

God Moves Hearts: From Devotion to Leadership | Ezra 7

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. It is great to be with you this morning as we are continuing our sermon series to the book of Ezra.

The book of Ezra is a remarkable, powerful, and inspirational book that we find in the Word of God. We have seen how the Holy Spirit worked in the heart of kings, worked through the people of God, and there was so much that was happening.

We learn about the inner working of the Holy Spirit. We have seen how the Holy Spirit worked through King Cyrus to issue a decree that the people of God would return from their 70-year exile back to Jerusalem.

We've also learned about King Darius and how he discovered the amazing and incredible work that was happening at the temple. His mind was changed.

[1 : 10] There was this stirring of the Holy Spirit and seeing, wow, I'm going to acknowledge and allow for the people of God to continue to finish the completion of the temple.

That leads us to where we are today. We've dealt with adversaries. We've seen the two kings whose minds were being changed. Here we are today in Ezra chapter 7.

The title of the sermon for today is, God Moves Hearts from Devotion to Leadership. What's so incredible is we're going to see today about King Artaxerxes.

Some of you may remember that name. Some of you might not. What had happened was the king, he basically was saying he was unfortunately convinced by the adversaries to say, we should stop the work of the temple.

However, the Holy Spirit had worked through the heart of the king, moving through King Artaxerxes as much like how King Darius and King Cyrus, their minds were changed, their hearts were stirred.

[2 : 16] The changing, the inner working of the Holy Spirit to not only acknowledge God, but to say to issue a decree to continue the work of ministry that was happening from the temple.

And it just goes to show you the awesome and incredible power of our God, that God continues to move hearts, that God continues to work in and through our lives.

And for so many of us, we may have had experiences, or moments in our lives where God has worked in and through our lives, or people that you've interacted with.

Maybe you've had a friend or a family member where you knew God was just working in their life. Maybe you've seen transformation where someone was on this really bad path.

They were living a certain way, a certain lifestyle, so to speak. But yet God was working in them. Because God continues to speak to us today.

[3 : 14] The Holy Spirit continues to work in us, the church, the people of God today. And we can see in Ezra how powerful and how incredible our God is.

So let's go ahead and pray and we're going to open the Word of God to Ezra chapter 7. And let's ask God to bless this time together. Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, the Creator of the heavens and earth, we thank you for giving us this time and this opportunity for us to come together, to sing praises to your Holy Name, to lift your name on high, to say thank you for all that you've done and all that you continue to do for you, God, or the God of miracles, the God of healing, the God of promises.

You sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to pave the way for salvation for us, that through belief we are saved, that through repentance, the changing of the mind and the working of the Spirit, lives are transformed.

And so Father, we ask that you bless this time, that truth is spoken here, and that there will be a moving in our own lives, in our own hearts, that there will be transformation in our minds to acknowledge who you are, to know you, to grow in you, and to do good in your Holy Name. Father, there's so much truth and so much wisdom and insight in this book. Let it speak to us today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray and we all say together, amen.

[4 : 42] All right, so we're going to turn to page 463 in your ESV, Pew Bible, or your Bible of choice, Ezra chapter 7. So let's take a moment in here.

What we're going to do here is we're going to observe. We're going to read the text together, and we're just going to see what can we observe, what is going on here in the text. So Ezra chapter 7, are we all there?

All right. So Ezra chapter 7. Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, Ezra, the son of Surah, the son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shalom, son of Zadok, son of Ahetab, son of Amariah, son of Arayah, son of Marrioth, son of Zariah, son of Uzi and son of Buki, son of Abushua, son of Phineas, son of Eleazar, and son of Aaron, the chief priest.

So these first five verses, what we're seeing here is Ezra's lineage, right? In your notes, it'll say about Ezra, the specific lineage. And a lot of us, when we read this, we're like, okay, what's the point here?

What's happening is that it is showing the lineage traced back to Aaron, showing God's faithfulness to his people, that God works through specific people, through specific families as well.

[6 : 14] So it's showing God's faithfulness and also establishing Ezra's credibility. So we go on into verse 6 here. This Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was ascribed, skilled in the law of Moses, that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given him.

The king granted him all that he asked for, for the hand of the Lord was upon him. I want you to take note of that. We had talked about previously the eye of the Lord being upon the people of God.

Divine favor, right?

God blessing Ezra. So that's one thing to take note. And so it goes on. Verse 7, there went up also to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Arta Xerxes the king, some of the people of Israel and some of the priests and Levites, the singers, right?

