

Vessels of God; Instruments of Change | Ezra 8

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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. Well, good morning, everyone. It is great to be here with you as we are continuing our sermon series through the Book of Ezra.

We are now at Ezra Chapter 8. The title of the sermon for today is Vessels of God, Instruments of Change. You see here the image of a vessel, right?

Of something here and we'll see today why that is so important found in the Word of God. Let's pray together and let's ask God to be with us as we go through this wonderful chapter, Chapter 8 of Ezra.

Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, we are grateful that we are here today, that we have the time and the opportunity to open your Word, to read it, and let your Word speak to us today.

[1 : 14] Father, we pray that we may be in your presence today. Your Scripture says that where two or three are gathered in your name, there you are with us.

We pray that today truth will be spoken here and that lives will be transformed to know you, to grow in you, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to be moved to do good in your holy and awesome and incredible name.

Father, we just pray that the message today will be clear that it will be understandable regardless of age or education or background.

Your Word is truth and your Word is life. We are so grateful we have with us the Bible, your living and inspired and just awesome Word that you've given to us.

We pray, Father, that you are with us, leading and guiding us as you always have. Be with us today. If there's any comfort that is needed, let there be comfort.

[2 : 20] If there's any healing that's needed, let there be healing. We say this in the name of Jesus Christ, and we all say together, amen. Amen. So turn your Bibles to Ezra Chapter 8.

It's going to be on page 464. So the first thing that we are doing here is, we're going to look at the text. There are 36 verses in Ezra Chapter 8.

There's going to be a lot of names in here. In the first 14 verses, these are the recorded names. It'll say in your ESVP Bible, it's page 464 or whatever Bible of choice for Ezra Chapter 8.

These are the recorded names of those who returned. What we're doing here is, we are seeing what can we see in the text.

You'll see here it says, these are the heads of the fathers of the houses, the genealogies of those who went up with me from Babylonia and the reign of Artaxerxes the king. Then look from verse 2 through 14, there is a number of names here.

[3 : 28] So you got Phineas and Gershom, Daniel, David, Hattush, Shchakonaiah, Perosh, Zachariah, 150 men with that. It just goes on with there.

For many of us when we are reading and we look at this, it may be very strange to see, okay, so what? There's a lot of names that are written in here.

We might have some debate on how to pronounce some of these names here. But what's very important here is that these recorded names are important in the eyes of God.

So much so that they are recorded here in the Word, and for God knew who they were. We can see right off the bat here how important it is for records.

I mean, for many of us, we might have gone to a wedding before, or you might have gone to a museum and written your name before. When we're born, we have our name written on it and the

names of our parents.

[4 : 26] And we can think of how there are records in everyday life, in documents that we sign and everything. And those records are human records.

But here we are seeing what God says is important. And that's something that's very different here. So it's going on.

In verse 15 then, we see that... I'm not going to read all these names here, all right? You have to forgive me here, right? But you see here that it's much like how we would see any sort of recorded document, like a flight manifest, right?

Or a visitation for people who are visiting a museum or those kind of things. It also makes me think of how so much in Scripture, every single name that is in the Word is important, so much so that we have it today.

And it reminds me then we'll go further on in this, that our names will be recorded in such a way. Our names will be recorded in the Book of Life.

[5 : 36] And how much of an honor it must be to know the Lord and that He knows you by name and that He records your name in the Book of Life.

We go then into verse 15, right? The search for the Levites. I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava. And there camped three days as I reviewed the people and the priests.

I found there were none of the sons of Levi. So in other words, if all these people who are traveling and there's no Levites, now when you read that you're like, okay.

But what's very interesting and very important here is the Levites had specialized roles, right? They were called by God for the temple and for the people of God.

So that's something that's very important, right? The Levites, they would offer sacrifice, they would teach the law and they would protect the congregation.

[6 : 34] So let's go on further, right? So then I sent for Eliza, Ariel, Shemaiah, El Nathan, Jerob, El Nathan, Nathan, Zachariah, right?

You see all these names. Verse 17, and sent them to Edo. The leading man at the place, Cassaphia, telling them what to say to Edo and his brothers and temple servants at the place, Cassaphia, namely to send us ministers for the house of our God.

