

Ezra Ch7v1-28 - Restoring And Renewing The Church

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[0:00] The law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord of Israel.

Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra, the priest, the teacher of the law, of the God of heaven.

Greetings. Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem with you, may go.

Now jump down to verse 27. Praise be to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honour to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem in this way.

And who has extended his good favour to me before the king and his advisors and all the king's powerful officials? Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

Well, we're going to pray together and ask for God's help as we look at his word. So let's pray.

[1:39] Our Father God, we ask that you will be our teacher by your spirit. Would you open our eyes that we will see wonderful treasures in your word, that ultimately you would lead us to Jesus, so that we as a people are renewed and restored and worship him together.

Father, we ask this in your name. Amen. Question for us to think about as we begin.

What do God's people most need? Or to put it in another way, what does this church need?

What does Carrigaline Baptist Church most require? A new building? I mean, this is good, but we could do better than a basketball court.

A new vision? I mean, we are doing the same things one after the other, year after year. What about a new pastor?

[3:01] Hopefully that will be soon. Or a new worship group. What is it that this church most needs?

Well, thankfully, we don't need to guess, because God's word makes it abundantly clear what we all desperately need. What we're going to discover in chapter 7 is that what we most need is a leader who will bring about renewal and restoration of God's people.

A leader who's going to bring renewal and restoration. Look at the beginning of chapter 7. After these things.

So this signals a transition in the book. Chapters 1 to 6 was all about the temple being rebuilt and restored. Now from chapter 7 to chapter 10, it's all about the people being renewed and restored. So, thank you, Eileen. I'll take a sip of water now. Thank you. So chapter 1 to 6 was all about the temple being rebuilt and restored.

[4:23] Chapter 7 to 10 is all about the people being renewed and restored. So how's that going to happen? Well, God raises up Ezra to restore and renew the people.

We're going to see three ways in which Ezra leads the people in renewal and restoration. We'll see that Ezra is a priest who brings hope, a preacher who speaks life, and a praise leader who leads us in worship.

In fact, what we will see through Ezra is a picture of what God will ultimately do through his son, Jesus Christ. Because in Jesus, we see he is the true priest.

He is a better preacher. He is the ultimate praise leader who brings about renewal and restoration of God's people.

So we're going to look at a priest, a preacher and a praise leader. That's easy to remember. First of all then, a priest who brings hope.

[5 : 38] A priest who brings hope. Look at verse 1. After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra, son of Saraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shalom, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahutub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Merioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Buki, the son of Abushah, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the chief priest.

This Ezra came up from Babylon. Now my goodness me, if we were writing it, would we have all those details? Why torture us with these unpronounceable names?

Why not just tell us this is Ezra? Well, it's important. It's telling us that Ezra is the great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, 16 times over, end of verse 5, the son of Aaron, the chief priest.

You see, you couldn't just decide to go off to priest school and become a priest. It was reserved for one family only, Aaron's family.

So Ezra is here presenting and proving his credentials. His genealogy proves it. He's the real deal. He's a genuine, card-carrying priest.

[7 : 26] Now with that title comes a special role. He's saying to the people, I am your mediator. I represent God to the people and the people to God.

So God raises up Ezra as priest. And what will this priest do? Well, remember the first time we meet God's people in exile.

That was all the way back in Exodus chapter 4. So go back with me to Exodus chapter 4. Which is on page 61 if you're using the church Bibles.

Exodus chapter 4, page 61. Here God's people are in exile. They're slaves in Egypt under the cruel tyrant Pharaoh.

And God is going to rescue them and bring them out from exile through the Exodus.

[8 : 36] And God, you remember, chooses Moses. Moses is to speak to Pharaoh so that the people would be released. But Moses isn't very willing.

Chapter 4, verse 10. Moses said to the Lord, Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant.

I am slow of speech and tongue. The poor man had a speech impediment. He's saying, I can't do it. Verse 14.

The Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, Well, what about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well.