So the temple servants, the gatekeepers. And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For on the first day of the first month, he began to go up from Babylonia. And on the first days, right?

There's a lot of time frame that's going on, right? Let's go to verse 10. Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

[7 : 17] What we're seeing in these, it's the blessing that God has upon Ezra. And the dedication of Ezra. Right? We're talking specifically about Ezra, the prophet here, right?

That he is dedicated to reading and studying the law, living it out and teaching what he had learned. So we're going on into verse 11. Now this is where we have Arta Xerxes, right?

If you remember again, Arta Xerxes seemed to be against the people of God, but there's a change that had happened in him. So it says here, let's go to verse 12, right? So it's talking about the letter in verse 11.

Arta Xerxes, king of kings to Ezra, the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven. He's acknowledging who God is. You see that there?

He's acknowledging who God is. I make a decree that any one of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who freely offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. He's giving permission for people to go to Jerusalem, right?

[8 : 19] And I make a verse 14, for you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, right?

The blessing of God upon Ezra, right? And it's saying here that the law of your God, and it goes in verse 15, and also carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to God, right?

In Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem with all the silver and gold, you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia and with the free will offerings of the people and the priests. So it's going on

talking about all of this money that was being used, right?

So what we're seeing here is that basically the king is saying, use whatever money at your disposal. That's just in a nutshell, right? And so it's going on, go to verse 18. Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of God. Do you see how much the king is not only acknowledging who God is, but saying, hey, look, you got a job to do. Do it according to the will of God.

[9 : 28] How remarkable is that? Not only have we seen the change in King Artaxerxes, but the change of Cyrus, the change of King Darius.

It's that working of the Holy Spirit. And so it's going on in verse 21. I Artaxerxes, the king make a decree to all the treasures in the province beyond the river.

Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven requires of you, let it be done with all diligence. Not only is he saying, okay, use the money for what you need to do for the work that you're doing, but if you need more money, let's give it to you.

Let it be done. So that's something that's remarkable, right? Whatever is commanded by God or Ezra, let it be done so. And so this is remarkable. So verse 23, whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of kings and his sons.

So we go, let's go to verse 26 here. Whoever will not obey, and this is remarkable, whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or the banishment.

[10 : 40] So he's acknowledging who God is and saying, you got to follow this God. Talk about a change of the heart of the king God moving in this person of authority.

Much like how God can work in people in authority today. We then go to verse 27 to 28, the king's blessing and conversion. It says, blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, thanking God, right?

That the heart was changed. How many of you have thanked God for how he has worked in your life? Right? There's the acknowledgement of that. And who's the Lord that is in Jerusalem, who's extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors.

And before all the king's mighty officers, I took courage for the hand of the Lord, my God was on me. And I gathered leading men from Israel to go up to me. So what we see here, right?

We learn about the lineage of Ezra, the blessing and dedication of the prophet Ezra. King Artaxerxes, he's saying, whatever funds you need, whatever you need, let it be done according to the will of God.

[11 : 50] And then finally, we have that three, those three kings here, Darius, Cyrus and Artaxerxes, he's pagan kings, people who are in authority, whose hearts were changed by God.

There was a conversion. There was something that was happening in people who are in power. When we think of nowadays and the time that we live in, what an encouragement for us that we as Christians today should pray for those who are in authority.

I know right now we are in the midst of a presidential election. And quite honestly, it should be our responsibility to pray that God will use the Holy Spirit and penetrate the hearts and stir the hearts. Quite honestly, I'm more concerned about the Holy Spirit working in the next president than who gets elected. Does that make sense? I'm more interested on the Holy Spirit working in and through whoever is in power.

Whether that's the president, whether that's the governor, whether that whoever it is, we should pray as the people of God that the Holy Spirit will work in and through them. That lives will be changed just like how we have learned about the life of the king.

[13 : 01] And so in all of this, what can we learn? What can we interpret from these verses? The first thing that comes to mind is Ezra's heart and devotion was to God and to the word.

If you look at Ezra chapter seven, verse 10, when it says, Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it to teach his statutes.

What a remarkable thing that we're seeing here. This prophet is dedicated to the Lord. He is dedicated to opening the word.

And at that time it would be reading the law. But what an encouragement for us in our personal walk with the Lord that we should open the word of God, that we should study it. And it goes on saying in here, right? What does it say?

If you have your Bible open, he had the heart to study the law of the Lord. We need so much so often when we think of our faith in Jesus Christ, we have to think of how is God working in our minds and in our hearts, right?

