

# COMING HOME

## A STUDY OF EZRA



### EZRA: REFORM AND REVITALIZE

*July 3, 2022*

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Scripture Reference: Ezra 7:6-10, 27-28

Please stand for the reading of God's word. Ezra chapter seven, verses six through 10 and verses 27 through 28. 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 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.

Verse 27: 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. This is the word of the Lord. You can be seated.

All right, well, good morning. <Crowd: morning>. How we all doing this... Uh, well this is morning, right? We've been moving service times so if you guys haven't noticed, uh, we're at 4:00 PM just a little bit ago. You remember? It's hard to remember, right? It's good. Hey, how did Derek do? How did our intern do? <Laugh> he did great. He did great. Hey, you can be an intern too. If you're interested, you will definitely find, uh, pastor Donald, if you wanna be an intern, please do. We would love to plug you in -- you learn about ministry, you learn about church, it's a great opportunity to do it. So Derek's, uh, learning a lot and he's adding a ton to our team, so we're thankful for him.

Hey, we're in Ezra chapter seven. So if you've got your Bible or your app bust that out, we are gonna get right into it, talking about calling. So, and we're gonna be jumping all around the chapter. So, it'd be

helpful to have the text out while we pray. So let me pray for us. Get your Bible out and we'll get started. Lord Jesus, we ask for your presence in this room, Lord Jesus, and calling is something that it's difficult for many of us to uncover what it might be, Lord. For some of us, we know exactly what our calling is and for others, we're just on the journey. And so Lord Jesus, I pray that you make calling apparent, I pray that as I preach your word, it is proclaimed and that it's honored and that anything that comes from me, Lord, would that just be rejected. But Lord, everything that you want to be communicated, would that be targeted to the hearts and to the minds of everyone here. Thank you, Lord, let this be a fun day and a day of excitement and practicality, in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, as pastor Donald said, one, there is certain questions you get in ministry all the time. And especially if you do young adults ministry or youth ministry -- I have a background in that. And one of the questions I'll just throw it on the board here -- it's, How can I learn what God's calling on my life is? How can I know? What's my calling? What am I supposed to do with my life? Who am I supposed to marry? Where do I serve? Who do I help? Right. Has anyone asked this question themselves? By show of hands, have you asked yourself, thought about the process? What, what's my calling? What do I do?

Okay. So most of us, right? Most of us have, and for some of us, we know exactly what the answer to that question is. Don't we? We got it all figured out. Even when we were wrong, we know the next calling. Like right away. Right? How many of you that people, that person? That's me. Like I know my calling and it, I was wrong. Doesn't matter. Know my next one. Right? How many of you have no idea what you're supposed to do with your life? Young people, right? Old people. That's right. That's right. It's how do you know? It's a difficult conversation.

Well, luckily for us, Ezra, in chapter seven here, brings up a lot of exactly this issue. And now as we move into seven, and in chapter seven, rather, Ezra, the person, finally shows up. If you've been tracking, you know, that he has not been around for the last six chapters. And now this guy, Ezra, finally shows up and his calling is what is on display.

Now, just as a refresher, up until this point, we know that Israel got ahead of themselves. They put some wicked rulers in charge and they started doing some things they're not supposed to, worshiping other gods, God exiled them into foreign lands. But God keeping his covenant promise decides to recollect Israel from the nations, send them back to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the city beginning with the temple.

Last week we saw the temple finally got built. So if you missed last week, you've been here all the other weeks. You missed it. Okay. Temple is built. Okay, great. That's awesome. Now, but now Ezra pops into the scene, and he has a calling that he believes he has to fulfill. And here's the issue, the law, the Torah, the law, the first five books of the Bible -- this is the books of Moses, this is how Israel's established, how they remain distinct from the nations, right? In this chapter, Ezra wants to reestablish this law in Jerusalem so that Israel would progressively become the people that God wants them to be. That's, that's the purpose of the law.

And so through Ezra's story, we're going to learn exactly what we need to do to assess our own callings. And there are five ingredients, okay? Five big ingredients for our calling. So if you understand these, you're gonna be able to discern whether or not you're living out God's call for your life. Okay. And it's incredibly practical. And so you can definitely take notes if it's helpful, but there is a tension, of course, as always in discerning our calling.