He is already on his way to meet you and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth. I will help both of you speak and will teach you what you are to do.

[9 : 43] He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. Let's go back to Ezra.

So Aaron the priest will speak God's word to the people. He will speak God's word to Pharaoh and tell Pharaoh that he is to let the people go so that they are rescued from exile.

Now travel forward all the way from exile in Exodus to Ezra and here we meet God's people again away from their land in exile.

But God hasn't forgotten. God has a plan and his plan is Ezra. Not just any old Ezra. End of verse 5. He's Aaron the chief priest. This Ezra came up from Babylon. You see, just as God had rescued the people through Aaron the priest, God is going to rescue his people from exile through Ezra the priest.

[11 : 04] One like Aaron who years before had rescued the people and knew Aaron is going to arise. His name is Ezra. This is something special for God's people.

This is hope. Do you remember Aaron? He was that great man who brought us up from exile and here is Ezra coming to do the same thing.

It's the beginning of renewal and restoration as God raises up his leader to bring his people home. Now isn't that what we most need? A priest who will represent the people and bring hope to the people.

A priest who can bring about restoration and renewal. In fact, we need someone even better than Ezra.

[12 : 04] We need not just temporary hope but we need eternal hope. We need not just physical restoration of going back to a land and seeing things being restored and built up but we need spiritual renewal, heart restoration.

And Ezra could never bring about that kind of deep change. So Ezra for us today is a picture of Jesus who can bring about that restoration and renewal through his chosen priest.

Go with me to Hebrews chapter 5 which is on page 1204. 1204.

Hebrews chapter 5. So I want us to make the connections that Ezra did that he was a priest like Aaron.

Aaron who had rescued the people from exile. Now in Hebrews chapter 5 God is talking about a priest that he has raised up.

[13:34] Verse 4. And no one takes this honour on by himself. He's talking about Jesus being the high priest.

No one takes this honour himself but he receives it when God when called by God just as Aaron was. In the same way Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest but God said to him you are my son today I have become your father.

You see Jesus is God's appointed priest one just like Aaron one just like Ezra who brings people up from not just exile physical exile but spiritual exile.

he brings us up from our slavery to sin and death and he restores us to God. In fact here is a priest in Jesus who continues to renew and restore.

Just look back at the end of chapter 4 verse 14. Therefore since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven Jesus the son of God let us hold firmly to the faith we profess for we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet he did not sin.

[15:15] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

You see Ezra was a great priest to the people. He would restore them and bring them back to their land but it was only physical it was only temporary he's a picture of someone better and greater to come.

In Jesus the true high priest we see one who leads us out of our spiritual exile to restore us to God through his death and resurrection but more than that he brings us to God our father so that we can receive grace and mercy every day in our weaknesses as we struggle with temptation as we struggle with our sin we come to our father God who pours out upon his children grace and mercy again and again and again.

hope. That's the kind of renewal and restoration we so desperately require. The invitation here to us all this morning is come to Jesus our true priest and experience his work of renewal and restoration of grace and mercy in our life every day.

so we see a priest who brings hope. Second we have a preacher who speaks life.

[17:03] As priest let's go back to Ezra Ezra chapter seven. As priest Ezra had the responsibility of teaching God's word to God's people.

So look at verse six. Chapter seven verse six. This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the law of Moses which the Lord the God of Israel had given.

I wonder if you see the pattern there that God had spoken the law or the word to Moses. Moses writes the word down and now Ezra takes that written word and he will teach that word to the people.

Ezra is going to lead them back from exile into the promised land but how is he going to do it? He's going to do it through the preaching of God's word. You see what the people need to hear is not Ezra's thoughts and ideas.

What they most need at this time is God's preached word. Now we can learn from Ezra in this. If we want to hear God's voice, if we want to know what God is saying to us today, we open up the Bible.

[18:27] We need to listen and read it. And that's what Ezra does. He goes back to God's written word. He goes back to what God has said so that he in turn can teach the people.

