

Embracing The Beautiful Vision

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Just to bow your heads in prayer for a moment, please. Father, we, Father, most of the time we're not really aware of this, but sometimes your word or your Holy Spirit makes clear to us that, Father, we're like a bundle of contradictory things.

You know, we want to, you know, we easily see ourselves as the victim, and then the very next moment we see ourselves as triumphing, and maybe you want to have lots of money one moment, and another moment we want to be just very, very generous and live simple lives, and the next minute we want fame, and then the other moment we just want to be left alone, and some moments, Father, we want you to act sort of almost like a divine puppeteer and just make everything move around to fix our problems, and then the next moment we want you to not have any type of control over our lives, and Father, we are not always aware of just how unruly we are and contradictory we are, but, Father, we rejoice and just marvel that you see us perfectly, and still you love us, and still your Son died on the cross for us.

We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would so bring the gospel home, the beautiful way, Father, that you continually invite us to, that that beautiful way, Father, would become more and more real to our hearts, that it might structure and form and shape and propel and draw us in terms of how we live our day-to-day lives until that day, Father, when we, your children, see you face to face.

So, Father, do that gentle but powerful work of your Holy Spirit in our lives, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Excuse me, I seem to have something stuck in my throat.

Hopefully, it'll just clear itself up. So, that was quite a scripture text. If you're wondering why we would talk a text about that describes other people's religions as being abominations, as forbidding your sons and daughters to marry other people, that seems to talk about there being a holy race, and it's terrible if anybody who's not part of that holy race becomes part of your family.

[2 : 2 1] It's not because I have a weird personality, and I intentionally go looking for weird texts like that to speak on. Like, I'm actually very Canadian, and I, you know, my wife and the staff can tell me that when I first read this text again in preparation for, I mean, I'd read it many, many times as part of my daily Bible reading, but when I first read it, knowing that I was going to preach on it, I was a bit appalled by it.

And I said to people, you need to pray for me. I'm not quite sure what I'm going to say about a text like this. It's really, really quite something. So, but the reason we do it is that one of the things we want to do here is we want to, Paul in Acts chapter 20 says he wants to declare the whole counsel of God.

And that's what we want to do here at this church, and one of the ways that we do this is by preaching through books in the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament. And so what that means is that we preach, sometimes we have to look at texts which are just very difficult.

And so actually, if you're sort of trying to figure out the Christian faith, or maybe you're trying to figure out like whether you should stay a Christian or whether you should join and become a Christian, in some ways we're the perfect church for you because, you know, if you sign a contract or a deal somewhere, and then you find out in the small print that there's these rules that you didn't know about and now you're sort of screwed, we look at the fine print.

And we don't sort of hide from these uncomfortable things and things which sort of go against the grain of Canadians and how we think. So let's look at the text. And so what I'm going to do, it's a bit different from how I normally preach.

[4 : 07] I'm going to read, again, all of chapter 9, and I'll just point out a couple of very, very small things. And then, but because the issues of intermarriage and abominations and the holy race and other things are all sort of intermingled throughout the whole thing, you know, normally I would read a couple of verses, explain it, a couple of verses, explain it.

I think what I need to do is we're just going to look at it so you can see that we're not hiding from anything. And one of the things I would suggest to you, if you have little notes or something, is make a note. Okay, is George going to talk about this?

Okay, is he going to talk about this? And if I don't in the sermon sort of address these big issues, make sure you, if you're online, send me an email. If you're here, make sure you ask me at the end of the service.

But let's sort of look at the text. I'm not going to read chapter 10. It's 44 verses. It's the continuation of the story. But just to give you, in a sense, the summary of what happens in chapter 10.

And actually, let's read the text, and I'll give you the summary. And then we'll sort of try to figure out what's going on in this text. And just so you know, a very typical way out of a text like this is to say, oh, well, that's just the Old Testament.

[5 : 22] And they're just sort of hard and judgmental, and we're Christians, and that's not what the New Testament is like. And I'm not going to say that. Because actually, that's not true. And I'm not going to repudiate the text, and I'm not going to do tap dancing around the text.

