

Ezras Blueprint

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[0 : 00] Well, if you could turn in your Bibles back to Ezra chapter 7, and we'll take our text just really from one verse. and it's verse 10 of Ezra chapter 7.

I'll just read the verse just now. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Now, just by way of background, I think it's probably helpful. We've just parachuted into the seventh chapter of Ezra, so it's probably a little bit helpful to just very quickly summarize really the first six chapters of the book of Ezra.

And they cover the period 538 BCE to 516 BC. And really following this decree of Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia, the first group of exiled Judeans returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel.

In chapters 1 and 2, you would read of that, where the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem.

And in chapter 3, we read that their immediate goal was to rebuild the temple.

[1 : 11] Then, chapter 4, there was opposition from surrounding people, which halted the work of rebuilding the temple for several years. But it recommended later, through the prophetic urgings of Haggai and Zechariah, which we see in chapter 5, it started to rebuild the temple again.

Then King Darius searched the archives. He confirmed Cyrus' original decree from chapter 1, and he ordered that work to proceed, even providing royal funds.

Then the second temple was finally completed, and they celebrated Passover in 516 BC, which we read of in chapter 6. So feel free afterwards, in the afternoon, to maybe read some of the surrounding chapters.

But we read of there that the Passover is celebrated from verse 19 to the end of chapter 6. And that really then begins to set the stage for where we are arriving in Ezra chapter 7, who was a scribe and a priest, which we read of many years later.

Ezra knows that ultimately God's people are being called back to the promised land. So here he is, he's in Persia. He's grown up and he's devoted a life to studying the law of God, and he ends up having this great heart to return, and to be able to teach the law of God, and to help refocus the life of God's people in God's place, according to God's own word.

[2 : 38] He knows that God's people are in God's place. He knows that the temple has been built. But what his burden is here, is to go and actually reorder the lives of God's people, according to his word.

So this is in really one sense, the next great return that we see documented in the book of Ezra.

And today on the 19th of April, 2026, in our world, we very much find ourselves in a world where there is profound cultural and spiritual crisis.

You don't have to look far in your newspapers, or if you were watching the news at all over this last week, we're in a constant state of crisis. There is a desperate need for men and women whom the hand of the Lord rests.

And this divine favor that we read of here, and that we think of, stands in stark contrast to the most terrifying judgment that God can enact on his people. And that's giving them over to their own desires.

We just have to look at the Apostle Paul, when he outlines in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, that when a society rejects God, he may respond not with immediate fire, but with a more chilling verdict.

[3 : 50] And he simply lets go, removing his restraining hand, and allowing that culture to reap the disastrous consequences of its own rebellion. And we live in such a time, a moment in history that cries out for individuals who, by God's grace, can stand in the gap.

And it's in these moments that we must turn our attention to figures like Ezra. For in this life, we find a, in his life, sorry, we find a timeless blueprint for how God prepares and uses a person to bring about revival and restoration over a land.

Now, Ezra the scribe, he does really arise from the pages, even as we read this chapter alone. And he jumps off the pages of Scripture as a giant whom God raised, raised up to guide the Jewish exiles back to the promised land and to reestablish them as a nation after 70 difficult years in Babylon.

Ezra was a man whose success was rooted in the verse that we read of in verse 6. His success was rooted in the fact that the hand of the Lord his God was upon him.

Just at the end of verse 6 there. For the hand of the Lord his God was on him. This is not just a throwaway comment, but it was one with real power behind it.

[5 : 15] And it enabled him to attempt great things for God. And just as importantly, not to attempt great things for God, but to expect great things from God.

And the societal upheaval that defined Ezra's world finds a somewhat similar echo in our own today. We witness massive movements of people on a global scale.

And in such an era, the people of God must ask a fundamental question. Who are we going to be in this world of chaos? The answer is not found in a political agenda or a right or a left cultural position, but it's in dusting ourselves off and getting busy with the work that God has called us to do for his glory.

And Ezra provides, just in this one verse, he provides a model for this work. And the secret to his impact is explicitly stated in this single powerful verse.

Ezra 7 verse 10 says, This is not just a biographical detail in Ezra's life.

[6 : 28] It's a blueprint for us to take note of today, both personally and corporately as a congregation or whatever congregation you may come from if you're visiting with us. And it outlines a process for us that remains as relevant today as it did in 5th century BC.

So this is going to be really the focus of our considerations and our reflections on God's word today. Four points really just to anchor our thoughts to. And it's really just sequentially going through the verse here.