What if you woke up one day and realized you, your life was meaningless, you lived a meaningless life? What if one day you woke up and realized the life you were pursuing was all wrong? And that the people you met, the people you were supposed to talk to, the places you moved were all the places that led you to a dead end of your own purpose. What if at the end of your life, you look back and you discovered you wasted your life? What if that happens?

Was listening to a podcast, some months ago and a billionaire, I forget his name. He likes to travel around and talk, go to universities and high schools. And he likes to talk to them about what it means to be a billionaire. Multi, multi billionaire, this guy. And at the end of his talk, he always says exactly how much his net worth is to the penny. He says, you know, 10 billion, I dunno, 20 billion, 30 billion, blah, blah, blah, down to the penny. And all the kids of course say, Ooh, and on, oh my gosh, this guy's got so much money. And then he says, but I would trade every red cent of that wealth for another opportunity to do it all over again, to be exactly where you are with nothing. Because he understood what it meant to be called to something, to live a purposeful, meaningful life. And it's just not how much you accumulate. Okay.

So before we dismiss the sort of idea of calling a sort of wishy washy Christian thing, there's a lot at stake here. It's possible, one day we could wake up riddled with regret that the life we lived had a lot of fun, but no meaning. Had a lot of excitement, but no eternal direction. And had plenty of ambition, but no peace at all.

Now here's the thing. I know that there's not a single person in this room that wants that life for themselves. I already know that. None of us want a life without meaning, purpose, or peace. So here's my point. Discovering your calling is absolutely foundational, and it's probably the only way you'll be to ensure that you'll flourish in a world like today.

So even if you feel like you've found your calling, let's reconsider it just in case. Okay?

So Ezra shows up, let's get into it. There's five things. Ezra shows up, but there's one important detail to note about Ezra showing up. 57 years have gone by since the building of the temple to Ezra showing up. I told you Ezra's a weird complicated book. And so you might ask, well, what happened in these 57 years? Well, I've got even better news. No book of the Bible documents what happened.

So what happened? We don't know. Here's one clue we do have though, the book of Malachi is a prophecy that most scholars widely believe applies to this area. So we get a little glimpse of what was going on with the spiritual state of Israel in this time. So let's look at how Malachi the prophet sees the happenings in Jerusalem. Look at Malachi 1 verses 11 through 14. It'll be on the screen.

For the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations (this is God talking), and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you profane it (ooh) when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and it's fruit, that is, its food may be despised. But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it all, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

That's a lot. What does it mean? It means that Israel has gotten spiritually apathetic. When they go to make offerings to God. Ah, who cares? I mean, just another Saturday, another holy day, right here we go, right? For us to be another Sunday going through the motions, right? That's what we're doing. Going through the motions, offering up offerings that are not worthy. Okay. And that's what they're doing. So we thought Israel had learned their lesson, but here we are again, 57 years go by Israel sunk back into the happenings of their day. They are now fully worried about the world and themselves again. And they are not worried about being godly.

Now, is this a problem? Yes, it's a problem. Why is it a problem? Well, God's calling and the reason why he establishes the law is to set Israel apart or to make them holy from the nations so that his name would be made great, and they would remain distinct and be a witness to the region. And so that can't happen if Israel is unholy and apathetic in their behavior.

And this is where we have to understand our first component of calling and it's this -- need. Need. There is a need in Israel. They need a remedy for their spiritual apathy.

Now the author of Israel here tells us a little bit more, just tells us a little bit more about what they exactly need in the beginning of chapter seven. Look at verse one, lot of names here. Okay. Hang with me --

Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra (that's him) the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest.

Whew. Okay. Hey, thanks. That's great. Yeah. All right. Hey, maybe you would never read those. Okay. And maybe I'm, I'm pretty close to sure that 85% of you have never read those out loud. Okay. Maybe you read 'em when your Bible, oh, whatever, here we go. Why are they in there? Well, are these just names? Not exactly. Not exactly. You see, these are names of priests and they're all part of a family line. And many of these names are actual notable priests throughout the entire Old Testament. So you're paying attention, you read First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, all these like large books, you actually see the names of these priests scattered throughout that timeline.

And where does this timeline lead back to? A guy named Aaron. Now that name might be more familiar and it's a lot easier to say than Zabadu- Zubadu- and Azariah and all these things, right?

