in shrines in high places. So they feared the Lord but also serve their own gods after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away." Well, hold on a second. "Now to this day, they do according to their former manner." Well, they haven't changed at all. "They do not fear the Lord and they do not follow his statutes or rules or the law or the commandment that the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel." Okay. Hmm.

So these people said they worship your God as you do, but that's not true, is it? It's not true. We just read, in fact, the 10 commandments say there is one God, not many. And you were to worship only that one God. Are they doing that? No. So Israel, they stand firm believing that God has asked them to remain holy in a context that is very much the opposite. And so they say, no, you cannot build with us. You absolutely can't. And so in order to rebuild Jerusalem and to rebuild themselves as a people, remember, they're trying to rekindle all of this, they have to remain distinct from the land. They've got to stay, stay true to what God has called them to. And guess what? That's what got them in exile in the first place. They're trying to avoid that same mistake. Right? So this is what we learn about our first understanding of how to deal with opposition. It's this, when opposition comes, you've got to learn when to say yes and when to say no. In order to continue to live a godly life, you will have to say no to things that don't honor God. Okay. You will have to say no to things that don't honor God. In order to continue to live this godly life, you've got to be able to say no. Now listen, this isn't always easy, right? Because after all, there's a tension of wanting to be kind and loving to people, to be responsive, and for them to feel you emotionally, but also wanting to hold fast to the tension of worshiping Jesus, you want

to pursue holiness? Like I want to share Jesus, but I don't want to look like a jerk either. You know what I mean? I don't want to look like a jerk.

Take the scenario in Ezra four for example, right? These people said again, we worship your God as you do. Right? But that's not true. They were polytheistic. They were commingling their cultural ideals and desires with religions to create some sort of worldview cocktail that was to their own liking. That's what they were doing. Okay. They put them, Israel, in a wildly awkward position. See, we believe the same God, right? You should let us build, right? But Zerubbabel he held firm and his people, and they said, sorry, you do not. I'm sorry, if you're here and you're a Christian, you've said yes to Jesus. That necessarily means you have to say no to other things that don't align. Okay. That means you have to do that. For example, you easily say, if you're a Christian, you say, I say no to being another religion, right? I say no to becoming addicted to drugs. And I say no to stealing money at my company. You say no to those things. Right. Well, let's be honest. Those are easy decisions. I mean, obviously you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't obviously steal money from your company. It makes sense.

Well what about some situations where let's say the cultural lines are a little more blurry, let's say where the stakes are a bit higher, even socially. How about those situations. Now today people have also concocted worldview cocktails. Even many of us, we've concocted these cocktails. We take the sexual ethics of the day. We take the political ideologies and then we take the bits and pieces of Judeo-Christian worldview and we sort of, you know, shake it up in that little metal thing. And then we pour for ourselves a drink that we're excited about. And that's how we form our worldview. And it's very difficult.

The month of June, every year is pride month. Are you familiar? I think you're probably familiar, right? Now what is pride month? Right? Pride month is a celebration of the freedom of sexual expression and identity. Okay. That's what it is. And there's celebrations. There are parades. It is the cause of a company or business that they'll take that cause up. You'll see many logos go to the rainbow at this time of the year. All these different things are happening and there's this big cocktail going on of these different celebrations. And it's essentially the lifting up of sexual identity. It is rebelling against the binary of man and woman and upholding freedom to define for ourselves what we find sexually good or identity good. So we all encounter people that believe this. And hey, let me just say real quick, if you are here and you find yourself a part of the LGBTQIA+ community-I love you. I think Doxa loves you as well. It is our position that no matter where you find yourselves today, that you can walk into a place like this. You can hear the preached word of God. And it doesn't matter what background, worldview, religion you are part of you are welcome to be a part of this community. So I just want to say that up front. We're thankful for you. If you're here. If you have family and friends like I do that are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, you may feel a specific way about this time of year as well. And I want to say, we welcome you to be a part of this community as well at a church. That being said, this is a different worldview and belief than the Orthodox Christian position like Doxa holds. And so there's this balance, there's this tension. We encounter people, maybe some in here who don't believe in Jesus and hold these things.

Friends, if you are Christian, how do you respond to them? How do you respond? Or there may be a different type of person, of people that believe they believe in the Orthodox Jesus and also hold the position of sexual freedom and identity outside of heterosexual monogamous marriage. Well, how do you answer a question from that person if you're here. Now they might present you with a question.

