

# A Heritage and a Hope

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Morning Church. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ezra. The book of Ezra, chapter 1, it's on page 362 in your Bibles.

Last week, Pastor Nick gave us an overview of Ezra and Nehemiah. And two books, they were originally one book, most likely. They still are one book in Hebrew Bibles today.

This book about the people of Israel returning from their exile in Babylon. So this morning we're going to dig into the first two chapters of the book of Ezra.

And I want to start by reading chapter 1 and the first two verses of chapter 2. So let's read these verses together. The book of Ezra.

In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred, to go out to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered.

Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.

[ 2 : 2 4 ] Cyrus, king of Persia, brought these out in the charge of Mithradath, the treasurer who counted them out to Shesh-bazar, the prince of Judah. This was the number of them. Thirty basins of gold, a thousand basins of silver, twenty-nine censers, thirty bowls of gold, four hundred ten bowls of silver, and a thousand other vessels.

All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand four hundred. All these did Shesh-bazar bring up when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem. Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried captive to Babylonia.

They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. They came with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Zerah, Rileah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigbi, Rehum, and Bono.

Now, what's your family history? What are your roots? On the one hand, many people who live in modern cities are increasingly disconnected from their roots.

Many of us live far from parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins. Some people move to cities for that purpose, to escape the oppressive patterns and unwanted constraints of their families of origin.

[ 3 : 47 ] Other people would prefer to stay where they grew up, but the educational and career opportunities are lacking, and so people are drawn to move.

But those opportunities are often temporary, and they often lead to more travel and more transients, and it's hard to find a place to settle down and plant roots.

Now, on the other hand, though many of us are disconnected from our roots, we can also see a growing interest in reconnecting with our roots.

The past couple of years, one of the most popular Christmas presents has been DNA testing kits from companies like AncestryDNA or 23andMe that tell you where your ancestors may have come from.

And there are also all kinds of websites and apps. Some of you are probably more familiar with them than I, but they can help you build a family tree and even connect with long-lost relatives.

[ 4 : 49 ] I know for some of you it's been very meaningful to meet a relative that you didn't know existed, or to learn about a part of your family history that had been forgotten over time.

Why are we drawn to reconnect with our roots? Even though it can be inconvenient, even though it can be at times painful to learn about troubling or broken parts of our family history.

Well, I would suggest this. As human beings, we don't flourish by trying to live completely disconnected from the past. Whether or not we want to admit it, we wouldn't be here today apart from those who have come before us.

And part of being human is that we want to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Self-actualization, whatever that is, doesn't all by itself end up being that fulfilling in the long term.

We want to be part of a people. We want to be part of a family. We want to be part of a legacy that has roots in the past and that will live on into the future. We want a place to belong.

[ 6 : 06 ] And that's in large part what these books, Ezra and Nehemiah, were willing to provide. Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the Israelite exiles returning to the land.

We've entitled this sermon series Rebuilding the Ruins. The story covers over 100 years from 538 B.C. at the beginning of Ezra to about 430 B.C.

at the end of Nehemiah. Now we don't know exactly when the book was compiled or who wrote it. Some have suggested that Ezra himself may have been responsible for compiling it.

But the author drew from several historical sources. We have quotes from Persian government correspondents. We have census records. We have other official lists.

And we have personal memoirs of both Ezra and Nehemiah. As we'll see throughout these books, there are many reasons to believe that these books are historically accurate. But Ezra is about much more than preserving historical information from a bygone era.

[ 7 : 12 ] What Ezra is doing is he's connecting the people's present experiences with their past history. These people have been displaced.

Their ancestors were moved to Babylon unwillingly. And then they come back. Their lives have been sort of in upheaval.

They're rebuilding a ruined city and a ruined nation. But Ezra wants them to know that they are not ruthless. They have a heritage.

They have a history. And because they have a heritage and because they have a history, they have a mission in the present and they have a hope for the future. And for those of us who are Christians, if you are a Christian, this is also part of your spiritual heritage.

Ezra Nehemiah is a part of our heritage that perhaps we may have neglected or forgotten or haven't spent, perhaps we're not as familiar with it as with some other parts of our spiritual heritage.