Aaron! Who's Aaron? He's the brother of Moses. He is the first Levite in the priesthood. We call it the aaronic priesthood based on his name. So what does that tell us that who Ezra is? Ezra is a descendant of Aaron. He's a priest. So now what does Israel need? What's their need? There's a need for someone who has learned and studied in the laws of Moses to help facilitate the apathetic people's relationship with God. That's the need, right? The catch is Ezra is going to have to see this need. Okay?

Now, in order for you to understand your calling, you're gonna have to recognize the needs around you. In your church, in your job, and in your family, and in your community. But here's the thing -- in a complex world that we live in today, there is no shortage of needs around you. We need everything, right? There needs to be godly people all over the place, right? We need evangelists. We need musicians. We need greeters. We need, uh, deacons. We need elders. We need politicians. We need athletes. We need bakers. We need it all. Your church family. We need all of those things. We need all of those things as well.

And your friends. All your friends that don't know Jesus. Maybe some of you here today. Maybe Jesus isn't God to you, you're coming, you're checking this out. Great, glad you're here. Those people, they need you. We believe that's Christians that knowing Jesus leads to life and flourishing and peace and eternal salvation. You are needed.

But do you recognize the need? So the question, I guess is, where have you identified a place where you can be helpful, but you haven't done anything with it yet?

What is that thing, that person, that place, that idea, that giving opportunity that you saw and you haven't acted on? And you feel like you could meet that need, but you just haven't done anything with it yet. That might be an opportunity for you to fulfill your calling. Jesus says the harvest is wide and the workers are few.

Harvesters don't just watch other people harvest. They lace up their shoes and they get in the fields and harvest. You're needed.

Well, let's see what else we can understand about Ezra's calling, cuz we understand 'need' right? Let's keep going here. Verse six--

this Ezra, he 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.

So here's the thing, Ezra recognizes the need that there needs to be the law reestablished in Jerusalem. And he goes to the king and he asks if he could be the one to do it. Okay. So Ezra recognizes the need then he goes to the king to ask if he can help solve the need, which means that he has a desire to fulfill the need, that's our second thing. Recognize the need, a desire to fulfill the need. Recognize the need, desire to fulfill the need.

Now once you recognize the need around you, it's gonna be helpful, it's helpful to want to meet the need that you see. You probably want that. I mean, I'm thinking about back to the time where I felt called to be a pastor, and that's a common question I also get. And it's a little bit more unusual. I became a Christian at 18 years old in college. Someone gave me a Bible and I read it. Like that was it. And it was great. And then I started dating my wife, Sarah, who went to the same college as I did. And her dad was a pastor, a little background on that. So she was a little more versed in the sort of cultural, spiritual things of church and I had no idea what any of this stuff was. As you can tell.

And so we go around churches, looking for a church, trying to figure out, okay, like where's a good place to go to church in a small town in Idaho. And we land in this one church, I remember one summer very clearly. I opened up my Bible and they're like, we're gonna start in a series in Genesis and the series it's titled Mother Earth. And then he starts exhorting, you know, Genesis chapter one and two. And then I'm sitting there as a 19 year old probably at this time going, okay, mother earth. <laugh> I'm not seeing mother earth anywhere in this book. Sarah, like, is it in the back? Like, I don't know how the Bible works at this point and it's not there for those of you that didn't know or you got nervous. There is, you know, we don't -- that's panentheism and pantheism. We believe that there's one God, his name is Jesus, and he is the second member of the triune God. That's what we believe. And that's Orthodox Christianity believes. And so I didn't understand what was going on in this church. It called itself the church, but it wasn't preaching the Bible, it was preaching something else.

And so I'm sitting there and I feel like the Lord spoke to me. I'm just telling you what I thought. And I feel like the Lord said, Hey, this isn't the way my church is supposed to be, and I want you to do something about it. And I was like, whoa. And as a 19 year old, totally secular kid from the bay area never really been in church ever. I was like that was weird. This is my flinch, I lean over to Sarah sitting next to me and say, Hey, I think I'm supposed to be a pastor. And she's like, what? No. Remember her dad's a pastor, right? Her dad's a pastor. And her vision of a pastor is sort of an older white guy shirt tucked in, glasses, comb over super wise. And here I am, 19 with flip flops and sweatpants on in the church. Hair's not done. And she's like, that's not a pastor. Like look at this guy. It's true, right? I wasn't, and somehow I'm still here. I don't know how it worked out.