Maybe some of you might present a question like, will you do this? Will you support that? How do you respond? Now just to be clear, Doxa believes and orthodox traditional Christianity believes that all sex outside of heterosexual monogamous marriage we call sin. It misses the mark. It does not lead to the flourishing of humanity. Now that includes things like things like being gay. Of course it includes that, but it also includes things like extramarital affairs, sex before marriage—all things that maybe people who are orthodox in their beliefs in terms of binaries might still be okay with.

The bar for sexual ethic and identity is incredibly high in Christianity. Because Christianity says we don't get our identity from our sexuality. We get it from Jesus. So it's very difficult to balance that. But I think it's important that you understand where we come from in that perspective. But for those of you that find yourself, I call myself a Christian, I believe marriage is between a man and a woman who are both covenanted together to not get divorced, to love one another continually, if you believe that, how do you answer questions like this? When do you determine when you say yes and no? Well, when someone comes up to you at your gym or your friend circle or maybe your cultural-political you know, affinity groups, like what do you say?

I want to give you a paradigm: recognize versus define, recognize versus define. Now this goes all the way back to our friends, Adam and Eve. See Adam and Eve were always, always able to recognize what God had called good and evil. It's when sin comes into the world, through them that Adam and Eve are tempted to not just recognize what's good and evil, but to define for themselves what's good and evil. And so as people of the Word, as Christians, we need to continually recognize what God calls good and evil, not be tempted to define for ourselves what is. That means we need to hold fast to the scriptures. We need to stay in community together. We need to be in loving relationship with one another because the world has an extraordinarily strong gravitational pull towards it. And Jesus is not an ally of most of those worldviews and ideologies. And so we've got to stay fast to that. So recognize what God's standard is, don't create your own standard, right? And that is precisely what much of the world does. It does not follow God's standard. It creates their own. And that's where we have to say no. I want to say yes to every person of every worldview up until the point where I have to say no to Jesus. Can you come over and hang out? Absolutely. Can I come hang out as a part of Doxa? Absolutely. Hey, will you support me as I willingly fall away from the gospel? I can't do that. Will you support me as I tear pages from my Bible and form my own pages myself? No, I can't. I love you. I care about you. I can't support that. Martin Luther said, "I'm not permitted to let my love be so merciful as to tolerate and endure false doctrine." And there's a big "Amen" to that.

Listen, we want to say yes, yes, yes. And our best yes is the yes that can say yes to everybody and yes to Jesus. But there will be times where we have to say no to others and yes to God. But the answer can never be, I say no to God in order to say yes to somebody else. Okay. Now next thing, there is another element to all this that makes this a very sensitive subject. And I hope if you're feeling anger or frustration, I hope you'll stick with me because I also feel that in this moment for other reasons, maybe. Now there's another element of this that makes this a sensitive subject. And I think it's important for us to hear because I think it's easy for Christians, and I'm speaking directly to Christians here, to sort of get on our high horse and sort of flip this idea of trying to remain holy into an us versus them mentality. And we'll say, we've got to remain holy for Jesus, pure sexual ethics, pure morality, worldviews. And I'm not rude. I just believe in apologetics. And we just take people's heads off with the Bible. Paul says the scripture is a sword and wield it rightly, but not literally. I mean, you're not literally supposed to hammer people. God is love which means we love our neighbors as ourselves, not hammer them with a hammer.

Okay. Remain holy for Jesus is this sort of, you know, this moral salvation police that we can sometimes become. Now one issue we have to deal with in Ezra chapter four, as we're looking at these people is this...they come up to them. They're clearly not walking the way they're supposed to in Israel's eyes. They present themselves and say, hey, we worship God as you do. Can we build the wall? What if, what if these people were genuine in their request? What if these people in the deepest depths of their heart, their request to worship and help rebuild the wall was all well-meaning? What if they truly believed that they could worship God? They were worshipping God like the way they were. What if they truly believed that? What if they weren't, in other words, evil people, adversaries trying to take their heads off and destroy the work of God. What if they weren't like that? Ezra chapter four lacks context on this subject. Now the narrator, he does call these people adversaries, but he's formulating these letters and writing this after the fact. So he knows how the interaction goes. And so he colors the rest of it negatively. Okay. But when they were having the conversation, it was unclear if they were actually going to be adversaries. For that reason in opposition, we must strive to always be gracious in your response to opposition. Always be gracious. Here's why. Because our own hearts, we are bad at assessing the motives of other people. Because sin has entered the world, regardless of what faith you call yourself as, we are bad at assessing the motives of others. Our blindness often causes us issues. Deciding people's motives can be challenging. Now who here has a blind spot? Well, my guess is you don't know what it is because that's why it's called a blind spot. So if you didn't raise your hand, you're not necessarily lying, right? You just don't know. We all have blind spots. Okay.