So there's the search that's happening and then from 18 to 20, by the hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mali, the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely, Sherabiah with his sons and kinsmen.

So it goes on in those two verses, there's basically a total of 38 Levites and 220 servants who were sent with them. And so there was the search where the people had to go out and bring forth the Levites.

Now the Levites are very much like how we have pastors today who shepherd the congregation, right? We have pastors who preach and teach the word of God and they care and they oversee.

[7 : 49] So it's a very similar, very nice parallel with there. From there in verse 21, there's the time of fasting and prayer. I proclaimed a fast there at the river that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek Him, a safe journey for ourselves, our children, right?

And what's interesting in verse 22, I was ashamed to ask the King for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the King, the hand of our God is for good on all who seek Him and the power of His wrath against all who forsake Him.

So we fasted and implored God. So it's really funny when you're reading this, right? They were afraid and it was very easy for them to just call upon the King and to get the King's resources, but yet they said to the King, well, we're gonna place our trust in God and so they have to continue with that.

So that's pretty interesting, right? Relying on God and not man. And we can see this right away that the importance of fasting and prayer, especially in time where you're asking for God for protection or in vulnerable moments or in critical times, right?

Especially in times of trial or tribulation as well. We then go to verse 24 to 36, where it's the protection of the vessels and the offerings.

[9 : 10] So you have here in verse 24, how many priests? 12, right? I said a part 12 of the leading priests, so it has verse 25, I weighed out them, the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering of the house of our God, that the King and his counselors and lords and all Israel, their presence had offered, right?

So there's the weighing of 650 talents of silver, 200 talents of silver vessels, 100 talents of gold. It's a lot of vessels right there. And then it goes on in verse 28, I said to them, you are holy to the Lord and the vessels are holy and the silver and gold are a free will offering to the Lord, the God, your fathers.

Verse 29 is very important then, guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests. It's going on in verse 30, the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and gold to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

Do you see a parallel here? For those of us who were here at the beginning of our exposition of Ezra, there was the transporting of the vessels from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

And it's a very similar thing that we're seeing here, right? So there's the continued, the transporting of the vessels. And I want you to take note of that. You're gonna see, okay, these 12 priests are helping to transport vessels to their rightful place.

[10:33] And you'll see why as we go forth. So then we departed from the river, the hand of our God was upon us. He delivered us by the hand of the enemy from the ambushes, by the way.

That's important. God protects us on our journey, just as God had protected his people, the Levites and all the people traveling.

So on the fourth day within the house of God, so verse 33, you see that there's the hands of all the priests. Verse 35, and that time, those who had come to captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, 12 bowls for all of Israel, 96 rams.

There's a lot of offerings that are happening. Verse 36, they also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province beyond the river, and they aided the people and the house of God.

And so in all of this, right, we see here there's the record of people who traveled. There is the search for the Levites, the finding of the Levites. There's the time where there's fasting and prayer, right?

[11:39] And then there's the traveling back to Jerusalem, right? There's this protection of the vessels and offerings. When we read this, we might think, okay, well, what are the lessons here that I can learn as a Christian today here in 2024?

And the first thing that we can see here, this is the question of what can we learn and interpret from these verses? So that's the next slide then. And it says here that your name is written in the book of life through faith in Jesus Christ.

And I'm gonna say that again. Your name is written in the book of life through faith in Jesus Christ. Some of you may know the verse right off the bat here that about the book of life in Philippians 4-3, talking about those who were with him, right?

Names are written in the book of life. We also see that in Revelation. Those who are believers, those who know Jesus Christ. In the same way that we see that there are these names that are recorded throughout Ezra and throughout all of Scripture, we have to think that we will be remembered by God by placing our faith and our trust in Jesus Christ.

That's something that's very important and something that we can see that direct connection, right?

We may not know who all of these people are when we read Ezra or anybody from, we may not know their personality or what kind of food they liked or did they have long or short hair or any of those things.

[13:16] But in this we see that our name is going to be written in the book of life. Revelation, Revelation 21, 27, nothing unclean will enter it, nor does anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And so there's a lot of references here to be remembered, to be known by God and to be written in the book of life. It's very different than if you're an author and you have your name written on a book.

