

# Yearning for the Real and True God

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, you, you know, sometimes, Father, we can forget that we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone, and sometimes we can think it's just about rules and doing this and doing that, and we can just forget, we can forget, Father, that your Son has died for us, that he loves us, that you love us, that you want us to pour out our hearts to you, that it's about having a relationship with you that changes you, and I mean, not changes you, changes us and brings you glory, and so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would give us a fresh appreciation for the intimate relationship you desire to have with us, and the intimate relationship you desire your churches, our church, to have with you, and so we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do this gentle but deep work in our hearts that we might grow in these things, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen. Please be seated. So, four or five years ago, some of you have heard this story before, four or five years ago, I think Louise's, my wife's birthday is in early January, and four or five years ago, I think her birthday fell on a Tuesday night, so we have a tradition that we want to try to have as much of the family to come around to help celebrate, you know, honour the person whose birthday it is, and celebrate that, and, you know, give gifts, and so because Louise's actual birthday was on, I think it was a Tuesday night, we had the family thing on the weekend, but it comes to Tuesday night, and it sort of feels funny to do nothing at all on her actual birthday, like that just sort of feels like a bit wrong.

So we decided that the two who still lived at home with us, and Louise and I, we'd go out for supper. So, you know, we get all ready, pick a restaurant, and we go to the restaurant, and I'm going to get some of these details probably wrong, but you're going to get the gist of it.

We go to the restaurant that we've chosen, and the restaurant we've chosen isn't open, because the staff is having their Christmas party that night. And I think we try another restaurant, and there's something similar going on.

Then we're having a quick discussion about where we want to go, and Louise has a very clear idea about where she'd like us to go, but I know better not.

[ 2 : 2 9 ] Now, the place that Louise wanted to go was inexpensive, and I wanted to spend more money than that. Now, listen, one of the things I need you to understand, I am not trying to justify myself.

What I did was wrong. Like, what I did was wrong. I didn't listen to my wife. And you can listen to the different ways that I was wrong, but I don't want it to sound as if I'm trying to justify myself.

I'm not justifying myself. And then we had a miserable evening, and we had a miserable evening because of me, and I wouldn't listen to my wife. Now, this story helps us to understand what's going on in this scripture text, which to us, when we just read it, looks very perplexing and very hard to appreciate and very hard to understand.

So it would be a great help to me if you would get your Bibles out and turn with me to Ezra chapter 3, verse 1. And I mean, we will always have the words on the screen, but there is something about having a Bible of your own and being able to look around, look at the verses before and after, and it just helped to make the story more your own if you, in fact, can look at it yourself.

And those of you who have tried to read the book of Ezra understand what I mean by saying this is a book which is very hard to get into. It's all weird names doing odd things and doesn't seem to relate to us.

[ 3 : 59 ] But that story I had about Louise and myself celebrating the birthday will help us at a very deep level to see why this is actually a very profound and helpful text and actually speaks about the deep yearnings of our heart.

So chapter 3, verse 1, here's how it begins. So just what's happened in terms of the context of the book is in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroys, defeats Israel and Judah, destroys the city, takes the king away blinded into captivity, kills the high priest, takes almost everybody into captivity.

The city is in ruins, the temple is in ruins, the holy things are gone, and looks as if almost Israel is over. But a prophet by the name of Jeremiah prophesied that 70 years from now that even though they'd been very sinful that God would bring them back.

And God, one of the big themes of the book actually is how God uses pagan emperors to actually accomplish his will. The Assyrians eventually get defeated and Cyrus, the first Persian king, becomes the new emperor of a mighty empire.

And some of you might not know this, but up until not that many years ago, Iran was called Persia. So imagine this is God doing something through the Ayatollah. That's how crazy this is.

[ 5 : 26 ] If all of a sudden the Ayatollah of Iran made a decision like this. That's the shocking thing about the story. So all of a sudden, Cyrus makes this decision that the Jewish people who want it can return to the ruins of their homeland.

They, I mean, he might not think many want to go because who would want to leave civilization? Who would want to leave all of the economic prosperity and safety and protection of living at the center of the empire to go to these outlying area where there is just ruins and who knows what wild and outlaw type things are going on there.

