

# Distinctiveness Threatened & Restored

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 16 June 2019

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Happy Father's Day to you. We're looking at Ezra chapters 9 and 10 today. That's page 368 in the Pew Bible. So we've come to the end of the book of Ezra this morning, but remember the books of Ezra and Nehemiah actually form one story, the story of how after their failure and exile, God brought his people back to the land of Judea and how they rebuilt the ruins. The first part of Ezra is about the rebuilding of the ruins of the temple, but the second part of Ezra that we're in is about rebuilding the people themselves. In other words, it's not enough to have the worship of God in a temple. We must also have the worship of God in our hearts and in our lives as well.

And only then can the story continue on into Nehemiah as the people rebuild the city itself. So it kind of moves out from there. But let me warn you, these last chapters of Ezra have some surprises and even some fairly controversial bits. The work of rebuilding a building or a city is not comfortable work. I spent a lot of my vacation over the last few weeks standing on a ladder doing work on my house. It was good. I got a lot done. Thanks for your prayers. I didn't fall off the ladder. So there you go. The work of rebuilding a city is not comfortable work, but the work of rebuilding a people can be even more uncomfortable still. But as much as these chapters here in Ezra contain a challenge to us, they also contain good news, good news of hope, even in the midst of failure.

So I'm going to pray for us, and then I'll read Ezra 9 to get us started. Let's pray. Our Father, as we come before you now to attend to your word, we confess that we need your spirit to be able to hear your word with open ears and open minds and most importantly, open hearts. God, there are so many competing concerns, so many competing desires within us. We are so often a mystery to ourselves.

Lord, help us in these few moments to hear a word from you, our Creator God. Give us clarity. Give us conviction. Give us a fresh vision of your Son, our Lord Jesus, our Savior, that we might know you and love you and be more like you as a people. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ezra chapter 9. After these things had been done, the officials approached me, me as Ezra here, 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, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

[ 3 : 1 7 ] For they have taken some of their daughters 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 chief men has been foremost. As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. 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 rose 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, Oh my God, I am ashamed and blushed to lift my face to you, my God. For our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day, 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 to utter shame as it is today. But now for a brief moment, favor 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 may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. For we are slaves, 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 to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem. And now, oh our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants, the prophets, saying, The

land that you are entering to take possession of it 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 you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever. And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved, and have given us such a remnant as this, shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor any to escape? Oh 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.

A number of years ago, Beth and I were in Mexico City on a group trip, and one day of our trip, we had a free afternoon. So, we decided to visit the house of Frida Kahlo, the great Mexican artist. Unfortunately, neither Beth nor I spoke much Spanish, so we were a little uncertain how traveling across the city would go for us. But to our relief, the metro system in Mexico City is brilliantly designed.

Every stop on the subway has its own distinctive logo or icon. The wayfinding in this massive system is utterly brilliant, and those distinctive symbols for each stop make navigating the subway incredibly easy, even if, like us, your Spanish is more than a little spotty. And so, we were able to have a pretty good day. Has it ever struck you how important it is for things to be distinct at times? For me and Beth, it helped us find our way to the Frida Kahlo Museum. Admittedly, not too much was at stake there. But what about those distinct markings on a hiking trail? Do you know those? Those red or white or yellow blazes, as they're called, that mark the paths? Well, those could be the difference between finding your way or getting seriously lost, right? Or what about the distinctive lights on an airport runway at night? Well, there's a whole lot at stake there, isn't there? The theme that's running underneath Ezra chapters 9 and 10 is actually this theme of distinctiveness. God's people are a people who are called to be distinct.

[ 8 : 19 ] God says again and again in the Old Testament, because I'm holy, I want you to be holy. And holy there means set apart for a noble purpose. Or as Jesus will say in the New Testament, as his followers were meant to be salt and light. That is distinctive and life-giving. And as the story kind of unfolds here at the end of Ezra, we see that it's a story of distinctiveness. In chapter 9, it's a story of the people's distinctiveness being threatened. And then we see it's a story in chapter 10 of this distinctiveness being repaired or restored. So first, let's consider how it's threatened.

In verse 1, some officials come to Ezra with some news. Now remember, Ezra is a Jewish priest and teacher of God's law who's been sent by none other than the Persian king, Artaxerxes, from Babylonia back to Jerusalem in order to teach the people how to live in accordance with God's word.