We're talking about being recognized by our Father, by our God, the Creator. And that's something that is just remarkable for us to think about.

The second thing is then, is that God calls and equips us for service. God calls each and every one of us to enter into a relationship with Him.

There's this invitation, much as there is the invitation for the Levites to come help with the people of God. God extends an invitation like a letter, right?

[14:27] Or when you get a text message, right? But it's something far more greater than a text message or a letter. God extends the invitation for you to believe in Him, to believe in the death,

burial, and resurrection.

To enter in that relationship is the greatest decision that you can ever make for your life. And from that, God not only calls us into relationship with Him, He calls for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He calls for us to be on a path of spiritual maturity, to go from spiritual children to more mature in the faith, right? You don't wanna be a baby for all of your life, right?

You want to grow, much like when we think of our own children. They are going to physically grow, much like how we are going to spiritually grow. And when we have God mold us, right?

God being the great potter and us being the clay, the work of His hands, we have to think for a moment that God is going to teach us so much and we are going to grow. We are going to be equipped for service.

[15:31] I'm talking about your time, your talent, and your treasure. I'm talking about spiritual giftings. I'm talking about the fruit of the Spirit. There's so many things, even when scripture talks about us putting on the new self and leaving the former self, that there is inner transformation that comes from knowing the Lord and that God is going to equip us for greater purpose.

That is something that is remarkable about our Lord and our God. Knowing that there is peace, that surpasses all understanding, there is joy that is inexpressible or inexhaustible, or there is the love of Jesus Christ.

I was reading a book the other day that was talking about for every person, for every one person, it's a pastoral book, for every one person that needs correction or rebuking, there is about ten people who need the love of Christ, who need comfort, who need encouragement.

That was something that really hit me when I thought about that because very often we think about, oh, correct theology and correct doctrine, but there's got to be the love and the nurturing that comes from Jesus Christ as well.

And that's something that's very remarkable. The next thing, the third thing, is that in times of crisis, we are to seek God through fasting and prayer.

[16:58] And there are moments in our lives where we are, we're called by Scripture to pray without ceasing. And in those vulnerable moments, we need to seek the Lord.

But we don't hear so much about fasting as much. It's something that we find in Scripture, but think of times in your life where you need to seek God through prayer and even through fasting.

That's something that is remarkable. The fourth thing then is Christ and the church foreshadowed in Ezra.

In the beginning of Ezra, I had mentioned that Cyrus is a representation of Christ, it's a prefiguration. The foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. And you'll actually see that on your notes, right, that Cyrus represents Christ.

Then you have the vessels, right, these objects that are being transported. They're being transported from Babylonia or the place that they do not belong into the place that they do belong.

[18:05] And this is actually a spiritual representation of believers. Think about it, when you believe in Jesus Christ, you are placed from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of life, from a spiritual standpoint.

And then in the physical standpoint, you are on a journey in your life to become more like Christ.

That you are being made new. That you are being transformed and there's the inner working of the Holy Spirit that happens in and through you every single day.

So that's something that's remarkable. Then you have Babylon representing the fallen world, representing hell and that separation.

And then there's Jerusalem, which is representing redemption, the restored world or even heaven, as mentioned in Revelation. And then there's the journey, right, of being transported.

And I want you to think of the image of a vessel, being transported, right? It's just like the journey of our life, our walk in Christ, that God continues to work in our life.

[19:16] Like I said, every single moment, every single day. And then of course you have the temple, Nebuchadnezzar's temple, representing the separation from God's presence and then being put into Zerubbabel's temple, the correct temple, representing God's presence.

And something that's very interesting that we find in, especially the Old Testament, is that the language of being separated from God.

I don't know about you. I want to be in the presence of God. I don't want to be in darkness. I want to be in light. I want to be in the presence of the Lord.

And that's what we think about the temple. And then finally the twelve tribes or the twelve priests that are representing the church, protecting and transporting us, twelve representing completeness. So we're seeing this nice parallel here. And I want to show you this image here, right? Priests and vessels. You see this image, right? It's just some drawing, if you will, right?

