

Ezra Ch2v1-70 - God's People Matter

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0:00] Ezra chapter 2 is on page 472 if you're using the Red Church Bibles. Ezra chapter 2. Ezra chapter 2.

Ezra chapter 2. And Johnny in his kindness and compassion has asked me to read just four verses. So I haven't had to stay up all night practicing the names.

Maybe Johnny is going to read the other 66. I don't know. But I'm going to read verses 1 to 2 and then 68 to 70 this morning from Ezra chapter 2.

So let's hear the word of God together. Ezra 2 verse 1. Now these are the people of the province who came up from captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken captive to Babylon.

They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to their own town, in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Sariah, Lachiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvi, Rahum, and Banah.

[1:22] The list of the men of the people of Israel. And then jump down towards the end of the chapter in verse 68. When they arrived at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings towards the rebuilding of the house of God on its site.

According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 darocks of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priestly garments.

The priests, the Levites, the musicians, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns. Amen. Thank you, Johnny. Just talk amongst yourselves while I get settled here.

Okay, don't. Keep our Bibles open at Ezra chapter 2, and let's pray.

[3:03] Our Father God, would you please capture our hearts and minds afresh. That we may listen carefully to your word.

Holy Spirit, will you teach us more about Jesus today? And would you please lead us that we might worship Jesus with all of our life?

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, Ralph didn't get to do the exciting stuff.

This is great, isn't it? Follow with me in the middle of verse 2. The list of the men of the people of Israel. The descendants of Parosh, 2,172.

Of Shephthah, 372. Of Shephthah, 372. Of Arrah, 775.

[4:17] Of Path of Moab, through the line of Jeshua and Joab. Now, isn't that interesting? Through the line of Jeshua and Joab.

2,812. 2,812. Of Elam, 1,254. Of Zatu.

Great name. 945. Anyone asleep yet? It reminds me of history and maths at school.

Names I know nothing about. And numbers which are entirely confusing. During the week, I sat down to have lunch with my daughter Rebecca.

And very kindly, she asked me, Dad, how's the study going? Well, I said, we're doing Jeshua too. I know, she said. I saw it at Sunday.

[5:16] That big, long list. Dad, just move on. Well, that's how I felt. Just turn the page and start in chapter 3.

Something a little bit more understandable. But if we do that, we miss out on something very important. You see, God could have left chapter 2 out of the Bible completely.

But since it's in the Bible, it must be for our edification and encouragement. In fact, these verses teach us that God's people really matter.

God's people really matter. First, the people of God will never be forgotten.

The people of God will never be forgotten. Context, as we get into chapter 2. Remember, God's people had broken the covenant.

[6:26] They had failed to listen to God and to love God. And because of their disobedience, God had disciplined them. They were sent into exile by the Babylonians for 70 years.

And now those 70 years are up. And so we read in chapter 2, verse 1. Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken captive to Babylon.

They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to their own town. Now this tells us two really important things.

First, that God always keeps his promise to his people. He keeps his promise to his people. Not only had God promised exile, he had promised their return.

He would always keep a people for himself. Keep your finger in Ezra and just jump forward a few books to Jeremiah.

[7:43] Jeremiah 32. And verse 37. Jeremiah 32, verse 37.

This is what God says through the prophet. He says, I will surely gather them, that is my people, from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath.

I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people and I will be their God.

Verse 40. I will make an everlasting covenant with them. I will never stop doing good to them. I will inspire them to fear me so that they will never turn away from me.

I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

[9:01] Back to Ezra. You see, God had promised that he would preserve a people for himself. They will be my people and I will be their God.

God is committed to his people. He doesn't give up on his people. He promised their return and return they did. God always keeps his promise to his people.

But more than that, God remembers the names of his people. He remembers the names of a people.

Look at verse 1. Now these are the people who came up from captivity. And in case anyone gets confused about who they are, guess what?

They're all recorded. Look again at verse 2. This is the list of the men of the people of Israel. The descendants of Parosh.

[10:09] 2,172. All their clans. And no, we're not going to read through them all. But here we have all their clans and all their exact number.

Verse 21. There were the men of Bethlehem, of Netthopah. 56. Of Anathoth. 128.

Of Asmetev. 42. They are all remembered. They're engraved in history. Recently, there was the 9-11 memorial.

25 years since the Twin Towers were attacked. On that day, 2,977 people were killed.

As a lasting memory, the names of every victim are inscribed at that memorial place. In fact, on the 11th of September, every year, their names are read aloud by family members.

[11:22] Now, could you imagine if the master of ceremonies stood up and said, Well, a lot of people died here a long time ago. But, you know, we just don't have time to mention them all.

No. No. They can't be forgotten. Each one is remembered. Each one is recorded.