One of our big blind spots is really trying to understand the heart of another person. I'll prove it to you? How many of you have been in a conflict and said the right thing in the wrong way and made the problem worse. Like this morning, right? I'll give you an example. When I got saved in college, I met Jesus at the age of 18. I'll tell you what, I was a sarcastic mean guy. I thought that was funny. I like to judge other people. And when I met Jesus, all that changed. No, no it didn't. It didn't change at all. In fact, it got worse. Because now I had a reason for being mean. And so what I did, and I'm telling you, this is a true story, I'm so embarrassed by this. Maybe I've shared it before. I had a little notebook, like a mole skin and I would write, and I would think through the lives of my friends as an 18, 19-year-old guy. And I go, oh man, like Friday night, I saw this person. Saturday night I saw this person. And I would make little list for them. And then, true story, I drove to their house. Them not knowing anything about my salvation. I'll tell you what, they probably liked me a lot more before. And I walked up, I knock on their door and I'm like, hey... I remember went to a couple of girls' houses, friends of mine, really close friends of mine, two extraordinarily tall women who were not Christians. And I knock on their door and I say, hey, can I come in for a second I want to chat with you. They're like, oh yeah, come on in, come on. I sit on the couch. I say, hey, listen, I was taking some notes and I have some feedback for you based on your opinions and thought process over the last two years. And I've just been taking some notes and I walked down the list. This is what I mean...dude...the Bible. And then I would have the verse right here. I mean, boom like I got it right here. Genesis this, Leviticus that, Matthew that boom, boom, boom. And then afterward I asked them like, well, what do you think about that? Are you going to change? And neither of them...like, uh, I mean, thank you. Like they didn't know what to say. And then they sort of awkwardly sat there until I decided to leave. And I left and I was like, man, it is tough doing God's work, man, I tell you what. And I got back in my truck and I made the rounds. And I lost a lot of friends doing that. A ton of friends. You don't say. Yeah, a lot of friends, they hated me. And like within two or three years I realized, man, that was so dumb. And many of those relationships, they're irreparably damaged in a lot of ways. A lot of those people aren't Christians because I thought I was a salvation police. And guess what? I think I was right about a lot of the things I said. But the Christian's goal within conflict is not to be right. It's to bring glory to God. And I did not bring glory to God in that conversation. I

destroyed them with my Bible. I don't want that for you. I don't want you to be a functional Pharisee who learns the Bible and goes off debating people and tearing their heads off.

And you know what, if you're part of the LGBTQIA+ plus community, or maybe affirm that lifestyle, or you affirm that ideology, that worldview, that's probably a lot of reason why you don't like Christianity so much, or those people don't like Christianity so much. Because they give you a rule book and then hammer you off. But I'm telling you what, you lose a lot of the love of what God is actually trying to say. There's a sense in which Jesus, if he was here today would be so gracious and loving to people that we perceive as lost politically, sexually, culturally, that would make a lot of Christians really uncomfortable. Jesus spent most of his time dealing with religious people that thought they had all the answers, but really had a lot of blind spots. In fact, those people killed him. It wasn't the sexually perverse or the culturally broken or the wicked stealing tax collector that murdered him. It was religious people. And so we've really got to make sure we control that. Let's not slam the door on our ability to influence other people with the gospel because we are religious rule givers. Okay. Always be gracious in your response.

There's one last key though, in responding to opposition, we find in Ezra chapter four. So let's keep reading. Look at verse four with me. Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build. Okay. And bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all of the days of king Cyrus, king of Persia until the reign of Darius king of Persia. Okay. So we find out in this case, these people are pretty sketch. They're pretty sketch. It says they discouraged the people of Judah, made them afraid to build and then bribed counselors to make their lives a living hell. That's what they did. This is sketchy. So Israel says, hey listen, I'm sorry. We can't commingle together. I feel like we've got to worship Yahweh and we can't do that with you a part of what we're doing. And they decide in response, I'm going to yell. I'm going to taunt. I'm going to bribe local officials to stop their work. I'm going to try to cancel them on Twitter. That's the equivalent here. Okay. So Israel is like, doesn't know what to do.