[20 : 24] Where the priests are transporting these vessels from darkness into light. But you know what's also remarkable about this? If you go to that next slide, it also reminds me so much about how there's shepherds and sheep.

Because throughout the Bible, God is very simple, right? When Christ says, come to light. Okay, that makes sense. I don't want to be in darkness, right? Or come to know the truth.

Be fed lies, right? Come to know the way, right? Instead of being confused. Well here we see a representation then of, right?

So we had the priests transporting the vessels from Babylon to Jerusalem, and Christ leading and guiding his sheep from darkness to light. Now what's very interesting, the difference between sheep and vessels.

You have sheep, right, which need to be led by the shepherd, right? Led by Christ as the good shepherd. Well the difference with vessels has to do with what is being filled.

[21 : 36] Now in some articles and psychology and different things, you'll hear the language about, how many of you have heard about the bucket being filled with water, right?

The idea is that when you're filled with love, right, you're filled with appreciation, your bucket is filled and in turn you are pouring out water to other people.

Well you don't want to have a hole in your bucket, right? You don't want to have no water where you can't give anymore. That's where you have burnout and those kind of things. Well what an incredible parallel with being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being filled with the love of Christ that we as vessels we pour into other people. Lord fills us up so to speak and that we in turn we continue to exhibit the love, right?

The light, love and truth of Christ to other people. And so what a wonderful parallel. And then the third slide here, another representation that we can see, has to do with pastors and congregations.

[22 : 41] It's actually very similar. That the people are going to church and they're going to hear from the Word of God, sing praises. It's very similar language. It's this wonderful parallel that we see with the real world and also throughout scripture.

So we have, right, the priests protecting and transporting the vessels, Christ leading and guiding his sheep, and then pastors ideally ministering and shepherding the congregation, right?

And leading them, right? It's helping them come to know who Jesus Christ is. Going from a sin filled life to a spirit filled life.

What a wonderful spiritual representation that we can find here. Something that is connected. And I know we don't have time to go through all of it, but there's a lot of verses that we can see that support this.

Praise God for seeing such simple images, right? Simple frameworks and ideas here that helps us understand who our God is.

[23 : 44] And so in all of this then, there's the question then, all right, you've talked about what is going on, the record of what's happening, the search for the Levites, the importance of prayer and fasting, and the protection of vessels.

You've also mentioned, Pastor, about the importance of your name being written in the Book of Life that we're all called to enter in a relationship and to serve the Lord. So what can I do about that? How can I live out the truth that is from Ezra chapter 8? Well, the first thing then is to be remembered by God.

And that is to, right, you have this picture here, be remembered by God. Believe in Christ and be saved. It's kind of like when you're ready to receive the free gift of salvation, your name is going to be written there.

And we praise God for that, right? So it's an encouragement for us. If you don't know Jesus Christ, let this be a call for you to believe in Jesus Christ and to be saved by grace through faith.

[24 : 52] Have your name written in the Book of Life. And the second thing then is to be on a journey. Be on a journey in Christ, right?

Be that vessel that is filled with the Holy Spirit, right? So you see, you begin on a journey, right?

When you are saved by grace through faith, that is the beginning of your walk, of your new journey

in Jesus Christ, right?

And so begin on that path, begin on that journey in Christ, being that vessel that is filled with the Holy Spirit so that you can pour out love and truth to other people.

That you can, the power that comes to you through you is from Christ. And you're exhibiting that to other people. And that's very important.

The third thing then is to be active in your faith, right? Many of us may know the famous verse, right? Faith without works is dead and there's a lot of debate on that verse.

[25 : 57] But the main idea is, number one, you have to have faith. And number two, you need to have a living and active faith, not a dead or stagnant kind of faith.

Does that make sense? You want to be active in your faith. It's showing that you are growing in Christ. It's showing that you're on a trajectory. That you're doing the work that God has set before you, right?

And so, of course, we have to pray in fast and uncertain times and whether that's an own personal event that's happening or a season that you're going through.

Many of us have been through seasons where we need to come to the Lord. It is in moments where we are vulnerable. It is in moments where we are going through a trial or a tribulation that we need to come to the Lord.