[ 8 : 21 ] But it points us to our mission in the present and our hope for the future. If you're not a Christian, if you're exploring Christianity, I hope that as we look through these books over the next couple of months and today, that they'll introduce you to the story of the Bible and to the God of the Bible.

Because if you come to believe and trust in the God of the Bible, then this story becomes your story too. It becomes part of your heritage as well.

This morning we're looking at the first two chapters of Ezra and I want to do two things. I want to show you the story that Ezra was telling his people and second, why that story matters to us today.

So the story Ezra is telling his people in these two chapters is this, the same God who brought the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt has now brought you back from exile in Babylon.

The same God who long ago brought the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt has now brought you back home from exile in Babylon. If you notice, Ezra ends, or sorry, Ezra begins with the two verses that 2 Chronicles, the page right before Ezra, end with.

[ 9 : 55 ] Okay? If you look back at that page, 2 Chronicles 36.22 now in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Beginning of Ezra in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia goes on.

So Ezra is very intentionally picking up on an unfinished story. It's continuing the story of Chronicles. Now, Chronicles summarizes the history of God's people from the creation of the world.

The first part of Chronicles begins with a genealogy that goes from Adam to Abraham. It's basically summarizing in condensed form the entirety of the Old Testament from Genesis to the end of Kings in one book.

So Chronicles just sort of gives you a compact version and highlighting certain things. Ezra is continuing that story. Intentionally and self-consciously he's continuing this story that has already begun.

And specifically in chapters 1 and 2 we see three significant parallels between what God did to bring the children of Israel out of slavery Egypt and what God did to bring the children of Israel back from exile in Babylon.

[ 11 : 12 ] So let me show you these three parallels. First, first parallel one, God works through a pagan king to deliver his holy people. We see this in verses 1 to 4 of Ezra chapter 1.

Now, if you are familiar with the story of the Exodus we studied the book of Exodus last year but I'll sort of try to summarize it for you if you're not familiar with it.

It's the story of God bringing the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt teaching them his law and then coming to dwell among them. Sort of God making these people his own.

And at the beginning of the book of Exodus we encounter Pharaoh the king of Egypt and he's the enemy of the Israelites. He is dead set against them from the beginning. He tries to get rid of them.

He tries to exterminate them first quietly and gradually and then openly and he resists the repeated warnings of Moses and Aaron even of his own court officials. But what we see in Exodus is that at the same time that Pharaoh is the sworn enemy of God's people he also ends up being an unwitting instrument of God's purposes.

[ 12 : 25 ] So Exodus chapter 9 verse 16 God says to Pharaoh for this purpose I raised you up to show you my power that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

See Pharaoh wanted to be in charge of everything. And yet what you see in the book of Exodus is that God was working out his sovereign purposes even through Pharaoh who was dead to death against God and his people.

Exodus even says in several places God hardened Pharaoh's heart. In other words God judged Pharaoh by sort of giving him over to his own stubborn desires and plans and then working his purposes through them so that everyone would ultimately see that God and not Pharaoh was the true Lord over all.

So in Exodus God worked through a hostile pagan king in order to deliver his holy people and in Ezra we see that same pattern. God works in the heart another pagan king to deliver his holy people namely Cyrus.

Now Cyrus is not openly hostile like Pharaoh. Cyrus has a much more friendly and tolerant policy. We know about Cyrus from several historical sources not only the biblical text but from many other historical writings.

[ 13 : 47 ] He defeated the Babylonians. He ascended to power in 539 BC. That's the first year Cyrus came in Persia and in contrast to the Babylonian and Assyrian kings who had preceded him he took a much more tolerant policy towards conquered people groups and their local religious customs.

So previous Babylonian emperors like Nebuchadnezzar had deported conquered people groups and had destroyed their temples and had confiscated their valuable artifacts and brought the images of their gods and the vessels from their temples to Babylon to sort of show off and say ha you see we conjured your gods we conjured your people and now we're going to show it off to the world.