Look at verse 10. For Ezra had devoted himself, literally he had given his heart to the study and observance of the law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Ezra had studied the word. He had devoted his heart to the word. He observed it. That is, he sought to obey it and apply it to his life. And as he had done that, he was in a position to teach God's word to the people.

You see, it's the word of God that will ultimately renew and restore the people. It's going to change their hearts. So Ezra gives his time to the word.

He studies, he thinks, he meditates, he writes, he submits to it, he works it into his own heart. And as it changes his heart, he speaks that word out.

[19 : 47] It's the word of God that's going to renew their hearts. Look at how Ezra is referred to in verse 11. This is a copy of the letter King of Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord of Israel.

Or look down at verse 12. To Ezra the priest, teacher of the law, of the God of heaven. And what is Ezra to do with this law, with this word of God that's been written down?

Well, look down at verse 25. And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, that is the wisdom of the word of God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of the trans-Euphrates, all who know the laws of your God, and you are to teach any who do not know them.

So here is Ezra, raised up by God to be a preacher of the word of God that is going to change the hearts of the people and renew them and restore them.

And isn't that what the church most needs today? A preacher who will be devoted to God's word.

[21 : 29] A preacher who will instruct God's people. A preacher who will speak the word of God's truth into people's hearts by the Spirit so that they are changed and transformed.

Wouldn't it be great to have Ezra as the next preacher of God's word? Wouldn't that be great?

Well, yes and no. You see, we need someone greater than Ezra. Ezra did teach the word of God but it was only a partial revealed part of God's word.

We have God's word in all its fullness. Ezra taught the word but Jesus was the word of God.

He is the word of God in all its fullness. God is the teaching only leads us to Jesus who ultimately speaks life.

[22 : 32] Life that can change. Look with me if you like or you can just listen. John's gospel chapter 5 which is on page 1069.

1069. John chapter 5 on page 1069. Here's what Jesus says.

John 5 verse 24. Very truly I tell you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but is crossed over from death to life.

Who of us could say believe my word and you will have life. Our words can't bring life but the words of Jesus bring life.

Verse 26. For as the father has life in himself so he is granted the son also to have life in himself. Jesus speaks life.

[23 : 52] Peter understood this. In John chapter 6 verse 66 just flick the page after the feeding of the 5,000 there's a defining moment as Jesus had been preaching the word and here was the response verse 66 from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

They didn't want to listen to the word. You do not want me to leave too do you? Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter answered him Lord to whom shall we go?

you have the words of eternal life. So here is the invitation that God is giving to his church to us his people today.

Open your Bible. Study it. Devote your heart to it. Meditate on it. Think about it.

Follow it. And as we do we will encounter the risen Lord Jesus. And as we come to Jesus he by his spirit will preach truth to our hearts.

[25 : 14] He will renew us and restore us. The invitation to each of us is to come to Jesus our greater preacher better and greater than Ezra and experience his life in all its fullness.

So come come to Jesus our priest come to Jesus our preacher and then third come to our praise leader who leads us in worship.

Let's go back to Ezra again Ezra chapter seven. As Ezra makes his way back to the land with some of the people King Artaxerxes writes a letter to Ezra.

We read it in verse 11. This is a copy of the letter King of Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest a teacher of the law a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord for Israel.

Now in the letter the king gives two decrees two commands. The first decree is that God's people can return.

[26 : 40] Verse 13. Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom including priests and Levites who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem with you may go.

He decrees you can return. The second decree comes in verse 21 where he decrees that provisions will be made for the people as they return.

Now I King Artaxerxes decree that all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest the teacher of the law of the God of heaven may ask of you. It's remarkable isn't it? Here's a pagan king working for the good of God's people. It's extraordinary that so much is done for them by this king.

All hail king Artaxerxes. Well not so fast because Ezra perceives that behind the king is the hand of God.