Looking ahead to chapter 10, verse 9, we know that about four months have passed since Ezra first arrived in Jerusalem on his mission of teaching and rebuilding the people. Chapter 7, verse 9 says that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem on the fifth month of the year. And chapter 10, verse 9 says that it's now the ninth month. So what does that mean? It means that only four months into Ezra's work, the officials come with some bad news. And what is it? Well, some of the returned exiles and some of the leaders, especially priests and Levites, have married some of their non-Jewish neighbors. And when Ezra hears this news, he tears his clothes, pulls out some of his hair, and sits down in appalled silence. He mourns, in other words, as if someone has died. But why is this such a big deal?

Well, the very critical thing to realize here is that the problem is not that these wives are of a different race, but rather the problem is that they are of a different religion.

[ 10 : 47 ] Note the word abominations in verse 1. We see it again in verse 14. The problem is that they've intermarried with people who practice these abominations, Ezra prays in his prayer. Now, the word abominations is practically a technical word in the Old Testament for idolatry. And all the practice, all the practices surrounding the worship of false gods. So the real issue for Ezra isn't that these wives come from a different ethnic group. It's not that they come from a different ethnic group. That's not the problem. The problem is that they worshiped false gods. Remember back in Ezra chapter 6, verse 21, when the temple was completed, about a generation before Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, what happened?

In that great celebration where they celebrate the Passover again, some of the people of the land actually leave their false gods and join the returned exiles in worshiping the Lord. In other words, people of every ethnicity were always welcome in the people of God, so long as they leave their false gods and worship the Lord alone. And what that means is that marrying across ethnic lines was fine if they shared your allegiance to God. Think about it. Moses married a non-Jewish wife. So did Joseph.

Ruth was a Moabite and she became the great-grandmother of King David. But marrying someone who didn't share your allegiance to the Lord, that was a spiritual crisis. Why?

Why? Because it would inevitably lead to enmeshing Israel in the false worship of their neighbors. They would be led away from worshiping the one true God.

And in fact, when you look back at Israel's history, that's part of exactly what happened to them. And that meant that Israel would eventually, all over again, become to look just like all the peoples around them. In other words, their distinctiveness would be lost.

[12:59] But why was that such a big deal? Why was their distinctiveness so important? Well, our passage actually contains a clue to why it's so important. But it's easy to misread it at first. It's easy to miss it. Look again at verse 2. The officials come to Ezra and they lament that the holy race that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.

Now, at first, that kind of rubs our ears the wrong way. It sort of sounds a little standoffish. It maybe even sounds sort of racist, right? But we have to understand that the phrase holy race there actually is literally holy seed or holy offspring. And in the Old Testament, that phrase of seed or offspring is loaded with rich theological meaning. It goes back to the prophet Isaiah, when Isaiah said that a holy seed, in other words, a remnant of the people would actually survive the exile and then be a part of God's renewed plan for Israel and for the world. But it goes back even farther than that, all the way back to Abraham, when God, beginning His mission of rescue for the whole world, tells Abraham that in him and in his seed and his offspring, the whole world would be blessed.

So, you see, the distinctiveness of God's people, the holy seed, was so that the whole world would see and know the true God and come to truly know God as well.

Their distinctiveness was meant to be a sign, like the lights on the runway, like the marker in the forest, a sign that the God who had created us has revealed Himself to us, and that same God was acting to bring us back to Himself for good. Here was the way home.

That's what the distinctive life of Israel was meant to display to everybody who could see them. And you know, that mission doesn't stop in the Old Testament. What does Jesus tell His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount? Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. And the Apostle Peter picks up that same thread and applies all of this to the church, saying, you're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You're the salt of the earth, Jesus says.

[15:53] But Jesus goes on to say, if the salt has lost its taste, it's no longer good for anything. If the runway lights go out, it's just another patch of concrete in the dark.

It's just another site of inevitable wreckage. And so, when Ezra hears that the returned exiles are marrying wives who don't worship the Lord, he acts as if someone or something important has died. He mourns because the very mission of the people of God is being threatened with extinction.

So, how might this apply to us today? First, let's take the presenting issue of marriage. For the New Testament believer, for the Christian, just like the Old Testament believer in the Old Testament, marriage ought only to be to a fellow believer, a fellow Christian.

In 2 Corinthians 6.14, Paul writes, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. And in 1 Corinthians 7, verse 39, Paul explains that Christians are to marry only in the Lord.