The first is that we ought to set our heart. The second point is that we're to study God's word. The third is that we're to do God's word. And then the fourth point is that we're to teach God's word.

And we see this pattern of study, application and instruction that God still uses to raise up leaders and put his hand upon them. So where do we start?

Well, we start at the very first section here of verse 10. And it's our first point that we're to set our heart. It says, For Ezra had set his heart. So that's our first step.

[7 : 31] The first part in this blueprint sees us setting our heart. And the Christian life ought to be a life of intention. It's a conscious and continuous response to the glorious grace of God.

And this attitude is captured perfectly in the opening word of our text. For Ezra had set his heart. This was not an exercise in him generating his own human willpower or a focused spiritual commitment from within.

Rather, it was Ezra's decisive response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. God had poured out his grace, stirring Ezra's soul and impressing upon him the urgency of the hour.

And in response, Ezra made a plan. He resolved to stop wasting time, to cease treading water in this sea of cultural chaos, and to get busy.

And to get busy with the specific calling that God had placed on his life. To set one's heart is to declare that today matters for eternity. To reject a drift of a lazy faith and to align oneself to the entire being of God and all of his purposes and his will.

[8 : 46] And the great danger of our age today is living a passive life, a life shaped by just the world around us, just allowing the world to direct us. Whatever wind it may throw up, we just go in that direction.

Maybe a life lived by default rather than by design. And I'll share a quick story that I read of in my preparations. Just a little bit of an idea of an image of what that might look like.

And the story's about a prince who becomes a master archer. The prince excels to such a point that he believes he's the finest archer in the world. And on his journey homeward, the prince stops in a small town to get something to drink.

But across from the tavern, the prince sees a barn with painted targets along the entire side of the barn. And there's a single arrow, dead centre, in every single target on the barn.

How could such a master archer be living in such a small town? Finally, the prince sees this young boy and asks him, It was me, says the boy. Show me, demands the prince.

[9 : 55] This can't be true. So they stand. The boy takes aim. The boy hits the side of the barn, far away from any of the targets. Then the boy runs into the barn, comes out with a brush and a can of paint, and he paints a circle around the arrow.

And he said, That's how I do it. First I shoot the arrow, and then I put the target around it. And whilst that's a little bit of a kind of funny story, it's a tragically accurate reflection of what we see in people's lives today.

Our actions can often be random, they can be undisciplined, and they maybe just land, and then we paint our priorities around them. So whatever we're doing in our life, we'll then justify it, and we'll paint the target around.

We maybe retroactively justify the life that we have without having a purposeful aim. But the hard truth is, if you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.

To set one's heart, as Ezra did, is to reject this thought. It's to draw the target first, and then aim every action towards the bullseye of God's glory.

[11 : 02] So how then does one practically set their heart? We read Ezra did it, but how ought we do that here in 2026? Well, there's three very quick ways that I'll run through of how we ought to maybe set our heart.

And the first one is to set our heart on the solid rock. A determined heart requires an unshakable foundation. It's pointless to set your heart on shifting sands, or your emotions, or your circumstances, or even the approval of the world around you.

The heart must be fixed upon that which is firm and eternal. And as a hymn writer wrote, on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Not some other ground, not the occasional other ground, but all other ground is sinking sand. To set your heart is, first and foremost, to set it upon the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

He is the immovable object. He's the cornerstone upon which a life of purpose can be built.

Anything not grounded in Him will ultimately fail.

[12 : 07] The second thing we can do is to set our hearts on our routines. Our well-intentioned aspirations vanish when there's no structure or routine. To set our hearts means to develop daily, weekly, and even yearly patterns to reinforce our spiritual priorities.

It means scheduling time for prayer and study of God's Word. It means committing to corporate worship, coming into His house, to worship and have fellowship with one another, and to build a life around the means of grace.

Critically, this routine, it cannot be a solo endeavor. Don't pack it in and give it up after a few weeks. We ought to surround ourselves with fellow travelers on the journey.

Those trusted brothers and sisters who will provide accountability, necessary that we need to persevere when our own motivations begin to falter. We ought to be bringing people around us.

And a heart set within a routine is guarded against distraction and discouragement because the people around us will rebuke us and will challenge us when we do wander.

[13 : 16] And the third very quick thing to think about when we set our heart is to set your heart in faith. And this is two distinct outworkings. The first is with repentance, acknowledging our sin and affirming that Christ is the undisputed King of the earth.