Well, here we have a list of the names of those God rescued from captivity. It's a lot of people. In fact, verse 64 gives us the total number.

The whole company numbered 42,360. That's a lot of people.

You see, the writers could have made verse 64 verse 2 and not bothered with all the list of names. But no, they can't do that.

[12:25] They can't be forgotten. Each one is named and precious. Each one is known by God and is special to him.

Isaiah puts it well. Here the people of God are crying out. The Lord has forsaken me.

The Lord has forgotten me. Do you ever think that? God responds. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she is born?

Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are ever before me. Now let me say, if you here today belong to God. You are not forgotten by God.

[13:35] Whatever may happen. You are God's treasured possession. Special. Remembered.

Engraved. Graved. On his hands. In fact, your name is written into a special book. And we'll come back to that in a minute.

But for now, be encouraged. That the people of God. Will never, ever. Be forgotten. By God Almighty.

So, the people of God are never, ever forgotten. Second. The people of God are gathered to worship.

You see, when God rescued his people and brought them back from exile and brought them to their land, it was for a purpose. The purpose was to worship God.

[14 : 41] Two things we need to look at here. First, look at the temple workers. Look at the list of names that we have here.

It's divided into sections. So, verse 2, we have the people of Israel and their list of names is recorded. Then in verse 36, we have the priests.

Verse 40, the Levites. Verse 41, the musicians. Verse 42, the gatekeepers of the temple. Verse 43, we have the temple servants.

And then jump over to verse 58. We have the temple servants again, which includes servants of Solomon. Now, all these people here, the priests, the Levites, the musicians, the gatekeepers, the servants.

They've all got something in common. Something that keeps them together. And what is that? They are all responsible for the worship of God in the temple.

[15 : 53] The priests would sacrifice the animals. The Levites would help the priests. The musicians would sing. The gatekeepers would make sure that the unclean didn't get in.

And the servants, well, they assisted wherever there was help needed. They were all responsible for the worship of God.

No names are mentioned here about the construction workers. Nothing about the planners. But the names of the temple workers, they're all highlighted.

They seem to get special treatment. In other words, worship is God's priority. Look at how it's put in verse 70.

And who gets special mention? Well, the priests and the Levites and the musicians and the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns along with some of the other people.

[17 : 01] And the rest of the Israelites settled in their own towns. You see, they're marked out as being different because worship matters.

Which brings us to not just temple workers, but the worship of God. You see, this isn't the first time that God's people were in exile.

You know your Bible history. About a thousand years before, God's people were in captivity in Egypt. And God saw his people and he remembered his promise to his people and he rescued them through Moses.

Exodus records for us what God said to Moses. Do you remember? Remember, when the people have been brought out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain.

God's purpose is that his people would be gathered together to worship him. In fact, seven more times, God would say to Moses, go to Pharaoh and say to him, this is what the Lord says.

[18 : 20] Let my people go so that they may worship me. Every time Pharaoh turned around and says, no, I'm not letting them go.

Off Moses would go again. This is what the Lord says. Let my people go so that they may worship me. You see, the purpose of rescuing them from exile was so they could worship God.

That they would live for God. Serve God. Honor God. Give to God. They were to celebrate and remember their redemption through the Exodus.

Now in Ezra, we find the same thing happening. Just as there was an Exodus from Egypt, so we have another Exodus from Babylon.

God redeems his people so he might gather them together to the worship of God. You see, God longs for a people who will love him and honor him.

[19 : 29] A God who redeems and saves and changes our life is worthy of our worship. God brings his people together.

And he will never forget them. And he calls us to worship him. Now, which brings us to number three.

The people of God always come to Jesus. You see, it's clear from the text in Ezra that while we have a list of all the names, not everyone who returned were part of God's people. Essentially, they were divided into two groups. And they were divided like this. There were those who were excluded.

Look at verse 59 with me. Forgive any mispronunciations here. The following came up from the towns of Tel Mela, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Ad Don and Immer.

[20 : 48] But the families could not show that their families were descended from Israel. They didn't have the right credentials.

They didn't have the birth cert. They had no record of their family lineage. It seems they were in the same category as some of the priests.

Verse 61. And from among the priests, there were the descendants of Hababaya, Hagkaz, Brasilia. We'll just go to verse 62 because this is the important bit.

These search for their family records. But they could not find them. So they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.

Shut out. You see, to come under the covenant blessings, you had to show that you were descended from Israel.

[21 : 47] You had to be able to trace your family line all the way back to, remember them? Isaac, Jacob, Abraham. And if you had the records to prove it, you were in.

You were part of the big family of God. But if you didn't have the family records, you were excluded. No longer part of the community. But the problem was much deeper than just a few people who couldn't find their names in a record.