Believe it or not, I think this text, in a very stark way, which grabs our attention, brings before us the importance of embracing the beautiful vision of the Bible.

If we get over our fears about the text, I think the text is calling us to embrace a beautiful vision and help us know what it means to embrace this beautiful vision and move forward to life.

Now you're really worried. Is George going to say racism and all his beautiful vision? No, I'm not. Let's look at what it says. So it's Ezra chapter 9, and here's how it begins. After these things had been done, now what that means is, if you go back and you read all of the book of Ezra, which is a good thing to do, about 80 years earlier, after the nation of Israel had been taken away into captivity, there's basically no Jewish people left in what the Jewish people call the promised land, or we would now call Israel.

And they'd been gone for over like 140 years, 130 years. And then about 80 years earlier, a large group, a fairly large group of people returned from exile.

[6 : 52] And in chapters 1 to 6, it describes what happened sort of in the first 20 years of them coming back. And then between chapter 6 and chapter 7, there's almost 60 years of sort of silence.

And then Ezra leaves a very small group of people to come back from exile. And so in chapter 9 here, it's five months after what we talked about in chapter 7 and 8.

So it's about five months later, and Ezra's been given the task by the pagan emperor of Persia to teach the Torah, the Tanakh, and to make it the law of the region.

And that's his job. So now it's about five months later, and we'll take it up again. And after these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations.

If you're doing little pins or little marks, put a mark there. Make sure I come back and talk about it. Why is it that God wants, that Ezra thinks God wants them to separate from the people of the land and to describe what they do as abominations?

[8 : 13] And then it mentions from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. Now, just to be clear, so the first thing is the officials come and tell Ezra this, and it's not that they've just not separated, but they're actually doing it.

So they've taken up what Ezra's calling an abomination. The things that the neighboring nations do, Ezra describes as abominations and he discovers that there's a significant part of the community which are doing them.

Then verse 2, and this is sort of now describing a little bit about the means by which this, a key aspect of how this has come about.

Verse 2, for they have taken some of their daughters, that's the Canaanites, et cetera, to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.

And in this faithlessness, the hand of the officials and the chief men has been foremost. Now, there's that phrase, the holy race, and for many of us reading this today, it sounds like the Deep South and slavery in the United States.

[9 : 30] It sounds like apartheid. It sounds like what the Nazis did by looking for a small trace of Jewish blood. It sounds like these racial purity movements and it's a pretty stark thing.

So what does Ezra do? So the people have told him this. Some of the leaders have come and told him this. It might very well be that because he's been there for five months and been teaching the Torah, they now realize, some of them, that there's been things going on in the Torah and the Tanakh forbid.

So how does Ezra respond? And he responds in a very interesting way. He doesn't repudiate it or tell them that he's wrong, but he also doesn't act in a judgmental way.

He's going to identify with the people, but he's going to identify with them by mourning and grieving. Listen to what it says, verse 3. As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.

Now just pause. We all know that there's different, you know, because we have the media now, we can see how grief works in different countries and, you know, like here in Canada, like most people now don't even have funerals anymore.

[10 : 54] We don't really, and a lot of our grief now in Canada, it's done very private and it's often medicated. This is a very, some people in the world, they're very demonstrative emotionally about their grieving and mourning and that's what's going on here.

The Bible's not telling us that we should become like this, but it's showing how they grieved and that's what he's doing. Verse 4, and here's a really interesting phrase, you know that, that old spiritual, it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

That's where they get this from. The next verse, then all who trembled at the words of God, it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Then all who trembled at the words of God, the God of Israel, because of the faithfulness, sorry, then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

And at the evening sacrifice, I arose from my fasting with my garment and my cloak torn and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, saying, now just, it's very interesting, you know, that he's appalled.

[12 : 16] But as you're going to see and what he's just done is in a sense he sees himself as needing to grieve and mourn for the nation. Now, this is still problematic if it's grieving that they're not racist enough.