But he makes a decree that they can go back and he even gives money and other types of things. And that's what we see in chapter one and chapter two. And so this is taking place about five hundred and three, about three years, two to three years after Cyrus's decree.

They've come back. They've got their homes at least sorted out enough so that they have a roof over their head. And our story keeps up with chapter three, verse one. And when the seventh month came and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem.

Then arose Yeshua, the son of Jostak, and with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealatiel, with his kinsmen. And they built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

[ 7 : 02 ] Now, pause. Yikes. Okay, George, this is a stretch. You're saying this story is going to be helped by understanding having a birthday meal with your wife.

The law of Moses, 536 BC. And if you go further, all these burnt offerings and sacrifices, George, that is just religion.

It's barbaric. It has nothing to do with us, but it does. If you could put up the first point, that would be very helpful. Here's the first point. The real Lord, who really exists, created the real world, calls the real you into a real covenant of real, unfailing love.

That is the message of the Old Testament. It is the message of the New Testament. We understand, of course, that there is a new covenant, a greater covenant, the final covenant that's brought about by Jesus.

We celebrate it in the Lord's Supper. We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper at the end of the service. The real Lord, who really exists, created the real world, calls the real you into a real covenant of real, unfailing love.

[ 8 : 18 ] You might notice, I think, the real bit's important. So here's the thing which is going on. Earlier on, just before this, I prayed. And I am a very simple, I'm a simpleton when it comes to this type of stuff.

And most Canadians, most Canadians, when they think of religion or spirituality, they think of it as a type of affectation. It's like a hobby.

It just gives them some type of peace or inner hope. You know, and many people say, well, I personally prefer some Jack Daniels or expensive wine. That does the thing for me.

But for others, you know, it's going to church. You know, that's fine if that's what it does for you. And, you know, some good whiskey does it for me. Then, you know, that's fine. It's all cool. You know, and they don't think that the story, when we read things like this, they don't think it's real.

Not like a hockey game is real. And when people are talking about what happened in the hockey game, that's real. Or if somebody tells you about what happened at work, that that's real. Or that your bank statements are real.

[ 9 : 20 ] That religious stuff isn't real. It isn't real. But Christians believe it is real. When I did that prayer, I believe I am talking to a God that does exist who can hear my prayer.

And that he will act in terms of what I've asked him to do. That's what I believe. I don't believe. If I just thought it was an affectation, I wouldn't take up Jack Daniels or anything like that.

But I'd have nothing to do with this place. Like, I mean, this is a complete and utter waste of time. I believe there's a God who hears me. Who hears you. When you pray to him.

I believe it's real. And that's what's at the heart of this story. That this story is talking about what the Jewish people were doing and how it's real.

Now, why on earth does this matter? Well, here's why it matters. So, I was unbelievably shy with young women. And I desperately wanted to have a girlfriend. But I could barely talk to a real woman.

[ 10 : 23 ] I could barely talk to them. But I wanted to have a girlfriend. I remember if I thought I might bump into a girl that I liked. I'm not making this up. I would make a checklist in my mind of things to talk about.

And I would try to memorize it. Because I was completely hopeless. Louise could tell you how hopeless I was. There's still times I'm pretty hopeless. But the thing about it is I would daydream about doing something with this young woman.

Go out and doing something. In my daydreams, of course, the conversation flows effortlessly. Effortlessly. We have a good time. We laugh. Everybody's happy.

That's the real world. I mean, that's my imaginary girlfriend. But in the real world. And in fact, if I was having an imaginary birthday party for my imaginary girlfriend, what happened to me that night wouldn't have ended up with my wife being terribly unhappy with me.

My imaginary girlfriend would have loved everything I wanted to do. She would have thought I was wonderful. Everything would work out. And I would leave those daydreams feeling very pleased.

[ 11 : 34 ] But it's all imaginary. Well, because, dang it, like real people say things and have opinions and want things. And you don't necessarily figure those things out.

That's what happens in the real world. So what we're seeing here in this text is actually, if God is real, okay, like, I don't want to offend you, but it's possible that your own boutique spirituality and religions is actually the equivalent, the religious equivalent, of having an imaginary girlfriend.