[27:59] The work of God behind the scenes. So he leads the people in praise not to Artaxerxes but to God. Verse 27.

Praise be to the Lord the God of our ancestors who has put it into the king's heart to bring honour to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem this way.

King Artaxerxes may have given the decrees but only because God had caused him to do so. In fact Ezra wants us to see how God has been at work all through this situation.

Look at the end of verse 6. Chapter 7 end of verse 6. The king had granted Ezra everything he asked for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.

We see the same in verse 9. Ezra had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month not because of King Artaxerxes but because the gracious hand of his God was on him.

[29:16] Or look at the end of verse 28. The end of the chapter. Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

Behind the scenes through all the events and circumstances God was directing the events. His hand was at work to ensure that his people got home and they had all that they needed.

So in response Ezra the priest the preacher now the praise leader leads the people in praise verse 27.

Praise be to the Lord the God of our ancestors. They worship God for his goodness and grace. They give him God all the honour and all the glory.

Now isn't that what the church most needs? A praise leader who reminds the people of God's saving work.

[30:27] A praise leader who puts the spotlight not on people but on God. A praise leader who delights at the wonders God has done.

Ezra may have been a great leader of praise but the problem with the people as we will see as we go through the rest of the book their worship was temporary their worship was limited they would worship other things and other people they were never fully and truly devoted to God Ezra couldn't change their hearts and you see we too fail to worship God as we should our hearts get distracted all the time by other things we fail to see God's hand at work in our life and in every situation Romans tells us in chapter one that we worship created things instead of our creator you see what the church most desperately needs is a leader who will stand in for the people and worship for us have a look with me as we close with these thoughts from

Hebrews chapter two go to Hebrews chapter two it's on page 1202 1202 Hebrews chapter two here we are introduced to Jesus as our praise leader chapter we'll start at verse 10 where it talks about how God will bring many sons and daughters to glory but more than that verse 11!

both the one who makes people holy that's Jesus and those who are made holy that's God's people are of the same family so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters you see by the work of Jesus he makes us holy so that we might become part of his family that we would belong to him that we would be his brothers and sisters now look and hear what happens in verse 12 he says Jesus says I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters in the assembly I will sing your praises Jesus starts to sing as Jesus looks out at his brothers and sisters as he looks out at his church as

Jesus sees the work of the father bringing many sons and daughters to glory Jesus begins to praise the father you see Jesus is the ultimate praise leader as Jesus sees what his work has achieved in making people holy so that they can be part of God's glory he responds in songs of praise and he never stops have you ever considered to think that right now Jesus is singing Jesus is delighting in your salvation constantly 24/7 praising the father before his people Jesus worships for us but more than that as our praise leader Jesus now invites us to join in that never ending chorus of praise to the father verse 12

[34 : 50] I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters in the assembly in the gathering of God's people I will sing your praises Jesus is present with us today by his spirit leading us in worship not just songs of worship but the worship of our whole life Jesus is inviting us to worship with him and bring our praise to the father we asked the question at the beginning what do we most need as a church well what we most need is a leader who can bring about the restoration and the renewal of our hearts and that leader is found in the person of

Jesus and the invitation for us afresh today is come to Jesus the true priest and you will find grace and mercy for all your needs come to Jesus the greater preacher and you will have life in all its fullness come to Jesus the ultimate praise leader and worship with him now and forever more let's pray together our father god thank you so much that you do not leave us on our own to fix our lives or to change our own hearts because we could never do that but thank you that in

Jesus we have the great priest and preacher and praise leader who is our all and our everything we need no one else and nothing else save you father would you help us as your people to worship with Jesus today to live our lives in service and in honor of our great king and all that he has done and is doing for us thank you lord amen so all that he will have that he will not he will all that he will he will make him up as as he will he will man out he will all he will all D he will here he will there he will all he will fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers father■■ him fathers fathers fathers Hall fathers fathers bare fathers fathers fathers soldiers fathers fathers principles fathers fathers