And it's to be done with humility and to be done with submission. And the second thing is to step forward each day in faithful expectation, anticipating that God is going to do great and mighty things in his kingdom through his people.

This is done by continually believing God's promises, shuddering at his warnings that we read of and living our lives according to his commands. Not the commands of the world and as we sang, not the counsel of the world but entirely on his commands.

Setting one's heart is a non-negotiable first step in the sequence that we see from Ezra as he shares with us. It's the act of clearing the ground and pouring the solid foundation upon which a life of purpose can then be built.

And once the heart is set, note that that's the first step in the process, you're then prepared for the next crucial step which takes us on to our second point and that is to study God's word, to study the

word.

[14 : 33] So after setting his heart, the text tells us that Ezra focuses his intention to study the law of the Lord. Read there, for Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord.

It's important to understand the stark difference between just a casual reading of scripture and the deep studious engagement that characterized Ezra's life. Now we live in a profoundly shallow culture.

I don't think that's a surprise to anyone. One that values sound bites and very short quick scrolls, a quick swipe here. That's what we're being told ought to be how we consume information.

Maybe it's a word for the day or something really short and shallow and in my preparations I looked at attention spans and there was a study around attention spans and I'll not ask you because it would be very interesting to see what people's views were but back in 2004 the attention span was about two and a half minutes so the average attention span for an adult was about two and a half minutes and last year in 2025 that had come down to 47 seconds.

So even in that short space of time just under 20 years we see attention spans just plummeting and that's because of the way the world seeks to grasp our information and seek to share information with us.

[15 : 56] It's all very shallow and there's not a huge amount of depth and in such an environment it can feel like an act of warfare for our hearts our minds and our affections to go deep into the word of God and I'd speak to myself first here often times it can just be a quick passage that you read but you're not delving fully into God's word as we ought to.

It should not just be a quick five or ten minute devotional it should be a rigorous disciplined and determined work of study. It's a process by which we allow the truth of God to penetrate into every aspect of our being and this study that Ezra speaks of and that we ought to have in our own lives is a discipline that involves both a personal and corporate effort and to emulate Ezra's example it requires a sincere approach to absorbing and understanding God's law.

Firstly diligent attendance to hearing God's word being preached. You're blessed to have a faithful preacher and a minister in training as they come to share God's word with you week in and week out so attending that not just attending to hear and as soon as you go out the door you've forgotten that passage but chewing upon the word meditating upon that word as we sang in Psalm 1 the primary means the primary means that God is appointed for his instruction of his people is the public hearing of his word therefore studying God's word ought to begin with the diligent attendance to the preaching with the congregation here or wherever your church family are if you're visiting with us this is not an unreceptive act of listening it's an act of readiness to engage with the text being expounded a couple of questions maybe just to ask yourself do you come ready every Sunday morning or Thursday evening is prayer meeting is it do you come ready do you come prepared prayerfully preparing to hear God's word do you come ready to study the word along with Thomas and Gordon and the rest of the congregation do you take the truths in do you remember them do you ponder them throughout the rest of the week it's not just a few minutes before bed it's not just a couple of minutes when you wake up in the morning do you go away and chew upon that word or do you sit here do you look at your watch there's a big clock on the screen there so I'm looking myself but do you just sit here count down the hours and just wait for the day to be done or do you think maybe of your to-do list for tomorrow or are you going through your shopping list tomorrow but the call that we see in this verse here from Ezra is to reject that approach and it's to embrace the student mindset that comes eager to learn and eager to be transformed by his word and the next way is by our own personal bible study personal bible study is essential for your spiritual growth it provides a direct encounter with God's inspired truth which serves as a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path consistent reading and meditation transforms the heart and it transforms the mind and it helps believers to discern God's will and apply it to our daily living and this discipline equips you to resist temptation it allows you to grow in faith and to develop a mature understanding of the Christian life without this personal engagement with God's word your spiritual growth will stagnate and it'll make it difficult to then maintain an obedience and a close relationship with the Lord it's the primary means of nourishing the soul a deep faith cannot be refined in isolation it must be forged in the context of community and fellowship so a thriving church should be a place that creates opportunities for that to happen whether that is bible studies whether that is various fellowships men's bible studies prayer meetings the diversity that you'll see across various congregations including your own so that every stage of life we ought to be becoming spiritually mature there