Because, you see, if there's in fact going to be a real God that really does exist, it's going to be more like the birthday scenario, and it's in fact going to be like this. This is actually proof that they're talking about, like, the real God who actually really exists.

And so, you see, in the real world, Louise communicated to me how she wanted to be honored and celebrated and enjoyed.

And I needed her to communicate that. And I ignored it. Now, think about it here for a second. And if you have a birthday party for your one-year-old, like little Dahlia is having a birthday in whatever, eight, nine, ten months or whatever, you can't really ask Dahlia what she'd like for her birthday or what would be fun.

[ 13 : 06 ] I can give you a hint. A cupcake with about this much cake and that much icing will make Dahlia very happy. Put her in her little high chair and give her the cupcake with all that icing, and in a couple of minutes, the cupcake will be destroyed.

There will be more cupcake and icing on the high chair, on the floor, on her face, in her hair, and all over her clothes than there is in her mouth, and she'll be really happy.

They get a bit older, you have to start asking them their opinion. You still don't really, you know, it might be that the five-year-old would just like endless bowls of candy, and you'd say, well, we'll give you a candy, but you're not going to have endless bowls of them, right?

So they start to communicate it. But as they get older, by the time they're old enough to be your peer, you've got to listen to them. That's the only way you know. But think about it for a second. If that's how we treat a child and that's how we treat a peer, by the time it comes to God, if God is real and he is a person, well, I don't have the vaguest idea in the world how to honor him.

I don't have the vaguest idea in the world how to celebrate him or enjoy him unless he communicates it to me. I am completely, utterly dependent upon him communicating it to me.

[ 14 : 26 ] And if I screw things up because I can't even listen to Louise, I have to listen to him. And I can't second-guess him. I can't say, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know you want that, but, you know, I think this is better.

No, I've got to listen to him. So if you look back at the text, you'll notice, here's one of the keys to reading the whole book of Ezra. You'll notice that just before the end of verse 2 it says, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

And you're going to see, if you're careful, it's one of those things that you miss. But all the way through the book of Ezra, this little as it is written, as it is written, as it is written is always there. Right?

But that's a sign that we're dealing with a real God. At least one who claims that this is the real God. We have to be completely and utterly dependent upon him revealing to us how it is that we honor him and celebrate him and enjoy his presence.

Now, some of you might say, George, okay, that's all very good. Come on, George. How barbaric is it? You burnt animals? Burnt? Or, like, you take a cute little lamb or a cute little goat, you know, sheep, cut their throat and throw them on a fire?

[ 15 : 37 ] Like, that's just all completely and utterly barbaric. Like, what's going on here with this type of stuff? Well, let me just comment on it on a moment.

But I think it'll be helpful if we look at the next few verses before I do. Let's look at verses 3 and following. It'll make it clearer. Verse 3. So, remember, they've all gathered.

They want to offer burnt offerings. So, what they do is they, verse 3, they set the altar in its place. Now, here, our English translation for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands.

It's a very, very literal translation, but it actually sort of obscures the meaning. Basically, they were afraid of the people around them. And that's going to become an increasing theme, and I'm going to talk about it more in a couple of minutes.

But they were afraid. And in some ways, it sort of implies that their fear drove them even closer to God. I mean, we can be afraid of people in our culture, and the temptation is that when we're afraid of people that it'll silence us, but it drove them to God.

[ 16 : 45 ] At least it did right then. And I'll continue reading. And they offered burnt offerings on the altar to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening. Now, here we go through this, all this weird stuff, and I'll explain it in a moment.

And they kept the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, as it is written. Remember, I said that's all the way through. And offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, another version of as it is written.

As each day required, as it is written. And after that, the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon, and all the appointed feasts of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made a free will offering to the Lord.

From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. Okay, so what's going on with this? Well, there's several things which are going on here which are important.

The first one is, you don't have to have it up on there. Just remember that the key to understanding this text is that the real Lord, who really exists, created the real world, calls the real you into a real covenant of real and failing love.