Following God means that other people will not like what you have to say oftentimes. And listen, because this is Pride Month and we live in a city like Seattle, this region, and I'm from an area like San Francisco, it is very difficult to conjure up enough courage to share that you disagree with that worldview because we believe that God has a better life for us that leads to human flourishing. Okay. It's very difficult to say that, but hey listen...a church's job, a Christian's job, especially a pastor's job is not to be liked by everybody. I mean, there's a phenomenon of like cool pastors that is so mind boggling to me because pastors, aren't supposed to be cool. They're supposed to deliver hard messages from the scriptures to help people's lives change. So, if you find yourself with a cool pastor who does not share the text well, or if you find yourself as a cool person who doesn't want to share the text well run for your life. And then say, oh, I can share those things in private. And those are private conversations. Well, guess what? There's people listening to you and they're being formed by your text. They're being formed by the way you preach. You all are sort of in some way, maybe some less than others being formed by the way we teach here. And if we don't teach you that you have to address hard things with love and compassion, then you might not do it. We have to be careful. We're not supposed to be cool. Do you know who's cool? Drake, JayZ, Beyonce, Brad pit. These are cool people. Leonardo de Caprio in like the early 2000s. Like these people are cool. You know who's not? Pastors. Because we give hard messages. Look what they did to Jeremiah. They dug him a hole and threw him in it. That's hard. People are not going to like what we have to say. You need tough skin. I think this is our last point: remain courageous no matter the consequences. So I want you to find your best yes until you have to say no to

God; you have to remain courageous; and then you have to remain courageous no matter the consequences.

Now what follows? I have to tell you this because you're wondering, man, there's a lot of verses in chapter four. What follows verse five is essentially a giant letter. A couple letters placed in the narrative from 50 years later, in a different language. Okay. It's in Aramaic. It's not in Hebrew and it's dropped into there. And it's basically a letter to get written to the Persian king from the people of the land to get people to stop building. But this is from 50 years later. This is during Nehemiah's time. Why is it here? Why is it here? Well, good question, right? There's a lot of reasons, but here's why I think it's here. It's here to show that God's people have always and will always face opposition. That's true for us today. It's true from in chapter four, it's true for them in Nehemiah, and it's true for us today.

But then verse 24 puts us right back in the narrative. Okay. And here it is. It says, "Then the work of the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." So how did they respond opposition? They quit. They quit. And for how long? Well, it says until the reign of king Darius. You know how long it is? 15 to 20 years. So they were in the middle of building the temple, someone came up, they caused opposition and they quit for 15 years. That's a long reason to quit and why? Well, again, they bribed counselors against them to, it says in the text, frustrate their purpose. The people were trying to frustrate their purpose. How many of you have had a clear call from God in your life and then something happened. And now all of a sudden you don't do it anymore. Does that ever happen to you? Maybe you were supposed to pursue a career. Maybe you were supposed to share the gospel with that person or pursue that person for a marriage, or to go deeper maybe with your community, or maybe attend or be a part of a gathering, a church. And then something happened. And we all kind of have some of those stories around this time, don't we? I don't know...worldwide pandemic happened. COVID happened. Death in the family happened. Job change, shutdowns, move. And maybe you've never gone back to that thing that God called you to. Maybe, and I've had a lot of these conversations, God was leading you somewhere and then something happened over the last few years and you never have revisited what God asked you and called you to do. So God made it clear for you and you gave up or maybe you quit or maybe you let it slip.

Here's what's bizarre for Israel though, in this passage. Israel was later permitted to keep building from the government, but that's not the point. The point is that God had never told them to stop in the first place. They were never supposed to stop. In fact, chapters five and six are basically God sending prophets to remind Israel that they should have never stopped building in the first place. So their fear and their emotion overwhelm them and frustrated their purpose. But again, 15 years, the building stopped. That's a long time. So I think fear became an excuse for their inaction. Their emotion became an in excuse for their inaction. And that happens to us. What previous hesitation do you need to revisit and see what you missed? There are things that you have stopped doing because something happened that you need to go back to because God has been calling you to them. And he maybe won't send a prophet, but maybe he sends a friend or a sermon or a worship set, or maybe he speaks to you directly. I don't know. But what do you have to revisit? We just talked about the onward campaign. I can't give, I'm paralyzed. I got to see what direction this church is going. I don't know if I like, you know, what's been going on. Or personally, I just can't give. I don't know how, I never have. Did God ask you to stop? Did he tell you you shouldn't? Oh, you know what? I'm not a social person. Something like a missional community, MC that's not my thing. Oh man, being a part of people in a room, I am a severe introvert and I just don't think I should be a part of it. I need some time.