ought to be a place to study to grow and to apply

God's word in fellowship with one another and this devotion that Ezra talks of here to study the law of the Lord it's not merely an academic exercise Gordon's hopefully enjoyed his first year at ETS and I'm looking forward to my own God willing it's not just an academic exercise when we think of this study but it's intrinsically linked to God's promise of blessing in the true biblical sense when not the prosperity gospel but when we think of success and prosperity they're tied directly to a life that is saturated in obedience with God and his word it doesn't mean the trials will never come to your door far from it we just have to look at our own nation which was once well acquainted with the book and I believe now is classed as an unreached nation given the number of people that we have attending church and we're witnessing that decay in our own culture we see it in our policies we see it in decision making at government and in such moments we groan recognising that the moral foundations of our country have been abandoned so Ezra sets his heart to study God's law because he understood that it was only that that was the source of truth it was only that that was going to give justice and stability in a world where people vied for loyalty and vie for their own personal gain

Ezra knew that a nation filled with people who followed the one true God was a nation that could withstand any external pressure or internal decay and this commitment to study however we see is not the final goal knowledge that is not then applied as we spoke to the young ones so we see the recipe but if you don't then apply it so knowledge that is not applied can become a source of pride true deep study of God's word is never an end in itself it must inevitably and urgently lead to personal application and action which takes us then on to our third point and that's to do God's word Ezra set his heart not only to study the law but also to do it and this is a critical extension from knowing to doing just like we said to the young ones we can know a recipe but it doesn't mean anything until we do it in our world that elevates subjective feelings above everything else it seems the Bible constantly presses upon us beyond our emotions into the world of doing

[22 : 44] God's word as it's preached each and every week here should then see God's work being done out in the community in your own homes or wherever you are and this stage in Ezra's sequence and in his blueprint really challenges us to examine whether the truth that we claim to believe has actually taken root in our lives we may know all the right answers we may be able to articulate sound theology in a small group or a Sunday school class we may be able to hold court in a Bible study but in the arena of our daily life do we fail to do the things that we claim to love Tim Keller said our time money and emotional energy are offered at the altars of comfort approval and pleasure and if that's the case then it's a betrayal of the gospel that must be relentlessly rooted out confronting this in our own life is absolutely essential for spiritual growth the call to action is a summons for every believer to examine their own life

Colossians 3 Paul says put to death therefore what is earthly and new one of the clearest indicators of your true priorities and my true priorities is how we spend our time to step up into doing what God's word tells us means to conduct an honest audit of our own diaries we must ask ourselves how have we been spending the many hours of each and every one of our days are we wasting our lives with trivial pursuits or are we intentionally investing our time in matters of eternal significance and again I speak to myself first we've all been given 24 hours this day we all had 24 hours yesterday how did we use those hours pride is also a formidable barrier to doing God's word we cannot grow if we first do not acknowledge our need to grow stepping up requires the humility to admit that we need to mature in our faith it means being open to correction instruction and reproof from God's word and his people we must be willing to see the areas of disobedience in our lives and repent of them rather than defending or trying to justify them ultimately doing God's word is a matter of submission we must ask ourselves do I willingly yield authority to God not the world not self not even the church but to God those that humbly submit do not argue with scripture they do not try to negotiate its terms or ignore its commands instead they take on that instruction allowing it to convict to correct and to instruct them in the way of righteousness a life transformed by this obedience of doing

God's word where our studies lead to action becomes one of the most powerful qualifications for the final step that we see here in Ezra's model when our actions align with our convictions when our lives gain an authentic power that cannot then be faked this is an essential foundation for this final step so we've seen that Ezra sets his heart then study God's word we then see doing God's word and now we finally end with the teaching of God's word we see there at the end and for Ezra had

set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel I don't want you to think that if you're not a minister or a minister in training you can maybe just switch off at this point I don't need to be teaching God's word that's for Thomas and Gordon to do I'll just sit back and listen well I would urge you not to the teaching of God's word is not just reserved for those in the pulpit the first three stages that we read of in this verse setting the heart studying the word and doing the word were all personal and effectively internal steps that we take they're private preparatory work that God is doing in Ezra's heart and it would be in our hearts as well but it's only after this deep internal work did God call Ezra to external public ministry of teaching this sequence revealed a profound truth teaching is not a separate activity for just a select few but it's inevitable and it's an inevitable overflow of a heart that is saturated with the word of God just look at what the apostle