[14:02] To love the Lord with all of our hearts, right? Not to lean in our own understanding and to allow for God to work in our lives to transform who we are into the men or the women that God wants us to be.

That is so incredibly important. Do you have the heart when you're opening the word of God? For Ezra, this prophet had the heart to study the law of the Lord.

So it's just encouraging. Open your Bibles. Read and study it. But also check your heart for a moment. What's your intention when you're reading the word of God? There are some people who read the word of God with evil intent.

And there's a lot of things that are hidden from those that are reading with evil intent. May we come to the Lord and may we be hungry or thirsty for the word.

Think about that. Think of how important that is. So the devotion was set on God and the word. And the second thing on here is that we're talking about the three kings, Cyrus and Darius.

[15:04] The heart of Artaxerxes was changed by the Holy Spirit. Divine intervention. My friends, one of the most beautiful things about our Lord and our God is that he is in control and that he is powerful and that he can work in our lives.

If you know someone who has a heart and heart, if you know someone who is evil or someone who is lost, pray for them. Pray that God will work in their life to change their mind.

How many of you have heard the saying, we must repent before the Lord, right? Repentance meaning the changing of the mind. Also the changing of the heart.

Right? When we're recognizing, excuse me, I'm still fighting my voice losing. Kind of. I'm still battling that. But it's understanding that repentance is the changing of the mind of who God is.

Right? When we're repenting of our sins, it's changing our mind on what sin is the heaviness of sin.

Right? And continued to being changed of our minds and our hearts, knowing that God is holy and that God is going to place us on a much better path than what the world has to offer.

[16:22] And so Proverbs 21, 1, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord.

Right? That God is really and ultimately in control.

And I cannot help but encourage all of you. Pray for those who are in authority. We can go on all day about all the weird things that politicians do or or leaders, the good or the bad that they do. But really what we should do is pray for them. That's a great way that us as Christians, we're asking God, change this person, change their heart, change their mind.

Maybe they need to come to the Lord and maybe that man or that woman, whoever is in political authority, maybe God wants their hearts to be changed and it will be so, so that things, a greater impact will happen.

And the third thing that we find here is that Ezra provides a framework of faithfulness to God. And I want to highlight this, right? It's the heart to study the word like I was telling you, right?

[17:27] Psalm 119, verse 10 says, with my whole heart, I seek you. Let me not wander from your commandments and how important it is to seek the Lord and seek that relationship because our God extends an invitation for us to believe in him and to be transformed, to get out of darkness.

How many of you, you've been in a dark room and you've been in there for an hour or whatever and you finally turn on a light and you're like, oh gosh, it's so bright. Right?

Thinking about how God is light, life and truth. The other thing is that the devotion to do what the word says and be reminded that we are saved by grace through faith, through believing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is the starting of our spiritual walk, of our journey, our new life in Christ. And in that we are called to grow. We are called to do what the word says.

That's so important for us because some of us may say, well, alright, I'm saved. There's nothing more. But there is so much more because allow for God to continue to transform your life.

[18:37] Continue to have God mold you into the person that he wants you to be. For many of us, it's truly reading, studying it and following it. I know that's very difficult for a lot of us.

We're like, alright, so I need to turn away from my sin. What do you mean by that? There's things that God is calling for me to do in my life. Absolutely.

So it's the devotion to do what the word says, much as James chapter 1 verse 22. If you may know it is to be what of the word, to be doers of the word, right?

We need to be hearers, absolutely. But we also need to do what the word of God says. That's very important. And the third thing that you'll see it on there is to teach others what you have learned.

One of the things that is so powerful and so important for us as Christians is to share in our testimony, is to share how God has worked in our life.

How God has worked in your life, the person next to you. How has God worked in your life? How you'll answer will be different than the person sitting next to you, right?

[19 : 44] What God has saved you from, right? How God has, there might have been a vulnerable moment where you found the Lord. Whatever that story is, and here's the thing, your testimony is important to the eyes of God.

And who you reach out to, your friends, your family, your coworkers, whoever, your fellow students, it matters. You share what you have learned and how God has worked in your life, much like how you share what you're learning in Scripture.

I mean, it can be even the basics, right? I learned today that Jesus loves me, right? We think of children. They can share what they've learned. We can share about how, hey, look, I'm reading and learning.

Pastor's teaching about the book of Ezra, where the Holy Spirit's changing the heart of kings. Some people are gonna be like, the Bible says what? Who's, what's an art of Xerxes, right?