But Cyrus took a different attack. Cyrus was wanting to build a big empire but he thought better to use carrots than sticks shall we say.

He said let's make people happy let's let people go back home let's let everybody worship their own gods as they please and then they'll be happier to you know they won't be as prone to rebel.

You know they'll be on board with our big virgin empire. So archaeologists have found a place still in or commissioned by Cyrus explaining his policies in this regard.

[ 15 : 21 ] Here's what's called the Cyrus cylinder from 539 BC or 538 BC says Cyrus writes I returned the images of the gods who had resided in Babylon to their places.

I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings. I settled in their habitations the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom the former Babylonian emperor Nabonidus had brought into Babylon.

Then he says here's sort of the religious worldview behind it. He says may all the gods whom I settled in their sacred centers ask daily of Bel and Nabu that my days be long and may they intercede for my welfare.

So he's basically hoping that all these other gods in sort of these far-flung provinces would pray to the head gods who he really believed in Bel and Nabu who were the Babylonian gods. And he thought you know they'll help out you.

So that's sort of Cyrus' motivation. Cyrus was not a believer. He was not a believer in the God of the Bible. He did not believe that the God of the Bible was the one and only true God.

[ 16 : 30 ] And if you read verses 2 to 4 they're not a declaration of exclusive loyalty to the Lord. Cyrus sort of carefully avoids making a declaration of exclusive loyalty in those verses even though he's very respectful to the Jewish exiles who wanted to rebuild their own temple.

So Ezra tells us that he extended the policy that was inscribed on that cylinder to the Israelites as well. He permitted and even promoted the return of the exiles to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of a temple to the God of Israel there.

So this is the first parallel in Exodus. God works through a hostile pagan king to deliver his people and Ezra God works through a friendly pagan king to deliver his people.

So that's the first parallel. Second parallel is in verses 5 to 11 God provides the materials for his people to build his house.

Now if you read Exodus when the people of Israel left Egypt they didn't leave empty handed. So Exodus 12, 35 and 36 the people of Israel asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing and the Lord gave people favor in the sight of the Egyptians so they let them have what they asked thus they plundered the Egyptians.

[ 17 : 52 ] In some ways it was a reversal. For years, decades the Egyptians had been plundering the Israelites profiting from their slave labor and now as they left the Israelites finally received some compensation.

And later on in Exodus we see that those items were used to construct the tabernacle. The dwelling place where God had promised to be with his people. God provided exactly what they needed to build his house.

We see the same thing here in Ezra. Verses 5 to 11, God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. Verse 1, he stirred up the spirit of his people. Verse 5, and he supplies them with all that they need.

Verses 6 and 7, all who are about to aid in them with vessels of silver, gold, goods, beasts, and costly wares. Verse 7 notes that Cyrus also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar, Babylonian emperor, 70 years ago, or sorry, 50, it wasn't 70, it was 50, about 50 years ago, had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his God.

So again, there's this reversal. Right? What had been lost in the exodus to Babylon was now being restored to its proper place in the worship of God.

[ 19 : 11 ] And verses 8 to 11 give us an inventory of some of those items. So there's second parallel, God provides the materials for his people to build his house in Exodus, and again, in Ezra.

Third parallel, God organizes the people whom he has delivered. And this is chapter 2. Now, when God brought the people out of Egypt, he organized them in the wilderness, and we see this especially in the Old Testament book of Numbers.

People were organized tribe by tribe, and each tribe had its proper place. There were three tribes on the north side, three on the south side, three on the east side, three on the west side, and in the middle of the camp was the tabernacle.

In other words, the Israelite camp was organized around the centrality of the worship of God. And the priests and Levites were responsible for the tabernacle.

They were assigned specific duties so that the community would function as a cohesive whole. And that's also what we see here in Ezra 2. God organizes the people who he delivers.

[ 20 : 29 ] Psalm 68 says, God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing. And that's what God does with the returning exiles. They're not a nameless, faceless mass.

They're not simply an aggregate number. No, in the family of God, everyone has a place to belong, and everyone has a reason to rejoice.