I say all that to say, I saw a need, and then I had the desire to develop in me, which I believe was the power of the Holy Spirit to meet that need. Now it doesn't mean that your calling is always gonna be sunshine and rainbows. Doesn't mean that. In fact callings are often hard and they often come with trials. And it also doesn't mean you always like your calling. It also doesn't mean you always like your calling. Sometimes you don't like it. But it does mean that deep down in you, God has placed a fire in you for whatever cause, job, or person.

Continuing on. So we have need, desire.

Continuing on, what else do we learn? Let's look back at Ezra chapter six, and we gonna pick out something else out of this verse. Again--

this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was -- here it is -- 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.

Verse six gives us more information about Ezra. He is skilled in the Law of Moses. He was also a scribe. That's telling you something about him right. Now look at verse 10. It says this -- 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.

So on some level you see Ezra has a desire, but he also has some other collection of things, right? He's from the line of Aaron, he can be a priest, he's gifted, and he's skilled. This is what it is. It's gifting. This is your third thing. It's gifting. You have a need, a desire, and a gifting.

Now real quick, giftings not all about natural talent. Now, to some degree there is, but it's, it's some, it's some combination of like a raw ability and developed skill. Some combination of those two things. Now it's one thing to do, to want to do something. It's another to be capable of doing it. And I know that's harsh to hear in 2022. Today we champion desire as the ultimate virtue. If we want to do or be something we can. And some of that's our parents, shame on you for telling us that. At that pizza party, when I was eight and you told me I could be a rocket-rocket-maker or whatever you told me. You lied, you lied, you knew I couldn't do it. You just wanted me to be quiet. Okay. I get it.

The truth is though, in the kingdom of God, it's not necessarily the case. Okay. We believe God gifts people with talents or demeanors or dispositions to pursue the things he's calling them to. Okay. So that means just because you desire to do something doesn't mean you're called to it. It doesn't mean you're called to it.

Now to be sure, just because you're not an automatically a rock star at something doesn't mean you should not pursue it. To be sure, there are things we're not good at to begin with that we can get better at with time. That's for sure. Okay? That's why gifting is some combination of raw ability and developed skill. It's a combination of the two.

Now you might be thinking, well, geez, that's great, but I'm here and I have no clue what I'm called to. And I work at this company or I'm going to this school and I don't know, man, I'm just trying to figure out life. Like, how do I know what I'm gifted at?

It's a good question. Ask yourself this question though, for a little bit of a hint. What is something that people consistently tell you that you're good at or you have skill in? Look back at your life for a second. What's the thing people keep saying about you? Man, you're really friendly. Have you thought about being in hospitality? Or, wow, you're really good at conflict management. Like you helped us solve that problem really easily. Have you thought about being in counseling or being in HR? Or wow, you are an amazing speaker. You should talk. You should be a stand up comic or something.

Think about those things. What are the things people are telling you that you're really good at? Okay. And maybe consider that that's something you might be called to. So there are those of you that actually do have, have been called to something specific, but the things of life have sort of convinced you to stop doing it. And so you, you understand what I'm saying? Some of you have actually had a calling. You were, you were trying to live the calling and then maybe something in your story has sort of caused you not to do it. Maybe the voice of your father, the voice of your mother, the voice of your ex-boyfriend, the voice of your sister is in your head, and you won't live out the calling.

We've seen it all over churches all of the time. You see people that are incredibly gifted, all across ministries and they start working in it, and somehow they go, ah, yeah, I know, but I just don't feel like I'm really that good at it. And sometimes you need to take the hint. Sometimes you need to be honest that, Hey, listen, you are very gifted at this thing, and you should just lean into that gifting instead of being stubborn. Okay? We want the best for you. It's okay to recognize your gift. Don't let your father's

voice or your husband's voice or your best friend's voice in your head, prevent you from embracing your gift. Okay?

Which means that you may need to work backwards if you discover your gifting before you see a need. Cause sometimes if you see a need, you can figure out if you're gifted. This time, if you know you're gifted, you can actually look for the need that you fit in the hole with. Right? Great.

Okay. What's next? What's next? Well, next we get, akin to Ezra, another long letter written by a king <laugh> and this letter is from king Artaxerxes, who's the king of Persia at this point, 57 years later. Right? And he is going to respond to Ezra's request to go back to Jerusalem and to help them be essentially a holy people by teaching 'em the Torah.