Obviously, that makes it even worse, right? But he's grieving and others are grieving and now he prays. Like, he doesn't immediately take up a sword and go starting killing people.

He doesn't do anything like that. He grieves and he prays. And you'll notice in the words of the prayer, there's still problematic things in them for us Canadians, but he constantly identifies with the people.

So here's how he prays. Verse 6, Notice the R language, not these people, but R.

Verse 7, We have been in great guilt and for our iniquities, we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and utter shame as it is today.

[13 : 36] Now, just sort of pause here for a second. Ezra understands, and this is a problematic thing for lots of Canadians, that what has happened to them, they're having their city destroyed, the people carried away, that that is all God's judgment.

I mean, on one level, Nebuchadnezzar just did it because he wanted a bigger empire and he wanted more tax revenues. But Ezra understands that what's happened is actually God's judgment.

And I'm not going to be able to talk about God's judgment. I mean, I'm going to have enough just trying to talk about abominations and racism without talking about God's judgment, but it's a key part of his prayer.

It's not that he's having this power of positive thinking, putting the best face forward. He's acknowledging the deep guilt that led to God's judgment. And he sees them now continuing that which led to God's judgment on them.

But he's also going to talk about grace and mercy. Let's see how he goes on. Verse 8. But now for a brief moment, favor or grace has been shown by the Lord our God to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place that our God might brighten our eyes.

[14 : 51] It's a wonderful phrase. excuse me, it's a wonderful phrase. That he might brighten our eyes. That's a wonderful phrase, isn't it?

And, sorry, I've lost my place turning around. If he has shown us favor to leave us around, brighten our eyes, that's verse 8, and grant us a little reviving in our slavery.

For we are slaves, yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery. You see, here's acknowledgement of God's steadfast love.

And once again, if he's acknowledging God's steadfast love in the context of being racist himself, this makes it even worse, not better. That's the question that we need to go back and think about.

Verse 9 again. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God to repair its ruins and give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

[16 : 03] And now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we are forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants, the prophets, saying, now here comes once again for us Canadians the problematic bit.

The land that you are entering to take possession of is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness.

Therefore, do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity. That's a hard phrase, isn't it?

Never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever. He's basically quoting or paraphrasing parts of Deuteronomy, but as well as that, Exodus, and as well as that, actually, the book of Judges and Joshua.

And after, verse 13, after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you are God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such a remnant as this, shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the people who practice these abominations?

[17 : 29] Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us so that there should be no remnant nor any to escape? O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped as it is today.

Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this. Now, you'll see there's 44 more verses after this, and I can just tell you that the short answer about what's going to happen after this is some of the secular leaders are struck by this, as Ezra continues to pray.

They say that we need to deal with this, we need to put away, literally, they need to put away their foreign wives and the children from the foreign wives and that we need to deal with this, and they start to deal with it right away.

In fact, this has probably happened, they can date it if you're sort of curious. This has started to happen, I've lost the dates here, but I think it's something like the 12th of, oh yeah, the 16th of December is when this happens.

The 19th of December, they call everybody together and they say that if you don't come together, your property's forfeit. Ezra wants to deal with it right away, but the leaders of the community say, no, no, this is a very, very big issue, we want to make sure we do it in a just way, and so people go home and on the beginning of the 29th of December, they begin looking at individual cases and they are to judge these people, the goal is to have the wives and the children put away, I'll talk about it a little bit in a moment, but they're all to be judged according to the law, according to what we call the Tanakh or the Torah or the Old Testament, and by the 27th of March, so they take three months and it's all dealt with.

[19 : 28] So what's going on? As I said, I didn't go out of my way to find a chapter like this and I've read it many times but it never really struck me, I guess it strikes you very different if you have to speak about it in public, and in our case, it's on YouTube, so who knows what's going to happen downstream.

So here's a couple of things, let's just walk towards, if you could put up the first point, that would be very, very helpful, and this is something which I've only been becoming aware of over the last couple of years.