Now look down to chapter 2 for a minute. We won't read through it, but notice how it's organized. First, the first two verses, we see the leaders of the community in verse 2.

Beginning with Zerubbabel, who was a member of the royal line descended from King David, and Jeshua, who became the high priest. So those two will show up later in the story.

Nehemiah is not the Nehemiah who comes 70 years later. I was a common name at the time. I was referring to someone else. Then a list of other leaders.

[ 21 : 31 ] And Nehemiah 7 repeats the list in verse 2, and includes a 12th name, Nahamani. So we have 12 leaders representing the 12 tribes.

So first, the leaders of the community. Then verses 3 to 35, we see the men of the people of Israel. Then verses 3 to 20, lists those who are descended from particular known families.

21 to 35, we see those who belong to specific places. Towns like Bethlehem, Nebo, and Jericho. So the leaders, people as a whole, verses 36 to 58, we see the temple officials in four groups.

The priests who had the highest level of authority and responsibility, the Levites who served under the priests, and then the temple servants and the sons of Solomon servants who carried out the more mundane daily tasks.

Then in verses 59 to 63, we have some people who could not prove their lineage. So it would be sort of like somebody today who's lost all their IDs and has no way of retrieving them.

[ 22 : 39 ] And so they couldn't demonstrate their family lineage. And notice how these people were dealt with. they were included with the returning exiles.

So they were not sent back to Persia. Even in the Old Testament, foreigners who were pledging their loyalty to the God of Israel could join the people of Israel.

That was true throughout the Old Testament. And you can even notice some of the names in verses 43 to 54 in particular are non-Israelite names.

Egyptian names like Zihab and Asna, Sisera, and others. So over time there were people from other nations who joined the Old Testament people of Israel.

That was happening throughout the history by people declaring their exclusive loyalty to the God of Israel, the males in the family being circumcised as a sign of that loyalty and they would join in with the people of Israel.

[ 23 : 49 ] However, verse 62 says that those who could not prove their descent were not included in the priesthood. God had specifically commanded that the priest must be descended from Aaron and so in order to obey that command they decided let's play it safe.

If we can't prove that these men are descended from Aaron it's better to play it safe and wait for more clarity in time rather than risk disobeying God simply because of the present uncertainty.

And it seems like at least one of these families was later proven to belong to the priesthood because one of the names appears later in Ezra in the list of the priests so it seems like they were able to work that out over time.

So finally verses 64 to 67 we get to the totals. Now by the time we get to the totals most of you are ready to go on from chapter two and go on to chapter three and pick up the story and leave this long list behind and you're thankful that I didn't read the list verbatim.

But some of you might be detail oriented persons or perhaps slightly obsessive compulsive persons and I can understand that I had to deal with that and quite prove that but if you might notice here an important detail or some perhaps troubling details if you add up the individual numbers in all of the lists in chapter two they add up to 29,818 but verse 64 says the total is 42,316 also the list in Ezra two is repeated in Nehemiah chapter seven but several of the numbers and a few of the names in that list are different and also the temple vessels in verses nine and ten of chapter one don't add up to the total in chapter one verse 11 so some of you might be thinking what's the deal with these discrepancies can we really trust that the bible is true and reliable and authoritative if the authors don't even seem to have their math facts straight so before we move on let me address that concern with three points first briefly first the list are most likely incomplete by the time Ezra

[ 26 : 14 ] Nehemiah was written 430 BC at the earliest the first group of exiles had returned over a hundred years previously and particularly in that time it's certainly possible that some of the records of particular families might not have been preserved over those hundred years so the author of Ezra Nehemiah would have simply recorded the information that was available to him at the time even if information about some family groups was no longer available second the list in chapter 2 seemed to list the men from the tribe of Judah and the priests from the tribe of Levi if that's true the extra 13,000 could be women children or members of the northern tribes it would not be surprising for the perilous four month long journey from Babylon to Jerusalem to attract a disproportionate number of young single men and a smaller number of families with children so that's the second possibility third it is possible that at this point the original text of Ezra