Or they might say, what's a Habakkuk, right? They might ask those kind of questions, and that allows for us to have conversations and to build relationships with others, where we share the good news of the Gospel, and we share how the Lord has worked in our lives, because let me tell you, God has called for each of us to share in our faith and to share what we have learned.

[20 : 57] So this is the framework here that we see. I'm reminded of the Great Commission. Many of you know this, right? It's to go out into all of the world, right?

Proclaim the good news. It says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always till the end of the age. Think about that. Think of how important it says to make disciples, right? Because being a disciple is being a student, right?

We're always going to learn more about the Lord. We're always going to learn more about the Word of God, because how God speaks to you might be different than how you were a year ago, or even before you came to know the Lord.

God continues to work in our lives. And so you may ask yourself the question then, how do I apply this to my everyday life? I'm certainly not Ezra.

[21 : 58] I'm not a prophet. And I'm certainly not King Cyrus or King Artaxerxes here. So how is this applicable to my life today? Well, the first thing that we can do is pray for the heart of those in authority.

1 Timothy 2, verses 1-2. I urge that this is the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy. I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings may be made for all people, right?

We've got to pray for everyone. For kings and all those who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. It's just like what we're seeing here.

My encouragement for you is to pray for those in authority. Look, we are in a time where this nation is so divided, right?

We've got to pray. We as the body of Christ, we come together. Because we all, or we should all believe in Jesus Christ. And knowing that God can work in and through any politician.

[23 : 05] Pray that hearts will be changed and that whatever leader we have, like that verse was saying, kings and those in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life.

Can I get a name? Men on that? I mean, I want to live a peaceful and quiet life, right? And so how important is it that it's in the word of God to pray for those in authority? This isn't about endorsing one candidate over another.

May we be reminded that all fall short of the glory of God. We shouldn't be idolizing politicians. We should be worshiping God and asking God to work in those politicians.

And those in public office, or those who are in community leaders. I get so tired of going on and seeing the news and how many criticism upon criticism upon criticism of people who are in

leadership.

There's so much more to that. And what's so wonderful about being in the body of Christ is we together collectively, we pray for one another, we bear up one another's burdens. We can pray for divine intervention in our own lives, in those that we know and those who are in authority.

[24 : 14] So that's the first thing. The second thing here is use your power and influence for the glory of God. Now this is a very interesting one. You would be amazed at who you know.

Your network, right? Or how many friends you might have on TikTok, or how many friends you might have on Facebook, or people that you interact with every day. I'm not saying that you're a tyrant over people.

I don't mean that by power. But you'd be amazed, the profound influence that you can have upon someone's life. Just the everyday interactions in the grocery store, or the people, if you go through the drive-thru and you get coffee at Bordertown, or if you're going through Walmart, interactions that you have, right?

You're using your influence for the glory of God. Whatever position that you've been in, even if you're at the bottom, even if you're, I'm just a janitor, I'm just a student.

I'm just an everyday person. I'm a farmer, or whatever it is. You still can use your influence for the glory of God. Trusting in the Lord, obeying what it says, exhibiting the love of Jesus Christ for others, showing that there is a wonderful way, there's a way that is higher, just like when we went over Colossians, we are to set our minds on things that are higher.

[25 : 32] We are to put on the new self, right? To focus on unity and love and truth, the grace of Jesus Christ, the love that comes from Him, and the truth of the Word of God.

You mean I got to follow this book? Well, you got to read it. This book is incredible. You should read it sometime, right? But really, we think about this, that as we are growing, we share what we learn with other people.

Every single, every person in this room matters to God. You are loved by God, and God calls you for that relationship with Him, and He calls for you to minister to other people.

Sometimes it's just being present with other people. Sometimes it's just praying with them. You know, I found that very often, sometimes you just got to sit with someone.

How can I pray for you? I don't know what words to say, but I'm going to be there for you in a time of crisis, a trial, or a tribulation.

[26 : 38] And so, consider that. How can you use your power, your influence for the glory of God? If anyone here is a TikTok influencer, you should use that as a platform, right?

But if you're not, that's okay. I only have a couple thousand. I don't have a lot. But what matters is how you answer that question. How are you going to use your power, your influence for the glory of God?

And then finally, the third one is to consider Ezra's framework. To have a heart to seek God and His Word. For many of us, we need to seek God.

Do you know that God provides eternal life? It's the free gift of salvation. That's something that it's beyond our understanding, knowing that God loves me and He sent His Son to live and perform miracles.