So here is Artaxerxes' response to Ezra, and in his response, we're actually gonna learn some things about Ezra's calling. Verse 11.

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:

Okay, stop right there. We're one line into this long letter and we already see stuff about calling. What do we see? King Artaxerxes confirms Ezra's calling. He says, he's a man learned in the matters of the commandments of the Lord. He sees it right there. He doesn't know him all that well, but he understands that he's gifted, which leads us to our next component of calling -- external confirmation, external confirmation.

Now, anytime you are pursuing a calling, whether that's to marry a certain person, to take a specific job, to serve in a mission, join a church like Doxa, you should pursue external counsel from respected sources and people you trust. Okay? You should do that.

God will often put discernment in those people's hearts to be able to judge whether or not you should be a part of that. Now it's not always the case, but he can often do that. And let me just say, one of the worst decisions you can make is avoiding godly counsel when making a big decision.

How many of you are the person that runs away when you gotta make a big decision? You're like, I don't want anyone's opinion, I'm just gonna shoot. Or how many of you ask way too many questions and you confuse yourself and all of a sudden you don't know what to do, and you're paralyzed of fear. <laugh> Tough, right?

You should always pursue specific godly people that God might place in your life for this very reason. It's one of the worst decisions you make not to do this. For example, young girl at a church I worked at, is young, she is a wonderful believer of God, servant in the church, wonderful participant in the family of our church in that time. And she was dating a long term relationship with this guy who lived in Puerto Rico and he was not a Christian. And what my advice to her and what many people's advice to her as she sought counsel was, they want to get married, don't get married. And you might think like, why, why that seems -- not cuz his long term, but because he wasn't a Christian yet, and he had no interest. In fact, he was hostile to Christianity.

Now, for those of you that maybe aren't Christian and you go, that feels like rude or, or whatever. Here's the thing for Christians. We have an order, a sort of order of priorities that we list ourselves in, in order to sort of flourish in our lives. Right? So we worship God first, and then we marry and we engage our spouse second, and then what comes next is our children, and then after that, it's our work and other things. Okay.

And you might go, well, why can't they all just be at the top? I mean, that's very American thing to think, right? But the truth is if you have a great marriage, your children will flourish. So that's why we put our marriage above that. And if you have a great relationship with God, you'll understand authority and submission and your marriage will flourish. If you have people that have different priorities and

someone worships God and the other person worships the marriage or worships something else, then all of a sudden everything's out of order and you get lots of conflict. And you wonder why divorce rate is 51%. Because we have to think through things like this. Okay? So that's my wise advice. You can hear me on my soapbox a little bit, I'm obviously really passionate about this. She decides to take herself outta community and she married the guy. And how do you think that's going? It's probably not gonna go super well. Right? You need golly advice. Okay.

Give you another example. I played football. Young people get thrown a lot of money at a very early age. It's very wise to do something with that money. Right? I had a friend who is incredibly hardheaded, whom I love so much. He is a nut case and he is wild, and he goes and spends \$4,200 on clothes on a day. And I don't know how you can spend \$4,200 at Macy's, but he figured it out. Like he did it. <laugh> It's not like he went to a nice store, um, just buying furniture and stuff.

So he's, he's blowing his money and I'm like, Hey man, listen, the league has lots of ways for you to save money, to protect you, to keep all of the monies put away and then multiply that money for you and lots of matches and stuff like that, you should take advantage of that. He said, that's my money. I'm not giving my money to anybody. Well, you're not giving it to anyone. You're putting it away for your future self. That's why you should do it. You're spending too much money.

I kid you not, three years go by not like 20 -- 3. He calls me, Man, Eddie dog, I should have listened to you, man. <laugh> I spent all my money. Like, yeah, I know you spent all your money. Like we all know that money just gets spent if you don't have a plan for it. And he didn't listen to the people around him, the counselors that the team put around him to be able to do that, and he didn't do it. Bad things happen.

