

Costly Obedience

I. Announce:

- A. *HELLO to those watching online. [next 2 wed]
- B. Slide1 Come and join us next Wed, June 17 where we showcase our VBS program. We will begin in the sanctuary with some *fun worship, highlights from VBS, and then* we'll head outside for a sweet treat.
- C. Slide2 The following Wed join us 6/24 as we celebrate **Mike & Lorie** and their many years of faithful service in **Asia**. This will be conducted in an **interview style format**, giving Mike and Lorie the opportunity to share stories from their years serving in *hard-access countries* and *reflect on God's faithfulness throughout their ministry*. You'll hear firsthand about *the challenges, joys, and lessons* they've learned while serving among *people with little access to the gospel*.
1. To encourage a more personal and open conversation, this gathering will not be livestreamed or recorded. We'd love for you to join us as we celebrate, encourage, and **pray for them** as they begin this new chapter of life and ministry in the U.S. (Goodies/fellowship afterward)
- D. Slide3 Café: Our café is introducing some fresh seasonal favorites! Be sure to check out the new summer menu starting this week.
- E. Slide4 We are looking for those to join our **Welcome Team** - We have various openings for *greeters, parking attendants, and helping with our visitors and guests* on **Sundays** or **Wednesdays**. contact Tony Schaffner.
- F. Slide5 Prayer:

II. Slide6a Intro: Costly Obedience [wrap up the book]

- A. About **2%** of the world's population lives in **polygamous** households. Almost always in the form of *1 husband with multiple wives* (polygyny) or plural marriages.
1. Today that's about **165-170 million people living in polygamous households**. (Since households include *husbands, multiple wives, and*

children, then the # of men who actually have more than one wife is much smaller - probably **tens of millions** rather than *hundreds of millions*)

- B. Christian missionaries have long wrestled with the pastoral question: *Should a man who comes to Christ with multiple wives divorce all but one?* (think about that)
- C. Theme: **Obedience is sometimes painful.**
- D. Big Idea: **Faithfulness to God often requires difficult decisions, but obedience always leads toward life.**
- E. Who wants to tell us about a time when doing the right thing **cost** you something? (maybe: a friendship? A promotion? Money? Reputation? Comfort?)
1. **Almost everyone admires obedience ... until it becomes expensive!**
- F. **The truth is: Easy obedience** requires *little faith*. **Costly obedience** reveals where our allegiance truly lies.
- G. **Ezra 9** ended with tears - **Ezra 10** begins with more tears - **but also action.**
1. The people gather in the rain, trembling before God, acknowledging that they have sinned.
 2. One man stands up with **hope**: *Yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.* (2) That may be one of the most encouraging lines in the chapter.
- H. **Slide6b** No matter how **deep** our failure, there is **Hope** when we *turn back to God.*
1. Yet restoration will not come *cheaply*. **Repentance requires action.**
- I. I think **Ezra 10** is supposed to make us **uncomfortable**. It is one of the hardest chapters in the OT, and we shouldn't pretend otherwise.

III. **Slide7a 1. TRUE REPENTANCE PRODUCES ACTION (1-5)**

- A. The people don't simply agree they have sinned. They make a covenant. They commit themselves to obey God. **Ezra then calls them to stand and swear** before the Lord.
- B. **Biblical repentance is more than:** *Feeling bad. Feeling guilty. Crying. Or Saying, I'm sorry.* **Repentance changes direction.**
- C. John the Baptist later preached: *Bear fruits worthy of repentance.*
1. Real repentance produces visible change.

D. **Illust:** If someone says they are driving to San Diego **but** keeps heading toward Las Vegas, you **don't believe their words** - you **watch their direction**.

1. **Slide7b** Repentance is *a change of direction*.

IV. **Slide8 2. GOD SOMETIMES CALLS US TO HARD DECISIONS (6-15)**

A. The people gather during a cold December rain.

1. **Everyone is trembling:** **because** of the weather. **because** of the seriousness of their sin.

B. The leaders call for decisive action.

1. The chapter is **difficult** because **families had been formed** through these unlawful marriages.

a) The issue was never *ethnicity*. God had welcomed people like **Rahab and Ruth** into Israel. **The issue was idolatry and covenant compromise** that *threatened Israel's mission to preserve the worship of the true God and ultimately bring forth the Messiah*.

b) Obedience sometimes requires **painful separation** from what is pulling us away from God.

C. Jesus Himself said: *If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off*.

1. He was teaching **radical removal** of anything **that destroys fellowship with God**.

2. **Sometimes obedience means:** *ending an unhealthy relationship. leaving a sinful habit. changing a business practice. confessing hidden sin. walking away from something comfortable.* [**not** cuz it is easy **but** because **God is worthy**]

V. **Slide9a 3. PARTIAL OBEDIENCE IS STILL DISOBEDIENCE (16-17)**

A. The investigation takes months.

1. This wasn't emotional reaction. It was careful, deliberate, **and** thorough. The people followed through.

2. We often **negotiate** with **God**. *I'll obey ... except here. I'll surrender ... except this.* **But God desires wholehearted obedience.**

a) **Delayed obedience** often becomes **disguised disobedience**.

B. **Illust:** King Saul spared what God told him to destroy (he obeyed partially).

Samuel responded: To obey is better than sacrifice. **God is not looking for selective obedience.** **Practical Application ...**

C. **Slide9b Identify Your Costly Obedience.**

1. **Where is God asking you to obey even though it hurts?** (Forgiveness? Generosity Purity? Reconciliation? Integrity? Surrender?)