[ 17 : 51 ] That's what's going on. It's always the case. It begins with Abraham right up to Jesus and the new covenant, and it continues on today. And so here's the point of the sacrifices.

The sacrifice of an animal like that is real. You hear the cry of the animal.

You hear the cries of the animal that are about to come. There's the blood. There's the smell of the awful. Like, it's real. And it's real. It's not just sort of sitting in silence in the comfort of your room and thinking certain thoughts, which can just be all about imaginary gods.

This is very real. It's very earthy. It's very striking. And if you're listening to God, he says these times of these sacrifices are times for you to remember the covenant.

Remember that I am the God, that he is the God who loves you, that has rescued you, that's called you into a relationship with him. It's a time not just to remember the covenant but to focus on God, that this is being done in a sense for him and for our relationship and to honour him and to glorify him.

[ 19 : 06 ] And it's also a time to remember that just as I have times when nobody can be married for any length of time without having to learn to say they're sorry to their spouse because we do wrong. And if that's true of us with a spouse or even with a friend, and there's times we have to apologise to our children that we've done something wrong, but it's definitely the case that you cannot possibly have a relationship with a God that's actually real that you never say sorry.

If you have a religion like that or a spirituality, you have an imaginary girlfriend. You have an imaginary God. Not real. Sorry, I don't want to insult you.

But you can't have a real relationship with a real person without ever having to say you're sorry and make an amendment of life. And you see there's a great cost with the sacrifice. Now, what about us?

If you could put up the second point, that would be very helpful. Here's the thing to understand. I'll say this again at the end if I remember. The Lord Jesus Christ's death upon the cross was the true and greater sacrifice to which all the sacrifices pointed.

That's what Jesus told us. The Lord Jesus Christ's death upon the cross was the true and greater sacrifice to which all the sacrifices pointed.

[ 20 : 24 ] So we don't slaughter lambs. We don't slaughter bulls and oxen. Why? Because at one time for all people on a busy road outside of Jerusalem in a place that was so cosmopolitan the charges against Jesus had to be read in three languages Hebrew, Latin, and Greek that Jesus, the Lamb of God, died on a cross and in a sense what he did on earth was also done in a sense in the transcendent, the spiritual that was a once-for-all offering of God, the Son of God in our place to make us right with God.

So that we would enter into this real relationship of real unfailing love with the real God. He provides that covenant and all of these point to him. But you notice that little bit about how the house of God wasn't made.

Look at the very end of verse 6. It says, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. Now that's a small thing here but once again this shows that we're talking about relationships.

I'm a sucker. I am a sucker for The Rock and his movies. I know it's corny but you know if I just want to relax on a Sunday afternoon like I'll watch something I'll re-watch something like the San Andreas Fault with you know him flexing his muscles you know rescuing people and doing all that type of stuff with a caring...

I'm a sucker for those things. Maybe some of you, now you have lower opinion of me well that's fine. I'm a sucker for them. And so if you watch something like that disaster movie the San Andreas Fault breaks you know the San Francisco's all having tidal waves and all that type of stuff and Dwayne Johnson I can't remember his name in that but he always plays the same character so it doesn't really matter what his character name is it's always Dwayne Johnson the imaginary Dwayne Johnson.

[ 22 : 25 ] I mean in real life he probably cries when he cuts his finger I don't know but you know in those things he's indestructible and completely and utterly fearless and of course so that you know his daughter of course is up in San Francisco his wife is there and so the whole movie as things are falling apart is his rushing there now what's he rushing to do?

if he was rushing because he knew where there was land and he was going to go to that land and he was going to build a house and he was going to get everything set up with food and then he went and rescued them well first of all they'd have been dead well that would have sucked but even if he was successful they'd say like are you a moron?

like are you a loser? like you really wanted to go build a house before you came to be with us and rescue us? like what's all that about? of course not he goes to be with them he goes to find them he finds his wife he finds his daughter they're together then they sort out all that stuff that's what a real relationship of love is all about and that's what's going on here they begin with connecting with God then we'll worry about the temple then we'll worry about the walls because it begins with a real relationship with a real God that really does exist now this next bit's a bit odd because all of a sudden it talks about them starting to build the house which we'll read in a moment and it and there's all these priests and Levites and they have to supervise it and it just seems really weird well here let's look at it and I'll tell you how to understand it it all it you have to think about it with a real God and a real relationship with that God and if you don't think of it in those terms nothing in the Bible is going to make sense let's look at what it says verse 7 so the foundation hadn't even been based so verse 7 they gave money to the masons and the carpenters and food and drink and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar lodges from Lebanon to the sea to Joppa according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month