The world has been so changed by Jesus that it is hard to look at anything the way an ancient pagan would. This is a very odd way to begin this, isn't it, for some of you, but it's the truth.

The world has been so changed by Jesus that it is hard to look at anything the way an ancient pagan would. There's a fellow by the name of Tom Holland who wrote a best-selling book called Dominion, and some of you are aware of him.

There's a very, very good book brought by Glenn Scrivener called *The Air We Breathe*, and he looks at seven things which most modern Western people just think of as obvious, and he does a very, very clever thing.

[20 : 43] He uses non-Christian scholars and experts to show how all of those ideas that the average Canadian think is just obvious and reasonable aren't obvious and reasonable, but all, in fact, come from the Christian faith, all of them.

And so we're so used to thinking in these categories. Like, Jesus is so completely changed the way people in the world think that when they look at stories like this, whether people realize it or not, they're looking at it from part of the way that they've learned to think because of Jesus.

And so when we hear a text like this, we think of the soccer moms who live next door to us, we think of our nice neighbor, and we think this sounds like very, very, very type of extreme type of behavior and way of discussing it with them.

But what we don't understand is what actually, what is it that the people did? Like, what were those people doing around there? And what did they believe?

And what were the stories that they told themselves? If their kids went to Sunday school, what would they be taught in Sunday school? And how did that, that they were taught in Sunday school, then how did that reflect in their religion and their culture and their politics?

[21 : 56] Well, here's what they were taught. Baal, the main god that they worshipped, had sex with his mother. Why did he have sex with his mother? Because his father, who was a higher god, was mad at his wife and he wanted to humiliate her.

So he encouraged Baal to have sex with his mom. You can just picture some of the moms here telling them a nice sweet story. Yes, I want to tell you all about Baal.

He had sex with his mother. Because his dad wanted to humiliate his wife. It gets worse. Baal, sister, one of his sisters took the form of a cow and while she was in the form of a cow, he raped her 77 to 88 times.

He raped her 77 to 88 times. This is their gods. As well as that, Baal regularly had sex with his daughter.

And Baal fought with and murdered his brothers. And part of their mythology and part of their worship is that after this had happened, it was like an endless cycle.

[23 : 21] So it's not as if Baal just once did it. It's how they understand how fruitfulness happens. Like part of fruitfulness is to, in a sense, worship and reenact Baal having sex with his mom.

And as well as that, the whole purpose that any of the gods had any human beings created was so that human beings could be their slaves. Every human being was a slave. Glenn Scrivner, if you go googling, he has this very powerful video called *The Night Before Christmas* and one of the things he says is that for the pagan gods, if a pagan god was to arrive, people would flee.

And it's a stark contrast with Emmanuel, the Christian notion of God with us as Jesus. So imagine you live in the neighborhood with people like this and they're your neighbors and you start to realize that the neighbors, that's the stories they tell their kids.

Would you let your kids play with them? And then you get to know the neighbors and one day they're saying, oh yeah, yeah, you know God, you know, the gods, Bahal and Asherah, they've given us two boys and four girls and then you sort of ask them, well, one moment there's just like two boys and two girls.

Did something tragic happen to two of your daughters? They say, oh no, no, nothing tragic. One of our daughters, we gave them to the temple priest. You know when you go to see the priest having sex with somebody?

[24 : 54] Well, one of them is my daughter. And what about your other daughter? Well, we needed to deal with the gods being angry at us and they needed a human sacrifice and it was our great honor and privilege to give our other daughters so the priest could kill the daughter.

Would you let your children play with your neighbors? Would you want your son or your daughter to marry one of the neighbors?

Well, my George, that paints this whole picture in a very different light. What do you think the family structures would be like where the stories that they tell you to structure the universe is of this type of...

I mean, let's... How many of you want to agree with the word abomination? That's not a judgmental phrase.

It's actually a pretty good phrase. Really? That's how your family is structured? That's how you see the world? That's what you reenact? You reenact the regular rape of Baal of his sister?