And He gave us this incredible book. We're talking the most published book, the most popular book of all of history. There must be a reason for that. There must be a reason why so many people have Bibles, right?

[27 : 48] And we have to have the heart to respond to God's call for our life. For some of us, it might be the call to just believe in Jesus Christ.

Acknowledging that you are a sinner in need of a Savior, right? That we need God. That we need this new life. We need this water, this water of life, or the bread of life.

There's so many analogies and connections in the Word of how God supplies us with all that we need. What we must do is make that decision for Christ.

And so, the heart to seek God in His Word, are you seeking the Lord? Are you seeking the truth of the Word? Are you opening the Bible?

Or are you just letting it collect dust? And I'm guilty of it. Sometimes I have some Bibles that are collecting dust, but other ones I have that are open all the time. You know, some of us may have more Bibles than we have people in our household.

[28 : 47] We should read them, right? And so, the second thing is to follow God's words, Christ's teachings, right? There's so much that we can learn.

How to love like Christ. That sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? And we like hearing how Christ loves us, but exhibiting that love to other people.

And then also standing firm in the truth of the Word. Why? That can be very complicated, but it's so simplistic. And that's the amazing thing about our Lord and our God, is how simple He is.

He's just saying, come to me. Trust in me. Believe in Christ. Again, James 1.22. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

God calls you for greater purpose. God calls you for so much more in this life. And look, the world, do you really think that seeking fame and notoriety, you'll find fulfillment in that?

[29 : 54] Do you really think that having all the riches in the world will give you purpose? God gives us purpose. There are many people, I mean, think of famous actors. Think of people who are very rich, and yet they're very empty.

You hear this all the time, and there's something missing in my life. I have everything I could have ever wanted, and yet it's still missing. Have you sought the Lord? Have you gone after Christ? Very often the answer is no. I can't say for every situation, but that is very common. And so for us, we have to follow God's words and Christ's teaching.

That is the dedication of Ezra the prophet. And that's something that we can learn from. That's the framework. And finally, as you grow, teach, love, and serve others.

Like I was mentioning, share in your testimony, share the gospel message, the good news of the gospel. All you need to do is just... First Corinthians, right?

[30 : 54] When I've mentioned talking about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, share how God has worked in your life. I'm telling you, your testimony can speak to someone.

And they'll say, wow, I had no idea that God worked in your life that way. I had no idea that this is what you've been through. Testimonies, they testify, excuse me, to the power of our God.

Much like how we have been reading here in Ezra 7. The same God that moved the heart of kings to change their mind and to acknowledge who God is, and to help the people of God, the same God that loves you.

Gosh. It's the same God that calls for you to enter in a relationship with Him. It's the same God that gives you purpose.

It's the same God that wants you to become the man or the woman that God wants you to be. And what's beautiful is we all have that choice every single day.

[32 : 07] Are you going to choose the Lord or are you not? And so in all of this, I want you to think for a moment. We've seen in Ezra chapter 7 how the Holy Spirit has worked in all of these people, the people of God and kings.

And in the same way, God can work in your life. God does work in our lives. How many of you know someone who's been healed? How many of you knew a evil or wicked person in their mind, their heart was changed.

God continues to work. God moves hearts. So keep that in mind when you think and consider Ezra 7. Let us remember that, that God moves hearts.

Let's pray together. Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time once again and this opportunity for us to open your word and to read and to hear and to see that your Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of kings and worked in stirred the spirit, moved in the hearts of your people.

And we ask Father that in the same way you moved in the hearts of kings and your people, that your Holy Spirit will move in our hearts. And Father, we pray that as we are approaching an election time, we pray for transformation.

[33 : 35] We pray that hearts will be stirred, that hearts will be moved to acknowledge who you are. And Father, we pray for unity among our brothers and sisters in Christ and that we may not be like the world that is divisive, that is full of anger and hatred, but rather may we stand firm on the truth of your word, Father, and may we deal in love with one another and to those that are yet to know you.

We pray, Father, for transformation. We pray for revival and renewal in this land. We pray that your grace will be overflowing abundantly.

We thank you so much for your son, Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. And so, Father, once again, we ask that there will be a movement of your Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our minds.

May there be transformation. May there be repentance. May there be decisions for Christ. May there be growth in you. And may we all be moved upon this salvation, upon this faith in you to do good in your Holy Name.

It is in the name of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of our faith, and we all say together. Thank you for tuning in to the Ontario Community Church sermon podcast. For more about our church and how you can get involved or support our mission, please visit ontariocommunitychurch.org.

[35 : 05] May God's blessings be with you.