Zerubbabel the son of Sheal-Atil and Yeshua the son of Jehozadak made a beginning together with the rest of their kinsmen and Yeshua Yeshua is a priest and with the other priests and the Levites who had come from to Jerusalem from the captivity they appointed the Levites from 20 years old and upward to supervise the work of the house of the Lord and Yeshua with his sons and his brothers and Kadmiel and his sons and the sons of Judah together supervised the workmen in the house of God along with the sons of Hinnadad and the Levites and their sons and brothers and we'll just sort of pause here so what's going on?

well I think you're going to know this instantly if I said this if it turned out that I'd won a small lottery and I'd got four or five hundred thousand dollars and I decided you know what I think I'm going to do I think I'm going to build a brand new house for Louise and I'm not going to tell her I'm going to find some land and I'm going to design the house and I'm going to supervise the builders and when it's all done I'm going to say to Louise one day let's go for a drive out in the country and we drive out to the country and I said see that house?

[ 26 : 07 ] does it look nice? yeah it looks nice I bought it and designed it and had it built for us do you think she'd be happy? no would she be right to be unhappy?

yes she'd probably say something like George you had that money you didn't tell me and you know how much I would love to design a house?

do you know how much I would enjoy talking with you over it about designing a house? do you have any idea? do you have any idea what you robbed me of? so what's going on here is they have the priests and the Levites supervising the building the house because the house has to be built as it is written it's God's house he designs it not them and that's why they're supervising it they're supervising it because it's for him now some of you might say well George that's you know that's a very creative way of reading the text but I think you're just imposing that on the text I don't think that's actually something that the text says I think you're just making it up and imposing on the text and it's a very interesting re-reading but that's not what the text says well it is look at verse 10 and following and when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets and the Levites the sons of Asaph with symbols to praise the Lord according to the directions of David the king of Israel in other words just like one of you or any of us if we were going to build a house or something at a certain point in time we might take a bit of a break and have a barbecue and you know have a bit of a party and so they've come to a key part they've cleared away enough room that they can lay down the foundation they have a pause they have a party but look what happens next and they sang responsibly praising and giving thanks to the Lord what do they say for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid now all the way through this every time you see the word Lord that's the covenant name for God it would be as if you know my grandkids if they always refer to it like a generic type of grandfather and all but they don't just when they talk to me

I'm not their generic grandfather I'm their papa when they talk about Louise she's not a generic grandmother she's Nana she's their Nana and whenever you see the word Lord that's this that's the covenant name for God that's their private name for God and when you see this song right here for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel usually in the Bible if you see this word steadfast love in the ESV it's translated one of the most important words in the Old Testament and I can't pronounce it because I can get that I can't get that guttural but it has said and has said is this idea of this unfailing steadfast covenant love and it describes how the Lord is towards his people that his love is a covenant love a relationship love like marriage is a covenant at least in a Christian sense and it's describing this covenant love between the Lord with his covenant name and his people and his love is steadfast it doesn't change and it's unfailing it can never not exist and that's the love that he has towards its people you see the text is trying to tell you that it's not about trying to figure out rules and religion and ritual that it's about relationship with a real God that's what the text is trying to tell you if you could put up the third point that would be very helpful here's the thing just as a bit of an not an aside it's a key part to this it's a key part to understanding Ezra and understanding yourselves you have a longing and a yearning to be in a relationship of unfailing love that is good and true and realer than real every human being every human being has a longing and a yearning to be in a relationship of unfailing love that is good and true and realer than real we might not want to acknowledge it it might be that it's dormant for long periods of time it might just be that in certain types of context it comes to the fore but that is a love that you have it's ultimately a love a desire that you have to know the chesed love of the Lord and that he is not just a generic God but that he is a God whose name you know and he knows your name it's also something we desire to have as much as possible with people you have that yearning only the gospel satisfies the deep yearning of your heart only the gospel satisfies the deep longing and yearning of your heart if you could put up the next point if you have you know if you'd like to join our music team that would be wonderful but usually before the service