You see, the rest of the people may have had the paperwork and had the stamp of approval. But they had all failed to live as God's family should. Instead of worshipping God, they went back to worship other gods.

If you read the end of Ezra and Nehemiah, it's terribly depressing. Because after all of God bringing them back again, they do exactly the same thing and break the covenant again.

Although God had redeemed them, they would reject him. You see, it wasn't just those who couldn't find their names in the records who were excluded.

[23 : 07] It was anybody who didn't keep the covenant. They too were excluded. In other words, based on their own performances, they would all be excluded.

Which brings us to a really important question. Who then are the people of God?

Who are those who are included? Who gets to be part of God's big family? And how does God keep his promise that the people of God will never be forgotten?

But if they keep messing up, how do they remain part of God's family? Well, the story of the Bible makes it clear that we need someone much better than ourselves.

You see, the true people of God are those who come to Jesus. Two things we're going to look at as we finish to bring it all together.

[24 : 17] Here's the first one. Jesus is the true Israel. Jesus is the true Israel. What do we mean by that?

Well, there is only one who has lived a faithful and obedient life. And that's Jesus. He alone is the one who has kept the covenant.

He is that faithful worshipper who never turned to any other God but did everything his father asked of him.

You see, Jesus is the true Israel. He is the son of God who is included and never excluded. So if he's in and he's part of the family of God what do I need to do to be part of the family?

Well, we all need to be related to Jesus by our faith. Go with me please to Ephesians chapter 1.

[25 : 27] Ephesians chapter 1. So we're asking the question what do we need to do to be included?

We need to be related to Jesus by faith. So Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13.

Let's read verse 13. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth.

The gospel of your salvation. When you heard the good news about Jesus Christ the true Israel the perfect obedient son who stands in your place representing you pouring out blessings upon you and in our place taking the curse that we deserve.

When you were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth the gospel of salvation when you believed when you trusted Christ that he is your life you were marked in him with a seal

the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory.

[27:17] Turn the page to chapter 2 verse 12. He goes on to explain it a bit more. Remember verse 12 that at that time you were separate from Christ excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away excluded and shut out have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Verse 19 Consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his family.

You see when we come to Jesus just as people in the Old Testament look forward in faith to Jesus coming when we trusted in Jesus we are truly included never forgotten always remembered.

In fact as members of God's family our names are written on a list remember what that book is Revelation calls it the book of life or the Lamb's book of life if you want to just flick the page because it's very close to Philippians chapter 4 it's the next letter along just very quickly as an example Philippians chapter 4 and verse 3 so Paul writes he says yes and I ask you my true companion help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel along with Clement and the rest of his co-workers whose names are in the book of life isn't that wonderful God has a book of life and in it are the names of his people and they can never be erased or removed it is written permanently and eternally if you are trusting in

Jesus you are never ever excluded you're always included and nothing can get you off the list not your sin not Satan not suffering nothing you are forever secure in him he is the true Israel our true representative and we are related to him by faith what is Christ's is ours we belong forever the second thing we need to get right here is that if Jesus is the true Israel the church is the new Israel you see when we trust in Jesus we're not left in isolation we become part of his community the church God's family you see Jesus rescued us from exile he has redeemed us from our captivity to sin and death and hell and he now leads us on a new exodus he brings us out so that we might worship

[31:08] God for that's God's purpose for us we are a people gathered together to worship God with our lives remember how Paul put it to the church Rome he says therefore I urge you my brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy just pause and think back to the mercy of God how he has redeemed you and rescued you and saved you what's our response to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God this is your true and proper worship this is God's great purpose for his people from beginning to end it's the story of the Bible one writer put it like this you can follow it on screen redemption is the means worship is the goal it's the purpose of history the goal of the whole

Christian story worship isn't just one segment of the Christian life among others worship is this is the entire Christian life now if you've known the mercy of God in your life if you've been redeemed from sin and hell by God you are called together with God's people to worship him not just for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning but with your whole life God gathers us that we would be a worshipping people one day the Lord Jesus is going to come again and the book of life will be opened and all the names of those who trust in Jesus will be read is your name in the book of life for those whose names are written you will gather together with all

God's people of all time and in all history I can't wait perfect joy comfort everybody God's people together doesn't that lead you to worship God to honor him and live for him doesn't it make you want to sing before the throne of God above I have a strong a perfect plea a great high priest whose name is love and ever lives and pleads for me my name is graven on his hands his crucified hands who died for me my name is written on his heart I know that while in heaven he stands no tongue can bid me thence depart brothers and sisters rejoice that your name is written in the book of life let's pray what a story what a wonderful true story of a savior

Jesus Christ who has redeemed us because he never forgets us that we might worship him lord thank you what more can we say but praise you for all that you have done your great mercy in response we offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to you our worship of a great God amen