Paul says where he demonstrates the absolute necessity of teaching and preaching in Romans 10 verses 13 to 15 you don't need to go there I'll read it just now it says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching and how are they to preach unless they are sent as it is written how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news the world is to be transformed it will be transformed because it learns a Christian understanding of everything this requires believers not just ministers or ministers in training to use their mouths their time their talents their relationships and to be serious about teaching God's word it means praying for opportunities to share this word with those that God has placed in our lives one commentator says this he says we must adopt a posture of faith adding one simple word to the end of our observations and that word is yet my next door neighbour doesn't know

Jesus yet my husband or wife don't know Jesus yet my colleagues at work don't know Jesus yet the method for this effective teaching is modelled perfectly by Ezra the Christians walk and their life itself must be the primary illustration of God's work the world the UK and Scotland are tired of hypocrisy we see it on our news day in day out we're starving for honesty and authenticity and to the Christians among us your personal holiness your ongoing transformation into the image of Christ is the most compelling and powerful tool you possess for influencing others when people see that the word of God has changed you they will be far more willing to believe that it can change them we're called to move from that internal preparation to external proclamation from being students of the word to becoming teachers of the word in whatever sphere of influence

[29 : 48] God has granted us so as we begin to close remember this example set before us by Ezra it's a clear and important pattern for a life and a life of impact to firstly set your hearts to study God's word to do God's word and then to teach God's word this is God's methodology for raising up men and women upon whom his hand can rest individuals who can bring order out of chaos light into darkness and hope to the desperate it begins with the intentional decision of a set heart and then matures through the deep discipline of study and meditation on his word and then it finds its fruit in allowing God's word to do God's work and then concludes with the teaching of his word both with our mouths and with our lives just like we spoke of the young ones to that cake we can show our lovely recipe but until we show what that looks like what the finished product looks like they're not able to taste it and they're not able to see and taste the sweetness of what it shares so we begin with that intentional decision of a set heart the challenge now becomes then personal for us are you like

Ezra are you studying God's word in such a way that you can draw blessing from it and then instruct others around you not just from a pulpit but from your office from the shop from the fishing boat from a football pitch have you been trained for the kingdom of heaven and what about those maybe among us here or maybe listening online that are not yet believers I must give heed to the serious warning that we find here perhaps you recognise this danger in your life that you don't know the Lord maybe it's a life lived by default rather than by design but as we spoke of with that illustration of the archer the hard truth still remains if you aim at nothing you will hit it every time you cannot find stability if you set your life on the shifting sands and not on the solid rock of Jesus Christ like we looked at near the beginning the model of Ezra demands that we begin with this fundamental question who are we going to be as a church and individually who are we going to be if you do not know

Jesus as your Lord and Saviour I want you to think about this question you can turn you in the Bibles if you want to actually Matthew chapter 27 and it will have been a passage possibly looked at in recent weeks as I kind of lead up to Easter Matthew chapter 27 really leaves us with a question that we will all be answering today we will all be answering this evening as you God willing come around his word verse 22 of Matthew chapter 27 so this is Jesus being delivered to Pilate we see the crowd choosing Barabbas and Pilate asks them this question so they've chosen to let Barabbas go and to crucify Christ and Pilate says to them what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ what is your answer to that question today you must first and foremost set your heart upon the person and work of

Jesus Christ he is that solid rock on which you can stand that question then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ every single one of us will be answering that question there is no neutrality it is a myth we cannot sit on the fence when we leave this place we are either for him or we are against him as we saw earlier it begins with our repentance we need to acknowledge sin in our lives and we affirm that Christ is the undisputed king of all the earth we need a humility and we need to submit to this truth we must abandon the world's illusion of living your own life doing what you want to do carve out your own identity in life don't be content with a status quo that leads to a lost eternity therefore take the first step of Ezra's blueprint here that's laid before us to set your heart on Jesus Christ he's not merely a foundation for us he is the only foundation he's not merely an escape he is the only escape from the judgment we are all faced with and in a culture that would have us stay silent within our walls

I pray that we would boldly speak of Jesus Christ as he truly is to all of those that we encounter let us therefore commit ourselves to this wonderful pattern that we see of here that Ezra lays before us with conviction I pray that as we leave this place we would be setting our hearts that we would be studying God's word that we would then be doing God's word and that we would be teaching God's word knowing that it's in his strength that we can do this we must declare this truth for he is the king of kings and lord of lords amen and may the lord bless these very short reflections