[26 : 05] Like, that's how you understand the world? Now, here's the other thing to understand and this... When I tell you this and you might want to read Glenn Scrivener's book or Tom Holland's book *Dominion* or hear Tom Holland do some interviews.

And... You see, this great... This profound project is... That's how everybody thought. Like, if you could go back in time, okay, the equivalent of the CBC, the equivalent of the Supreme Court, the government, the spiritual leaders, the universities, the artists, like, that's just...

That's just how everybody thinks and that's just what everybody knows. And... And... And... If you can think about it, so God is actually trying to form a people that are centered around a beautiful vision which is radically...

To say radically is too weak a word for how different it is from what everybody knows. And you can understand a little bit if they... If people are told...

I'm going to describe more of it in a moment that no, we... We... No, we actually don't have a priest having sex with a whole pile of young girls as a way of worship.

[27 : 24] We read the scripture. Boy, is that ever lame. No power in that. No... With that.

What wimps. And don't you know this is how the world is, you Jewish people? Now you understand a little bit about what the constant struggle is that God is trying to form a people in the midst of how everybody thinks like this which is very, very different.

G.K. Chesterton wrote a book over a hundred years ago called *Orthodoxy*. It's still well worth reading. And one of the things that he said is that the sort of in some ways the modern world has gone mad and it's gone mad because the modern world has taken some of the Christian virtues maybe one or two of them out of the whole range of them and they've followed them to the utmost but they follow these virtues.

It's very interesting. I was just watching Tom Holland who's still not a... He's basically become a Christian in his thinking but he acknowledges that he hasn't become a Christian.

But he now just sees that it's hard for him to see the world through anything other than Christian eyes but he can't quite have that giving of himself. And, you know, he said in this conversation that the modern world takes a different virtue and sort of drives it like a sledgehammer through everything and has disconnected it from the other Christian virtues and it's also disconnected it from God, grace, forgiveness and forgiveness and that that's what's describing the modern world.

[29 : 12] So, if you could put up the next point, this would be very helpful. There can be no good yes without saying multiple no's.

This is something which is very hard for us to think about but if you think about it all, that's actually just true all of the time. If one of you decides that you want to get your PhD which is a good thing to do to pursue that higher education, you're going to have to say no to all sorts of things.

You're going to have to say no to spending the money that you spend on your PhD to maybe buy a car or some other types of things or a nicer car. You're going to say no to spending, you know, on a nice day you're going to go study rather than go play some sports.

Like, you have to see a range of no's. If you're going to have children, if God gives you that ability and the opportunity to have children, you have children, you say yes to children, you're going to have to say no to all sorts of things.

Your house won't be as tidy, you won't have as much money to spend on yourself. You have to all of a sudden take them into the account when you do things and if I want to say yes in marriage to Louise, I say no to three and a half billion other women.

[30 : 12] That's like that. You can't say yes to something good without saying a whole range of no's. The yes forms the no's. That just makes sense, right? We want people to say yes to things which are good and once you say that, there's going to have to be a whole pile of no's.

And so that's what we see working out here in the text. And if you cover up the next point, here it is. The Lord is inviting you to say yes and embrace his grace-given beautiful way.

The Lord is inviting you to say yes and embrace his grace-given beautiful way. You see, here's what's going on in the text which we don't entirely realize.

What they're saying, what the Jewish people are invited to learn and we're invited to learn from this is to say, no, no, no, no, no, no. Human beings aren't made to be slaves.

God made human beings so that we could be in a covenant of love with him. His desire was that we would walk with him and have talks in the garden with him that he could have fellowship with us.

[31 : 16] That's the vision, not slavery. No, no, no, no, no, no. You don't just, you don't just do all of these things to people. You don't just sort of treat your children and your wife and your kids like property. No, every human being is made in the image of God.

They have an integrity. They have a dignity. They have a value that works. No, no, no, no, no. Everybody doesn't have to be married. Like, just, what did I just say? Every human being, even if they're single, even if they're a widow, even if they're an orphan, they have a value.