Okay. It's been four years. Okay. That's a long time. Did God tell you you shouldn't be a part of one or do you just not want to be a part of one? I don't have time. I mean, I can't commit to this. I mean, I've got three kids and let me tell you that's a lot. That's a lot. Did God say something else was a bigger priority though? Or did you just stop? Okay.

External pressure is not an automatic sign to pause the word God has given you. It's not a sign. It's not a sign. In fact, when acting in obedience to God, it's actually the quite the opposite. External pressure often is a sign you should press forward. It's totally opposite. This is the upside-down kingdom. Okay? This is what it means to be a Christian. Jesus looks like he should stop being God or saying he's God, because if he doesn't, he's going to die. And then he dies. Spoiler alert. He rises from the dead because behind his greatest sacrifice was the purpose that the father had given him. And the same is true for you. You might be tempted to quit the work that you know God has called you to, come on. And all of a sudden, just when you're about to quit, you can press through. And if you press through behind that sacrifice is your greatest purpose. This is where God is leading you. And so I'm telling you right now, don't quit. Don't be like Israel. Don't be like Israel where when things get hard or things get difficult or a tough subject comes up and we have to deal with that subject, we can still look it in the face. It's going to be hard. It's going to be difficult. It's going to be maybe a little cringeworthy, but you'll be consistent, and you'll be loving, and you'll be tolerant of the people that you care about. And you share the gospel with them or you share whatever it is God has asked you to share. And you just do it. And you trust that the sovereign God of the universe has called you to something that might feel like it's really difficult, but in the end, the purpose is far greater. Just like his story.

Are you tracking with me? The post-exilic people of Ezra, they parallel the story with Jesus. Okay. Again, the post-exilic people in Ezra, they stop when opposition comes, but Jesus, he doesn't. In fact, Jesus, the Messiah that would save the world, he's going to come through this people once they finally do get their act together and rebuild this temple. He's going to come through this city, Jerusalem, and he's going to come humble. He's going to come well-meaning. He's going to come loving. He's going to spend time with people that disagree with him. He's going to pray over those people and cry over those people. But he's also going to be incredibly honest and truthful with them. He's going to come. And the people that opposed him will oppose him more because he lives perfectly. And they're going to kill him to the point of murder. They're going to string him up on a cross. And what looks like him persevering is an "L" for him and a "W" for his murderers and his adversaries, is actually the opposite. He presses through. And because he's a perfect person, God, Jesus, he can't be held by death. And he resurrects three days later saying that anybody who understands my sacrifice will find their purpose. My sacrifice was for you, the sin, the brokenness, the loss doesn't have to stay on you.

The opposition you feel...how about the fear of opposition that you feel in engaging other people with the gospel, the fear of opposition and being a part of something. How about the fear of opposition of being a good dad or a good mother. That feeling of just, I go to run from this. All of that fear can be laid at the feet of Jesus. As Jesus, unlike us, has a perfect father who loves him, who's cared for him, who's sacrificed him. And all of our brokenness and opposition gets to go at his feet. As one commentator says, when we come to an apparent graveyard of our hopes, and I know we all do, we need to renew our trust in a God who knows his way out of the grave. Many of you, many of us opposition, brokenness loss...we feel like we're in the grave. And maybe we feel like we are, maybe we are. But I'll tell you what. You worship a God who knows his way out, who understands that your opposition and that sacrifice you

make in the opposition actually leads to the greater purpose for your life that he has for you and your future. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I pray for my friends. As we all face difficult situations that you would help us and empower us to be kind and gracious through them, but to be bold and courageous through them as well. Lord Jesus, many of us feel overwhelmed by the loss and the brokenness we're experiencing. And I pray we can lay that at your feet as we battle through it. I pray for my friends who disagree with my reading, my understanding of the scriptures and what the Bible teaches on sexuality. And I pray for their hearts. We love them, Lord Jesus, would they feel the comfort of love and would they understand, the truths that you have help us lead to flourishing in the life. We love you. We pray for you. We're excited for the work you're doing in all of our hearts and lives. And thank you for our dads. It's so hard to be a good dad, but thank you for being a good dad who loves us. In Jesus' name, Amen.