So if you feel like you're gifted at something, approach someone that might be have godly wisdom. Maybe you'd be like, you're a musician and you wanna sing. Pastor Donald's a great example of that. You can ask him, he can help you uncover your gifting and decide whether or not it's a path worth following. And let me just say, if someone comes to you and says, and after many times you've talked with them and talked with other people and they say, Hey, listen, I just don't see your gifting in this. And this person doesn't and this person doesn't and this person doesn't. Have you considered something else? Guys, that's not mean. Okay. That's clear. That's being clear. I am being clear to you, and actually that measure of clarity can really help you out in the future. If you can learn early on that this is not the path for you, then you can begin working towards something that is. Something that God's called you to. Okay. So don't take it as a mean thing.

Proverbs 15:22 says without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed. It's wisdom. It's not a sin not to get advice. It's just could be dumb sometimes. Not a sin.

Okay. There's one more aspect to our calling, right? So we got confirmation there. We've got the need. We got desire. We got gifting. We got confirmation. There's one more aspect to our calling. And really this could require its own sermon, but we see it in the story of Ezra, so here it is.

Now we're gonna see it scattered through all throughout Ezra chapter seven, and we're gonna see it in this letter to the king. So what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna read you a bunch of this section, and it's gonna sort of jump around and the scriptures will be labeled, but you'll get the point at the end of it. Okay? So just stick with me as I read this, we're gonna start in verse 13.

Artaxerxes talking to Ezra in a letter -- I make it a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you and also to carry the silver and the gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, with all of the silver and the 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.

Verse 18, 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 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.

Okay, let's get this straight. Okay. Ezra asks a non-Israelite, hostile, adversarial king to go back to Israel. Right? And what happens? The king responds with favor, but not just a little favor. The king says, not only can you go up to Israel, anyone who's captive here in Babylon can also go with you if they want. I'm going to give you the silver and the gold out of my vault. So you can, and you can take any of the silver and gold you can find in Babylon, take it with you. And we're gonna take a freewill offering for your trip from the people. And then you can decide what you want to do with whatever's left over.

That's pretty nuts. Considering in chapter four we read that the moment they started rebuilding the temple, they got shut down, which is more expected than anything. That's called favor. That's called opportunity, which is our next word -- opportunity. Which is the last element of our calling.

Now opportunity is when God provides a way forward to you using your gifting and embracing your calling. And oftentimes these are unexplained or even sometimes miraculous events that take place. Right? This could be people providing resources like money, people giving time, advice, it could be an invitation to fulfill your calling, or anything else like that.

Now there are references for Ezra in this chapter that the hand of God was on him all throughout the text. And here's one in verse 27. This is Ezra responding to the letter.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing into the heart of the king. 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.

Here's the thing. If you're following your calling, you're gonna start to see God orchestrating events happening in your life. You're gonna start to see it. You're gonna, if you're looking for a church you're gonna wander in, you're gonna meet the exact person you need. Okay. You're looking to raise money for a cause, all of a sudden money's gonna show up. You're looking to meet specific people or if you're looking for a specific spouse, that person is gonna miraculously be introduced to you through a number of different connections or you're gonna randomly bump into them or you're gonna, it's something like that is going to happen. You're gonna see the hand of God on you. These are references to the hand of God going out ahead in your life. That's what's happening.

Now, like many of you know, I planted a church in San Francisco. And what's cool about planting a church is that it sort of puts you on the, like the frontier of what it feels like God's doing in the church. It's pretty cool. And we decided to move to San Francisco and start this church. And we didn't have any people or any money. And if you know anything about church, like if you're just in a building by yourself, it's not really a church. Okay. You're just hanging out in an empty building, right?

A church is not a building; it's people. And so you need people. And so all of a sudden we're, we're praying, Lord, Jesus, is this the will you have for us? We're gonna move. We're gonna take a risk. We're gonna take a chance. Then all of a sudden, conversation leads to another conversation, leads to another conversation. And then people start to say, oh, that's something I'm called to as well. And you're seeing alignment take place. We had one couple decide, I'm gonna drive 40 miles in to gather with you guys until we're able to move. Praise God. That's the favor of God.

In church planning, you also need money. Especially in a city like this. <laugh> especially in a city like San Francisco or big cities like New York or Chicago. All of a sudden money began to show itself. People

would randomly be generous and decide that, Hey, we just heard about this through somebody else or somebody else, we wanna bless you. We wanna make sure this ministry goes. Praise God.

And some of you know what I'm talking about because you're that person right on the other side of it, who you're fulfilling your calling, giving, being generous and giving money to specific causes that you feel led to support. Now there's all this synchronous movement taking place.