You can't just oppress them. No, no, no, no, no, no. The community that should be formed around this beautiful way is one where they acknowledge that there's the broken, there's the poor, there's the orphans, there's the stranger, and we're supposed to care for them, and we're not allowed to oppress them.

And no, no, no, no, no, no. It's not as if men are sort of somehow better than women. No, no. There's this beautiful vision that every man bears the image of God and a woman bears the image of God.

And God wants a husband and wife to cleave to each other and forsake all others and to be generous and to be fruitful and to be multiply and to make the world into a garden and into a beautiful place.

[32 : 26] And it's to be characterized not by the darkness of doing these things, but God wants there to be light and he wants there to be life and he wants there to be generosity. And he wants to be able to walk with you.

And that's this beautiful vision. And why wouldn't you want to embrace that? If you're watching this and you don't know where you are with Christ, why wouldn't you want to embrace that?

That's the vision. Don't you want that to be true? That's what we want to be true.

And the Bible says God's, and if you embrace that vision, you say no to child sacrifice. You say no to incest. You say no to murdering your brother.

The beautiful way says we're going to figure out reconciliation rather than murder. We're going to figure out truth-telling. We're going to figure out repentance. We're going to figure out prayer.

[33 : 27] We're going to learn how to walk with our God together. We want to row in the same direction in the family and the community. Isn't that a beautiful vision? And if you do that, you've got to say no to all this other stuff.

So even in chapter 10, I have to watch my time. I'm sort of already at the end of it. Here's the thing, is that from the law's point of view, and this is just to give you a sense of the complexity of the issue, not the complexity, the closest modern Canadian example of what they're facing is the issue of bigamy.

You see, according to Jewish law, these relationships were all illegal. So just in Canada, if it turned out that I have a second wife, well, that's against the law.

You folks would have, if Louise didn't kill me first, you would have to figure out what to do with me about having two wives. But what the Canadian law doesn't allow is for there to continue to be two wives.

One of them has to be put away. But how are they put away? There's two things in the text which give you a hint. The first is, by the way, that there's conversion.

[34 : 42] If you go back and read Ezra 6, verse 21, you'll see that part of what's been going on on this whole 80, 100-year journey is that the peoples of the nations get captivated by this beautiful vision and are included in the beautiful vision.

And so conversion is an option. And the other thing is that the law which is used to judge, and they don't go into all the details, there's literally thousands of cases, they can't go into all of the details.

Well, they're judged not according to the pagan myths, but they're judged according to the law. And the law specifically says you are to care for the orphan and the widow, that justice is to be done to them.

So it doesn't go into the details, but you know that that's how they're to be judged. Now, just in my last couple of minutes, what about the racism and the holy race?

If you could put up the fourth point, that would be very helpful. The holy race is not a biological reality, but a grace-created reality.

[35 : 49] The holy race is not a biological reality, but a grace-created reality. In fact, actually, literally, it doesn't say race.

The Bible has no category for race. Race is a secular idea, not a biblical idea. Biblically, there are only human beings, and every human being is made in the image of God, and that's the only reality.

There's just human beings. That's all there is. But the actual literal word isn't holy race, but holy seed.

And it's a collective singular, which is a weird tense. But you see, what makes, in a sense, so on one level, it's describing the people that God has called apart for himself, but God calls them apart.

He doesn't just say, oh, well, you have the right chromosomes, or you have the right skin color. No, everybody enters by grace. God is the only one who can set us aside for himself.

[36 : 58] It's a grace-driven reality, and it's this odd double symbolism, because you see, right, if you go right, the term first comes up in Genesis 12, where God said he's going to bless all of the people groups of the world, and he's going to bless all of the people groups of the world through his holy seed.

And on one level, it describes those people that God has called apart from himself, but it also describes the one who would come from that people group, which is the Messiah.