D. **Remove What Pulls You Away.**

1. Don't merely **manage** temptation, **remove** it.

2. Create **distance** between yourself & whatever **weakens** your walk w/ Christ.

E. **Trust God's Heart.**

1. **God never asks us to surrender something good without offering something better.** [His commands are not burdensome they're life-giving]

VI. Slide10 4. **OBEDIENCE OPENS THE DOOR TO FUTURE BLESSING (18-44)**

A. **The book ends somewhat abruptly** (though it does roll into Nehemiah). There is **No** grand celebration. **No** emotional conclusion. **Just a list of those involved.**

1. **Why?** - Because Scripture reminds us that **obedience** is often **ordinary, costly, and unseen.**

2. **But history shows that Israel's covenant identity was preserved.** The line leading to Christ remained intact. **God honored their willingness to obey Him**

B. **We rarely see all that God is doing through our obedience.**

1. **But** every act of obedience plants seeds for future generations. And the **greatest blessings** often come after **the hardest surrender.**

VII. Slide11a **CHRIST CONNECTION**

- A. **Ezra** called the people to costly obedience. **Jesus** demonstrated costly obedience.
1. In the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed: *Not My will, but Yours be done.*
 2. His obedience led Him to the cross.
 - a) Our salvation exists because Jesus chose **obedience** over comfort.
- B. **Slide 1b** Because **Christ obeyed perfectly**, we are **forgiven** when we fail, and empowered by **His Spirit** to obey Him today.
- C. **Summary**
- D. The Book of Ezra begins with **God stirring hearts** & ends w/**God purifying hearts**
1. **The physical temple was rebuilt**, but God was after something **deeper** all along - a people who loved Him enough to obey Him.
 2. **The same is true today**. God is not merely rebuilding churches, ministries, or programs, He is rebuilding lives. And that rebuilding often happens through *the difficult, costly, but beautiful path* of **obedience**.
- E. ***WRAP UP**
- F. I said earlier, **I think Ezra 10 is supposed to make us uncomfortable**. It is one of the hardest chapters in the OT, and we shouldn't pretend otherwise.
1. This is one of those passages where we slow down and admit that we **don't** have all the answers.
- G. **Remember What The Issue Actually Was.**
1. **The problem was not interracial marriage** (in the modern sense). The Bible celebrates marriages involving Gentiles: **Rahab**. **Ruth**. **Bathsheba** (likely of mixed heritage). **Moses** married a Cushite woman.
 - a) God had repeatedly warned Israel (Deut. 7:3-4) **not to intermarry** with pagan nations because, *they will turn your sons away from following ME*.
 2. **A Moral Problem**: The issue Ezra is dealing with in ch.'s 9-10 has an ethnic component, but the *ethnicity* itself is **not** the moral problem. The moral problem is **religious allegiance**. (Idolatry)

3. **A Messiah Problem:** This wasn't what Ezra was dealing with here, **but** other authors write about the need for preserving Israel's **covenant identity** **until the coming of the Messiah**.
4. **What We Don't Know.**
- The text **never explicitly** says **the wives and children** were **abandoned** or **destitute**.
 - The Hebrew word translated *send away* refers to **dismissal** or **divorce**, **but** it gives almost **no details** about *what happened afterward*.
 - Some scholars believe **provisions** were likely made for them, since OT law *protected women and children in numerous places*, **but the text simply does not tell us**. [we avoid being dogmatic where Scripture is silent]
 - I wish Ezra gave us more details, **but he doesn't**. We should **resist** filling in the blanks with assumptions.
5. **Point people to the NeT.**
- The NT gives different instructions. In 1 Cor. 7, Paul tells **believers** who are married to **unbelievers**: *If the unbelieving spouse consents to live with you, do not divorce them*.
 - So Ezra 10 is **not** a model for *Christians divorcing unbelieving spouses today*. [the coming of Christ changes the covenant situation]
6. **The bigger point of the chapter.**
- Ezra 10 is primarily teaching **repentance can be costly!**
 - Sometimes obedience requires **surrendering something precious**.
 - For us, that may not be a marriage but:** a sinful relationship. a business practice. Pornography. Bitterness. Greed. pride. an addiction. an idol we've allowed into our lives.
 - Jesus said: *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out. deal w/seriously!*
 - He was making the same point: **sin is so destructive that radical measures are sometimes necessary**.

H. Ezra 10 leaves us longing for a better Ezra and a better solution. Ezra could call people to repentance, but he couldn't change their hearts. Jesus came to do what Ezra could not. The chapter reminds us that *sin always costs more than we think*, but **God's grace in Christ** is greater still.

1. ***Or, Sin will always: Take you further than you want to go. Keep you longer than you want to stay. Cost you more than you want to spend.

I. **Prayer:** Father, thank You that Jesus obeyed perfectly where we have failed. Give us courage to obey You even when it is costly. Help us trust that You're ways are always good and that Your plans are always better than our own. Make us a people who choose **faithfulness over comfort**, and **holiness over convenience**.

J. Keywords: obedience, repentance,

K. *So Should a man who comes to Christ with multiple wives divorce all but one?*

1. Many evangelical mission organizations today answer **no**, reasoning that sending away wives and children **would create greater injustice**. Instead, they encourage the man to remain faithful to his existing family responsibilities, **while not** taking additional wives and to live according to Christian teaching going forward.