In other words, a Christian must marry only another believer. They can be from a different race, they can be from a different social class, they can be from a different nationality, but they must be a believer in Jesus.

[17:25] Now, that's not a very popular view, of course, but it is incredibly wise and good. You see, as a Christian, the love of Jesus is meant to be the defining feature of your life, the burning center of all that you do.

Now, imagine uniting your life with someone who actually cannot look at the thing you hold most precious, the thing that defines your whole life, and also affirm it.

That's what happens when a believer marries an unbeliever. There's always going to be a disconnect at that most fundamental level of who you are. There's always going to be a barrier to real oneness.

And more often than not, the believing spouse will either grow closer to Jesus and further from the unbelieving spouse, or closer to the unbelieving spouse and further from Jesus.

By God's grace, there have been exceptions. But more often than not, friends, this is what happens. So if you're considering marriage as a Christian, this is non-negotiable.

[18:38] You must marry in the Lord. But there are all sorts of other ways our distinctiveness is threatened. Dating and marriage is a big one, but not the only one.

Romans 12, in Romans 12, Paul says that the world constantly wants to squeeze us into its mold. Conformity. How about how we act in the workplace?

How about the sorts of conversations we have with our roommates? How about the things we watch and listen to? This doesn't mean that we should exclude or separate ourselves completely from every cultural institution.

That would be impossible, foolish even. And it would also betray our calling to be salt and light. It's hard to actually season something or illuminate something if you don't actually interact with it, if you don't live in the midst of it.

But the danger is always there. If the salt has lost its saltiness, Jesus says. I wonder, friends, would you be able to pinpoint in your own life this morning where you may be prone to losing your distinctiveness?

[19:50] Actually, it's quite hard to spot it in our own lives at times. Often we need the loving input of brothers and sisters in Christ to point it out, much like the officials do here in verses 1 and 2 with their fellow leaders.

Are you open to someone pointing out that in your own life? Do you welcome that kind of loving, gentle correction? We also need to be immersed in God's word.

You know, this issue in Ezra 9 comes to the surface after four months of Ezra presumably teaching God's word to the people. And it's then in the light of God's word that they start to begin to realize that they've gone astray and that something has to be done about it.

So the more we expose ourselves to the living word of God, the more God does his work of sometimes uncomfortable but much-needed transformation. So what do they do then?

This is how their distinctiveness is being threatened. Now, with the second part of the passage, how is it repaired? How is it restored? First, Ezra prays.

[21:09] We read his prayer already at the end of chapter 9. It's one of the great prayers of the Old Testament, a mighty prayer of confession. Notice how Ezra identifies with the people even though he himself hadn't sinned in this particular way.

Oh, that our hearts would break for sin in the church like Ezra's did. Ezra's prayer then falls into two halves.

In verses 6 through 9, he acknowledges God's favor in leaving them a remnant, of bringing them into the land despite their great guilt years ago that led up to the exile. But then in verses 10 through 15, he basically quotes Deuteronomy 7 with some other passages brought in and says, how can we break God's commands again?

After experiencing his favor, how can we go back and do the same thing we did last time? Would God not be right in his justice to consume us? We are guilty before God, Ezra says.

None of us can stand before him. And brothers and sisters, restoring our distinctiveness begins right here.

[22:24] We are making confession without excuse, without minimizing it, without skewing or warping God's character, but acknowledging him as totally just and totally merciful.

Isn't it a strange thing? This is one of the reasons we pray a prayer of confession each week, by the way. Isn't it a strange thing that, you know, 200 people come together every Sunday? One of us stands up here and leads us in a prayer that says, God, we have blown it.

That's very countercultural. And yet how necessary that is. We pray these corporate prayers of confession each week, not so we can grovel in our guilt or beat ourselves up, but so that we can deal with our guilt and so that we can be changed.

But, you know, our personal times of prayer should also contain confessions of sin. We should go to God and admit where we're wrong, where we've been unfaithful, as this passage says in numerous

times describing what's happened.

Unfaithful. That's a powerful word, isn't it, if you think about it? What is that telling us? It's telling us that sin isn't just breaking some arbitrary rules or some random codes of practice.

[ 23 : 45 ] If sin is unfaithfulness, then that means sin is primarily relational. We reject God as king and want to be our own king. We reject God's loving rule of our lives and choose idols instead that really can't satisfy.