It's this, because it's a collective singular, it on one level describes the people, but it also can describe one person. And you see, all the way through this, even if you listen to this text, Ezra, there's a, you know, there's both a promise and a riddle to how Ezra thinks.

He knows about this holy seed, and God is going to, is doing something through the holy seed, and one day he's going to go through something with the holy seed. He also understands that he can't stand in God's presence because his sins are so bad, and he understands there's something grace there, but he can't quite get his mind around how that's going to all work out, because you see, if you just have, if God just sort of lets you just go for the wrong things you've done, that's called favoritism, that's called prejudice, it's actually not anything good.

And so there's this, there's this profound mystery and riddle which is there that somehow or another there's this promise of grace, we don't see how grace is going to work because we do things which are wrong, and yet at the same time we understand that there's going to be a way that God is going to make us holy and stand in his presence, and if you could put up the final point that would be very helpful.

[38 : 41] it's a promise and a riddle, this beautiful way points to the beautiful way in all of its fullness and completeness that comes to Jesus, from Jesus, where even though people reject Jesus, virtually nobody in the world anymore can think apart from Jesus' teaching.

It's because of Jesus' teaching that we're at first struck with what's been happening to the women. That's not how pagans would view it. They would just say, oh, well, you know, sucks to be those women.

You know, we can kill them anyway. Like, we can just kill the children anyway. But on one hand, yeah, the Savior that comes that changes how the world thinks, at the same time, well, here's the thing, Jesus dies, you know how all of the pagan myths say that human beings are created to be slaves, and part of the beautiful way is that God did not make human beings to be slaves.

But Jesus dies a slave's death so that you, a slave to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to idols, and your passions might be free in him.

That's the culmination and the propulsion of the beautiful vision. If the pagan gods come, you run because they want to kill.

[40 : 03] when Emmanuel comes, he dies for those of us who are slaves so that we could be his children by adoption and grace.

Isn't that a beautiful vision? That is the beautiful vision. And he wants to include you. And he wants you to embrace the beautiful vision, and if you embrace the beautiful vision, there's going to be a whole range of no's that you have to say.

And by the way, this whole issue of intermarriage, it's part of the reason why it still is a Christian teaching, and it's a Christian teaching if you just think about it for a second. I'm called to be generous with my money, and I think that the Bible wants me to try to be generous with 10% of my money, and if I marry somebody who actually thinks that's really wrong, how's that going to work out?

I think I need to gather with the Lord's people on a Sunday morning, and if I marry somebody who says, no, Sunday mornings is when you sleep in, and then maybe go and have some really nice croissants and coffee, how's that going to work out?

And if you say, I think I really need to go and spend some time in Bible reading and prayer, and they say, well, I wanted to spend some time with you, how's that going to work out?

[41 : 27] And it can go on and on and on, and it's not that the Lord is cruel to you, he wants you to embrace the beautiful vision, and he wants you to walk in the beautiful vision, and he wants you to walk in the beautiful vision and the power of the Holy Spirit for your great good and the good of the world, and I urge you to embrace it, but stand in prayer.

Father, I began by praying about how we seem to be contradictory and we want it all, and we want people to think we're generous, but we don't want to give away any money.

We want people to think we're smart, but we don't want to read. We want to be athletic, but not work out, and we never even see ourselves usually most of the time, and Father, we give you thanks and praise for this beautiful vision and how it's anchored in grace, and we ask, Lord, that your grace given to us in Jesus would become such an anchor to our soul and such a strong place to stand and such a reality in our lives that pushes us to be generous, and it pushes us even to look at ourselves and on one hand, Father, just laugh at ourselves at how ridiculous we are and at the same time call out to you for help, that Father, our lives, Father, more and more and more might embrace the beautiful vision in all of its completeness in all of whom we are, that this beautiful vision would be that which guides our church, our individual lives, our friendships, our interactions, Father, with the state as we try to get them to cast away things which aren't in keeping with it, not that they all become Christians, but that it's ultimately a beautiful vision for everybody, and so,

Father, we ask that this beautiful vision would become more real to our hearts, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.