Nehemiah was not copied precisely over the centuries so for centuries the books of the bible were copied by hand and we have many copies of the bible from many different periods of history so we have the Dead Sea Scrolls from 2nd century 3rd, 2nd, 1st century BC we have the Greek versions a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek that also is from sort of pre New Testament times we have the Old Testament quotations and a whole range of other historical documents we have what's called the Masoretic text which is the Hebrew text of the Old Testament from the early Middle Ages and so you can compare all these copies of the Old Testament with each other and by and large we can demonstrate that the bible has been extremely well preserved over time the overall story of the bible has not changed and many of the details have been very carefully handed out to us even the widest differences among all the copies of biblical manuscripts do not call into question any significant biblical or

Christian teachings so even if you take the copies of the bible that are most different from each other you've got the same story and you've got the same basic Christian doctrines but when you compare the different managers over time there are a couple areas that do occasionally diverge and one of the areas that seems most prone to variation is long lists of numbers have you ever tried copying by hand a long list of unfamiliar names and numbers and then have somebody else do it and then have somebody else do it so this is an area where we may not be 100% sure what the original author wrote but having said that we can still trust that God inspired the original author to write what God wanted him to write that's what the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture means and that God has preserved for us all that we need to know so even if we can't be 100% sure about some of the numbers and how they add up we can for all these other reasons be confident in the trustworthiness of the scriptures that we read today so having addressed that concern let me get back to the main point right the same

God who brought the children from Israel out of Egypt has brought them back from exile and Babylon right in those three parallels God works through a painting to bring back his people God provides them with all they need to build his house and God organizes the people whom he has delivered so that's what Ezra wants the people to know at the beginning of the story it's the same God who's been working all along now you might say well why does that story matter to us right and this is the second half of the message why does this story matter to us 2500 years later here's why it matters the same God who brought the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt the same God who brought the exiles from Babylon is the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ he's through his life death and resurrection Jesus accomplished an even greater exodus what did

Jesus accomplish when he died on the cross he rescued us from slavery to sin and Satan and death he opened the way for us to paradise once more Jesus came to bring us home to God out of our exile out of our lostness out of and back into God's family with a place to belong forever the apostle Paul wrote if you belong to Jesus to Christ to the Messiah you are Abraham's see Abraham's children and heirs according to the promise of God so if you've entrusted yourself to Jesus this story is also your story this God is also your God so when we read this book about people who lived long ago and far away in different historical and cultural contexts we can still trace the fingerprints of our faithful God and Savior we can still see the same

[ 31 : 53 ] God at work who is taking care of us every day and who hears our Christ Paul wrote in Romans 15 whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction so that through endurance and through encouragement from the scriptures we might have hope so I want to conclude with three specific ways that Ezra 1 and 2 gives us mission and hope today first God is still sovereign over pagan political leaders right in Exodus God rescued his people despite Pharaoh's evil designs in Ezra God brought his people home through a friendly decree of Cyrus now if were up to me I would always vote for friendly Cyrus over persecuting Pharaoh but in both cases God accomplished his purposes and God rescued his people now the New Testament teaches us that as

Christians we have responsibilities toward our political leaders to respect those in authority to honor the law of the land unless it conflicts with the law of God to pray for those in authority whoever they may be to seek justice and correct oppression but the Bible also tells us in Proverbs 21 1 the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord and God turns it wherever he will and otherwise he would say it like this no matter who is in power on earth God is still on his throne in heaven and that's something that we need to remember today we live in uncertain times divided times tumultuous times American Christians today can be tempted to line up behind one political party or another to devote ourselves to one candidate or another and to give them uncritical and whole hearted support but if we are

Christians our whole hearted allegiance belongs only to Jesus Christ he alone reigns over the nations in righteousness no other human being comes anywhere close to his majesty his mercy his justice his faithfulness and so knowing that God is still on the throne can give us a steady confidence when the world feels shaky it can give us hopeful perseverance when the world seems hostile and dark and it can give us humble gratitude when things seem to be going well so that's the first thing that we can hold on to and remember is that God is still sovereign even over pagan political leaders second thing that gives us mission and hope is that God still supplies all we need to carry out all that he stirs us up to do so God stirred the hearts of his people to return and to rebuild the temple but he also supplied them with all that they needed to carry out that task now how did God provide well provided through the gifts of neighbors in Persia some of whom may not have even been believers verses verse 6 all more about them and he provided in part through a grant from the