It's unfaithfulness. I wonder this week if you might consider taking up Ezra's prayer in your quiet time or your own prayer time and maybe praying through it on your own.

It might be pretty stiff medicine, what you're normally used to praying, but it would do much good for our souls to enter into this kind of deep confession of sin.

So first, Ezra prays. But it doesn't stop there. There's also deliberate action. It would seem from the end of Ezra's prayer that there's not much that can be done.

Behold, we are before you in our guilt, and none can stand before you because of this. But then in chapter 10, a way forward appears.

[ 24 : 55 ] Let me read. Picking up in chapter 10, verse 1. While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly.

And Shekariah, the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra, we have broken faith with our God, and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land.

But even now, there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children according to the counsel of my Lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the law.

Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you. Be strong and do it. Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites, and all Israel take an oath that they would do, as has been said.

So they took the oath. Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehonahan, the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night, neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.

[ 26 : 04 ] And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that if anyone did not come within three days by order of the officials and the elders, all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.

And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now then make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will.

Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, It is so. We must do as you have said.

But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain. We cannot stand in the open, nor is this a task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter. Let our officials stand for the whole assembly.

[ 27 : 16 ] Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us. Only Jonathan, the son of Azahel, and Josiah, the son of Tikvah, opposed this, and Meshulam and Shabbathai, the Levites, supported them.

Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men, heads of fathers' houses, according to their fathers' houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month, they sat down to examine the matter, but by the first day of the first month, they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

And then in verses 18 through 44, there's a list of all the men who had married foreign wives, grouped according to sort of their location in Israelite society. First the priests, then the Levites, then the rest of the people.

Now, what are we to make of Shekariah's proposal here? At first, it seems not quite right, doesn't it? Divorce all the foreign wives?

Send them away back to their families? I thought God hated divorce. What is going on here? And you know, many commentators struggle over this passage, and it's easy to see why, and not just because the plan of action seems harsh to our modern ears.

[ 28 : 38 ] You know, first, there's actually no command, explicit command in the Old Testament, that demands Israelites to divorce unbelieving spouses and send them away. Deuteronomy 24 permits divorce for particular forms of indecency, but doesn't command it.

Second, we need to remember that just because the biblical narrative describes something, that doesn't mean that the Bible prescribes something. In other words, just because an event happens in a story, doesn't mean we're meant to copy it.

Some events are in the Bible just because the Bible's giving a true record of history, not because the Bible's commending that action for us to imitate. But then again, we have to remember how critical this situation was for the life of the returned community.

The leaders of the people had enmeshed themselves in families, and practices that ran directly counter to the worship of the one true God. And keep in mind, marriage in the ancient world was performed for all sorts of reasons.

Financial alliances, political alliances, social assimilation. Marriage often served those purposes more than genuine love and affection. It's not as if we have a sort of Romeo and Juliet story here, where there are Montagues and Capulets.

[ 29 : 58 ] And you know, when we look at the writings of a contemporary of Ezra, the prophet Malachi, it would seem that some of these leaders had actually divorced their Jewish wives in order to marry these foreign non-believing wives, presumably for political or social reasons.

So perhaps we can sympathize with the excruciating decision before Ezra that he had to make in order to rebuild the people.

As I thought about this passage this week, I think what we have here is actually a unique event in redemptive history. In other words, God isn't telling this to us as a pattern, as an exact pattern for us to follow for all time, but he's showing us what happened at a unique time in redemptive history when the very mission of his people was at stake.

In this very fragile moment of the people returning from exile, decisive, unique action had to be taken. And the people do just that.

They take very decisive action to repent of their sins. Now, for believers today, however, the New Testament actually commands the opposite counsel.

[ 31 : 23 ] Believing spouses are commanded to stay with their non-Christian spouses in 1 Corinthians 7. In other words, if you are married to a non-Christian spouse, you are commanded to stay in the marriage.

In 1 Peter chapter 3, Peter counsels wives not to leave, but to win over their unbelieving spouses by their godly conduct. Now, that doesn't mean that the Bible contradicts itself.

You have to understand, the Bible is an unfolding story, not just a static book of rules. What's appropriate or required at one point in the story is no longer appropriate or required at a later point in the story because of what Jesus has done to move that story forward.

But even if we must approach this particular issue of marriage to unbelieving spouses differently now as New Testament believers, there are still two big lessons I think we must take away from Ezra chapter 10.