It is in those moments where we seek God so much more. Many of us, we think of, oh, I've got a good thing with God when things are good. What about when things are bad?

[26 : 59] Are you seeking the Lord? Are you praying to Him? Sometimes we have those seasons in life. And then, of course, fasting in uncertain times and, well, we can go on about just all of the crazy things that are going on in the world.

Sometimes the Lord may lead you to pray for things that are happening in our own country or in our own world. I know I mentioned last week about how it's so important for us to pray for those in political office, regardless of what political party they're a part of.

We should ask God to work in and through them, that there will be transformation and repentance, that there will be a moving of the Holy Spirit in our leaders.

Well, one way that we can do that is by praying and through fasting. And it's very important for us to know that. And the fourth thing, then, is to step up where God wants you to be.

So you need to answer God's call for your life. Just like how there is an invitation for the Levites to come and to take care of the congregation of the people of God and to participate in the temple.

[28 : 21] God calls for us to enter in that relationship. God calls for us to be active. And God calls for us to step up. Ask yourself the question, what is God asking of you today?

Where is God calling you or who is God wanting you to speak with? It's so important for us as Christians to really focus on hearing the voice of God or the leading of the Holy Spirit or even just opening the Word of God and letting it speak to you.

We are all to step up as parts of the body of Christ. We all have different gifts and abilities. Like I mentioned before, our time, our talent and our treasure.

And there are certain gifts that God gives to each and every one of us. And that's something that's very encouraging. Maybe you have felt like you've been inactive.

Maybe you felt that kind of push or that tug, if you will, from the Lord to step up in the person, the man or the woman that God wants you to be. That's something that's between you and the Lord.

[29 : 36] And if you don't know, ask the Lord, God, what do you want me to do for my life? Maybe you're leading me in a certain way because here's the thing. God calls us for greater things in our life.

When we are being transformed, when we are being renewed, when we are being restored, we're being transformed on a personal note. But because of that transformation, we then in turn go out into the world and we declare the name of Jesus Christ.

That's why we share in our testimony. That's why we share in the gospel message saying things like this is how God has worked in my life. How has God worked in your life?

And where is God calling you today in your current season? Maybe you're already doing it and that's great. But in any case, it's something for us to remember, for us to keep in mind.

And in all of this, I want to encourage you that it is the same God who called the Levites to minister to the people of God.

[30 : 44] Calls for you to enter in a relationship with Jesus Christ to enter into his presence. God calls for us.

He knows who we are and he calls for you to be written in the book of life. The same God who made you as a vessel calls for you out of darkness and sin into restoration and salvation. It is much like how I mentioned a couple of times before the idea of Kinsugi art that God takes that which is broken and restores it and makes it more valuable than what it once was before. How many of us may identify with being broken or being shattered as it were by the world, but being restored and being more valuable than we once were. And the same God who protected the priests, the prophets and the people of God will protect you all the days of your life. And so let this be a call for you to be a vessel, to be a vessel of God and to be an instrument of change.

[32 : 01] God calls for you to know him right to be filled with the Holy Spirit to grow in him and to do good in the name of Christ being that instrument of God.

Let us take that to heart as we close. Let's pray together. Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us this time to go over Ezra chapter 8.

There's a lot of spiritual truth, a lot of lessons that we can learn, but there's also the things we can observe and the things that we can apply to our own very life. Father, I pray that every person here has already or is going to make a decision for your son Jesus Christ by believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Father, we pray that we may be remembered by you, that we may be on a journey and becoming more like you. Father, we ask that you mold us and that you make us new and that you transform us from the inside out.

We pray that we may have an act of faith and in those storms of life in the seasons that we may go through the trials and tribulations. May we seek you.

[33 : 22] May we fast even in those critical times. And Father, you call for us in that relationship to grow in you to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to do good in your Holy Name.

We pray that this message will be in our minds and in our hearts and in our spirit. Be with us all of us today.

And as we sing this last song, may we lift up a shout of praise for you are Holy, you are strong and you are mighty. And Father, you are good.

May you be the foundation for our lives that can never be shaken. It is in Jesus' Name that we pray and we all say together, Amen.

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.

[34 : 21] May God's blessings be with you.