I pray some version of this prayer with the musicians and that is you come into his presence but it's describing what we're doing this morning you come into his presence to know him as the triune God receive grace from him and respond in a worthy manner that's what we do that's what this is supposed to be about us coming into the presence of the triune God we come together with our brothers and sisters all adopted by grace into his family and we come to receive grace from him and we come to respond in a worthy manner it's in this text it's what's to characterize our worship and our life two more things just to bring this to a close it's and the first one is really important for us because the fact of the matter is we have complicated emotions people are complicated the world keeps wanting to try to reduce us a lot most modern thought tends towards reductionism to reduce us to something simple but the Bible acknowledges our emotional complexity and it's seen here in this very next part of the story look what happens in verse 12 so the foundation has been laid there's a little altar at a certain part of surrounded by a foundation they're all ruins everywhere they're afraid of the people but many of the priests verse 12 and the Levites and heads of the fathers houses old men who had seen the first house that's

[ 33 : 39 ] Solomon's temple they wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid though many shouted aloud with joy such a beautiful picture many weeping and many shouting for joy all at the same time all in the same service so that the people could not distinguish verse 13 could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping the people shouted with a great shout and the sound was heard far away you know here's the thing we just celebrated a baptism of a beautiful little baby girl there are also women and family there's families in this church that struggle with infertility there's people in this service who wish that they could be married and have not been able to be married and on one hand to see this beautiful baby girl get baptized on one hand your heart weeps your heart weeps and for others you're filled with joy and both responses are good and both responses can be in the church they can both be in your small group some will celebrate the promotion that somebody gets and others will be sad at their own failure in their areas of professional work and both can be there both should be there not can be should be there because we are emotionally complex people and our community should allow freedom for emotional complexity and you know

Romans 8 says all things work together for good for those who love God and this is another place where we both weep and mourn at the same time and that's very true obviously for Christians that's very true all things work together for good for those who love God but you know our sin and our rebellion and our hard-headedness and our just plain stupidity and foolishness sometimes mean that we lose real goods God gives us a new good but the real good is lost even when we get a new good and so even in our private lives we can have times of deep regret and weeping at the good that was lost while we accept and rejoice in the new good that God has given us just one final thing bringing this to a close enemies enemies chapter 4 verses 1 to 5 now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord the God of Israel now just pause the word there for adversaries in the

Hebrew the original language actually the original language has a range of meanings but all of them are bad adversary is actually the weakest of the senses can also be translated as foe oppressor enemy and it has with it as well sometimes it's used to physical objects as a hard pebble that cannot be broken or flint so it's communicating this idea of an oppressor who's like a hard pebble that can't be broken now when the enemies the oppressors who are their neighbors heard that they had returned well they're the enemies they're haters they're people who want them to fail I don't think there's anybody here over a certain age hasn't had somebody in their life who was a hater and they approached verse 2 that's the enemies they approached

Zerabbel and the heads of the 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 Esar and the king of Assyria who brought us here but Zerabbel Yeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers houses and Israel said to them you have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God but we alone will build the house to the Lord the God of Israel as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us I'm going to say more about this in a moment but I'll just read the final two verses then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah other translations use stronger words than discouraged they harassed threatened hated cajoled insulted hated the people of Judah and made them afraid to build they 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 now if you go on to read the rest of chapter 4 5 and 6 which I'm not going to read and one of the things

I've discovered that if it wants to be helpful to read you have to pay attention to the emperors who are listed and it's helpful to maybe I'm going to have a little piece of paper that gives me the names of the emperors and the dates that they reigned but what this book just casually mentions is this is over a hundred years of hatred this is intergenerational hatred the scan of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah take place over a hundred years and these people who hated them hated them for a hundred years a hundred years of hatred now the communist kicked the missionaries out of China about seven years ago our Chinese brothers and sisters have faced intergenerational hatred from the communist party of