First, our call to distinctiveness, to be salt and light, will often require courageous and costly, hard decisions.

[ 32 : 36 ] Maybe it's a dating relationship you need to call off. Maybe it's a business venture you need to back away from. Maybe it means standing alone and not going along with the gossip or the crude joking amidst your friends or your colleagues.

This all takes courage and it can be costly. And yet, as believers in Christ, Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit for this very reason, to so unite us to Himself that we are empowered to do the costly and courageous thing.

This doesn't mean it needs to be hasty. Did you notice in Ezra chapter 10, Ezra accepts the plan of the people not to settle the matter in one day in the middle of a rainstorm.

Rather, what do they do? They choose trusted men and they investigate the matter patiently and thoroughly over the course of months. Some people present kind of disagree with that plan of action in verse 15.

And it's unclear whether those men in verse 15 think that the plan is too strict or too lenient. Maybe they wanted the unbelieving wives to stay and thought the whole business was out of hand. Maybe they wanted the expulsion to happen even faster.

[ 33 : 59 ] It's not clear. But for all of this, we actually see something quite amazing and encouraging in Ezra chapter 10. The people actually obey.

In verse 16, we read, the returned exiles did so. Now, if you've read much of the Old Testament, you realize that there aren't many moments when the people actually follow through with doing the courageous and costly thing.

More often, they are building golden calves, rebelling in the wilderness, demanding their own king, seeking foreign political alliances to rescue them, just like us.

But here, something different happens. They repent and they obey. And that brings us to the second and last thing we should take away from Ezra chapter 10, and it's found in the words of Shekeniah in verse 2.

But even now, there is hope for Israel in spite of this. In spite of blowing it big time, even now, there is hope for God's people.

[ 35 : 20 ] And church, how much more can we say those words today living on this side of the death and resurrection of Jesus, knowing so much more of God's steadfast love and redeeming grace, even now, there is hope.

perhaps you look at your life and you see the string of moral failures. You see your conformity to the unhealthy patterns and people around you.

And you know in the quiet moments, perhaps you think that God probably doesn't have much of a desire or purpose for you. And to be sure, as Ezra prayed in chapter 9, our guilt does rise higher than our heads.

We're sinking in it, the Bible says. And God owes us nothing in return. But even now, there is hope. When our sins deserved God's wrath, God, in the person of Jesus, lived a life of utter distinctiveness for us.

[ 36 : 29 ] He was different in every way, always loving, always courageous, always His own person, always obedient to His Father's will.

But then, Jesus identified with us in every way, taking all of our sin and all of our guilt upon Himself at the cross.

And He rose to life on the third day to secure our right standing with God the Father forever. You see, no matter how high our sins have risen above our heads, Jesus has risen even higher.

He's ascended to the right hand of God the Father in heaven and offers His righteousness on our behalf. So friends, even now, there is hope.

Hope for those of us who've blown it. Hope for those who need courage. hope for those who are afraid to do the hard but right thing. Hope because one who is better than Ezra has come.

[ 37 : 35 ] Not just confessing our sins for us, but actually bearing our sins for us and giving us His Holy Spirit to live new lives. And friends, the more we take hold of Jesus by faith in the Spirit, more and more our distinctiveness will shine.

the more our lights on the runway will blaze out. The more we'll fulfill the purpose for which God made us, the more we'll be assigned showing others the way home.

Let's pray together. Father, we pray and we thank You for the hope that we have in Jesus.

Would You come by Your Spirit and turn our hearts again to You? God, in our own strength, in our own steam, we so easily conform.

Oh God, by Your Spirit and by Your grace, make us distinct, make us salt and light, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Well, this morning we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper as a response to what we've just heard.

[ 39 : 03 ] And you know, the Lord's Supper is one of those things that Jesus taught us to do that actually marks out our distinctiveness in the world. This table, this bread that we're going to share, this cup that we're going to share, this is for people who've acknowledged their sinfulness, acknowledged that they can't rescue themselves on their own, they can't make themselves right with God, and they've turned to Jesus and received what He has done for their forgiveness, for their new life, for their hope.

And so we take this bread and we take this cup as a sign that what He has done is true of us and we're participating in it through faith. That Jesus has made a space for us in the table of the

kingdom.

And we are His brothers and sisters. We are God's sons and daughters and we belong in that family. So, I wonder if those who are helping to serve would come up. I think