Persian government surprise right and most of all he provided with the freely given offerings of his own people chapter 2 verses 68 and 69 God supplies what we need to carry out what he wants us to do now this principle can be misused in a variety of ways one way it can be misused is to insist that I know exactly what God has stirred us up to do and therefore everybody else better get behind me 100% and not ask any questions otherwise they're disobey God but that's presumptuous often that's simply fearful we have to be humble enough to admit that we don't always see everything clearly from the start and sometimes we need to change course it's right for us to pursue plans when they seem wise and right but our plans are not always the same thing as God's will as the elders we've become convinced that this building project is the right next step for our church and as the members we voted overwhelming last fall to approve it so we earnestly desire to see

God supply our need through the freely given offerings of his people and we've been encouraged by some of the progress we've seen we want to encourage ourselves and our plans before the Lord in prayer and depending on him throughout the entire process and looking to him to lead us in all that we do we can pray like Paul does in 2nd Thessalonians 1 Paul says we always pray for you that our God may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him that's the purpose that we need to be seeking in everything we do you know sometimes it matters less what you do and it matters more how we do it are we doing it so that the name of God the name of Jesus would be seen as beautiful and glorious and the people would be blessed so let's pray that

[ 38 : 02 ] God would fulfill every resolve for good and every work motivated by faith that God wouldn't leave us half finished but he would carry us all the way through and guide us to the end so that's the second thing God supplies what we need to do what he stirred us up to do third we can be encouraged that God still organizes the people whom he has delivered God sets the lonely in families and he leads forth the prisoners with singing everyone has a place to belong in the family of God and everyone has a reason to rejoice have you found your place to belong here or in some other local expression of the family of God most of you have been coming to Trinity for a little while you have probably noticed we have this thing called membership and among other things when you become a member we add your name to a list like the list in chapter 2 but you know what we use that list the elders and the staff pray through that list we pray for about 10 members by name alphabetically every week at staff meeting and at least once a year the elders try to connect with everyone on that list to specifically ask how at the very least how can we be praying for you to be growing in your water with Jesus and if you're on that list and if you just sort of disappear and don't come to church for several weeks or a couple months we'll eventually reach out to you and say we love you and we miss you and can we pray with you can we help you the bible tells us not to forsake assembly together we don't want to let you just drift away easily you see as the elders we believe that we have a particular responsibility before God to spiritually care for everyone who says count me in and put me on that list because I belong to Jesus and he's put me on the list in heaven so I want to put myself on the list in a local family of believers on earth so that as the elders as God's under shepherds care for me

I can be reminded that I have a great shepherd in heaven who will never forget me and who will not just let me drift away and who will pray and who is always interceding for me you see that's what membership is about it's being reminded that we have a faithful shepherd who is always looking after us so find a place to belong whether it's here or in some family of Christian believers and get on that list finally you have a reason to rejoice not only a place to belong but we have a place to belong we have a reason to rejoice that's why we read Psalm 126 earlier when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dreamed and our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues chanted of joy the Lord has done great things for us we are glad when we know what

God has done for us in Jesus Christ that he loves us that he has reached out to us that he has called us to belong to him and know his love and be assured of his grace and that he will never leave us or forsake us and that he's going to walk with us and bring us all the way to our true home in heaven that gives us a joy that sustains us through every trial and difficulty and disappointment we know we have roots in what God has done in the past and we know that we have a hope for the future because the same God is going to be with us as we move forward let's pray father thank you for your faithfulness to the people of Israel thank you that as we see your faithfulness to them in the scriptures that we can be reminded of your faithfulness to us we pray that you would draw us to near to you and renew our joy today

Lord as we celebrate the Lord's Supper renew our joy we pray in Jesus name I relieve of the Jesus name■ to the Lord as we have to best toios and to