[ 40 : 12 ] China Khomeini took power in Iran in late 1970 the underground church in Iran is coming up to 55 years of hatred intergenerational hatred and we can go around the world of other places of intergenerational hatred now what you see the book of Ezra and Nehemiah about is the flip side of that because it doesn't focus on it if you could put up the point that would be very helpful to follow the Lord involves a crucial and inescapable intergenerational dimension one of the questions that was put to me at GAFCON which was very very it's been playing around in my brain like a virus the question is who's going to be the pastor of your great grandchildren we all hope that Jesus will come back but who's going to pastor your great grandchildren now on one hand we need to live every day as if

Jesus might come back tonight but on the other hand we need to wrestle with this intergenerational aspect of discipleship that's why things like royal seminary and church planting are so important but it's also why we have to find ways to help parents raise godly children have good Sunday school and good other types of mentoring and maybe we should be getting into helping people homeschool because increasingly our culture is very very anti-Christian but there's this inescapable thing and that's what's hidden in the book of Ezra it's part of the story of the book of Ezra and Nehemiah is that they fail they fail time and time and time and time again but God is faithful why because his love towards us is hesed it is steadfast it is unfailing it is covenant love and so they stumble they're going to spend 17 years not building the temple it's going to take 20 years to build the temple because of their fear but God never gives up he doesn't give up even though many do and he sends prophets to challenge them at a serious time and by the way you know something which is so interesting about how the wisdom of God works when Israel was falling apart there was a prophet named

Jeremiah who said there would be 70 years before that the temple would be back and the people of Israel would be back and the worship would be back they came and they started to build you can check this with all the time references in 536 BC they start to build the temple they fall into fear they end up finishing it in the year 560 BC and 516 year BC is 70 years after the temple was destroyed in 586 BC God kept his word it is written one final thing the Bible gives hope for enemies you could put up the final point here's the thing I want you to understand the Lord does not want more Canadians he has zero interest in Canadians he wants to adopt more children to glorify and enjoy him forever forever when I went to Gafcon there were 52 nations represented and God doesn't want more Nigerians and more

Singaporeans and more people from Indonesia he just wants more children you maintain aspects of your cultural identity that's wonderful that has to be if you're human you're going to have culture but at the end of the day he doesn't want more of that he wants you he wants you he wants you to be his child by adoption and grace now why why am I saying that it's not on the screen but if you turn to chapter 6 verse 21 which is giving you chapter 4 5 and 6 gives you this 20 year period before the temple ends up getting built if you look at chapter 6 verse 21 verse 19 on the 14th day of the first month the returned exiles kept the Passover for the priests and Levites had purified themselves all of them were clean so they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles for their fellow priests and for themselves it was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile and also by everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord the God of Israel by some of the haters the people gave up having their children sacrificed to Moloch and who had hated the Israelites who become followers of the

Lord hate doesn't have the final word God's heart is that he wants more children he doesn't want more people biologically descended from Abraham or from one of the twelve I mean he wants more of them sure he does but he brings you in by adoption and grace and we are to pray for our persecutors we are to pray for our haters we are to pray for them please stand as we bring it to a close you know I'm just gonna I'm gonna say one thing as I as I just yeah no let we'll just close let's close father we thank you that you are a god who loves us you really exist you call us into a real relationship with you you call us knowing what we're really like you adopt us as your child you call us to be part of your kingdom and you want us to be part of not just a generic abstract family but to have local churches that we can be part of where we can rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep and support those who need support and receive support when we need support and we can put an arm around people and they can put an arm around us and we can pray for people and they can pray for us and we can help each other out and we learn what it means to walk with you and follow you together and we can have a heart for our culture that even that parts of our culture that hate us that we don't hate them but that we would have strong confidence father that you are

[ 46 : 49 ] God that you are real that you have a plan and purpose that you are bringing things to their proper end and we can pray that you turn the hearts of haters away from hate not so much to love towards us but love towards you and from that love towards you will love towards us and father we ask that you help us to have such lives of prayer may the gospel grip us we ask this in the name of Jesus your son and our savior and all God's people said Amen