So we have to look for those things. So you have to ask yourself this question. If you're looking about opportunity in your life, as it relates to your calling, where in your life has God opened up unexplained doors of favor? What was that person you met, that invitation you were offered, maybe that unexpected windfall you received? These are often clues of opportunity that if you follow leads to your ultimate calling. Okay? Just like Ezra received.

Need, desire, gifting, confirmation, opportunity. Just look at that. This is a very practical, but also simultaneously unbelievably spiritual formula to understand your calling. Now, what do you get when you mix all these things together? Well, you learn your calling. You learn your calling in little things. If I should talk to this person and share the gospel with 'em? Or large things, I need to move to that city to be a part of that large thing that's going on there. Right?

But that's not all you get. You see by chapters end, Ezra had all five ingredients too. He had all five, we just talked about it. And it was then that he could finally return to Jerusalem. And he eventually, as we'll see, is going to reestablish the Torah and help Israel become the people that they needed to be. Now, why is that so important? Well, it's important because then Israel, as they become the people they need to be will finish rebuilding Jerusalem in spirit, in their souls, but also physically. And then one day the Messiah, the promised Messiah would come through the place of Jerusalem and save the entire world through it.

Do you understand what I'm saying? So in one sense, it's because Ezra fulfills his calling, that the world could be saved through Jesus. In collection with these several other callings of all of the people of Jerusalem, God orchestrates, sovereignly, his will through everyone fulfilling their calling. It's unbelievable.

So this statement is true for Ezra, and it's definitely true for you. When we fulfill God's -- when we fulfill the calling on our lives, God's plan for the world can actually move forward. You see, God has laid out a special plan for your life. It might not be easy. It might not be exactly what you wanna do right away. You might not even like it right away. But when you answer the call, you'll be living in sync with God's created order for your life. Do you understand?

That's the key. You get to align your purpose with the purpose of other people, and you build this amazing fabric of God's story moving forward. When enough of God's people fulfill their calling, we get to turn the proverbial page on God's story.

And what is that story, exactly? That's the story of this Messiah, Jesus. You see, all through the beginning of time, God wanted to send this Messiah to reconcile us to God, his people. And he knew Jesus is the way to do this. And so he orchestrates through Ezra, a place where the Messiah can come. Okay? Through the people, Israel, Jerusalem. Jesus comes, he lives a life, he dies the death that none of us could die, and he resurrects, saying that anyone who would believe in me would not perish any longer, you wouldn't taste death, and you wouldn't feel unfulfilled, and you wouldn't be lost and broken without purpose and meaning and peace. And I would grant that to you.

But that's actually not the end of the story. He then says in John 20, as the Father sent me so now I'm sending you. Which means all of us have a role of play. We have to go out and fulfill our callings because God is bringing the kingdom of God to culmination. What's that? It's when heaven and earth overlap and

a place that once felt broken and lost with little tinges of celebration, all of a sudden becomes a place with nothing but calling, nothing but peace, nothing but purpose over all of it.

And every time one of us fulfills our calling, we inch that story forward. That's the story of Ezra. Ezra fulfills his calling and he brings God's story forward. And you can do the same thing today.

No more pain, no more suffering, no more rejection, no more hardship in that new kingdom. And it's hard work to live our calling to get to that place. A restored relationship with God himself awaits us and a life that flourishes in calling and purpose under his rule is also what awaits us.

See when you live your calling today, you make the kingdom of God more of a reality for other people. When you live your calling today, you make the kingdom of God more of a reality for other people.

And one day that kingdom will be culminated when Jesus comes back. But until then, we work toward our callings and make this place a good place. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you for, thank you for microphones going out, Lord. It provides, uh, some humor and some fun. But we know that microphones aren't necessary. We know that technology isn't all that necessary. We love it. But what's most important is that your word is open, that the Holy Spirit is present and that we're present, worshiping you, praising you, loving you and caring for you. And so thank you for that, Lord God. I pray for a celebratory spirit on Doxa this morning, as we celebrate the 4th of July in our country. And we're thankful that we get to be in a country where we get to freely, openly worship the king, Jesus. We're thankful for that, Lord God. And so we pray blessing on this church this morning as we go out and we all find our place and our calling so we could turn the pages of your sovereign story to bring the kingdom of God forward to the joy of all people. In his name. Amen.