

Outline

Introduction

- Summer series on Old Testament characters
- Two-week series on Ezra
- Ezra as High Priest during return from Babylonian exile (5th century B.C.)
- Relevance to modern church as "church in exile"

Historical Context: Jerusalem in 538 BC

- Ruined city after Babylonian destruction (586 BC)
- Temple stones scattered, weeds growing
- Older generation remembers glory days
- Younger generation only knows ruins and stories
- Ezra raised up to rebuild souls, not just stones

God's Faithful Hand in History

- Israel's exile was not accidental
- Centuries of warnings through prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel)
- Warnings about idolatry and injustice
- Judgment came through Nebuchadnezzar
- Seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah
- Babylon fell to Medo-Persian empire
- Cyrus the Great allowed peoples to return home

Ezra Chapter 1

- Cyrus's proclamation to rebuild Temple

- God stirred hearts of priests, Levites, and leaders
- Cyrus named by Isaiah 150 years earlier
- Three waves of return to Jerusalem
- Jerusalem was modest, struggling community

Ezra's Identity as Priest and Scribe

- Genealogy traced to Aaron
- Called "scribe skilled in the Law of Moses"
- Fusion of priest and scholar

Ezra 7:10 - The Heart of Ezra

1. He studied God's Word (set his heart to seek the Law)
2. He lived God's Word (obeyed before teaching)
3. He taught God's Word (instructed others after internalizing)

Divine Favor

- "The good hand of his God was upon him"
- Success from God's presence, not charisma
- King Artaxerxes granted authority and provisions
- God supplies resources when hearts are anchored to His Word

The Crisis in Jerusalem (Ezra 9-10)

- Buildings rebuilt but hearts compromised
- Temple open but people closed off to God
- Intermarriage with surrounding peoples
- Leaders involved in compromise

- Issue was syncretism, not ethnicity
- Problem: mixing true religion with false worship

Modern Application

- Church has intermarried with the world
- Compromised beliefs
- Mixed secular psychology, language, entertainment
- Pride, judgment, gossip

Ezra's Response

- Not racism or xenophobia
- Concern was covenant faithfulness
- Holiness (qadosh): set apart, devoted to God
- Separate (badal): dividing from practices undermining allegiance
- Grief over spiritual suicide of compromise

Connection to the Gospel

- Preserving covenant community for Messiah
- Safeguarding identity and worship
- Ensuring line of David continues
- Part of God's redemptive strategy to Bethlehem, Golgotha, empty tomb
- Jesus embodied perfect obedience to Law
- Early church devoted to apostles' teaching

Three Life Lessons

1. God Still Uses Men and Women Anchored in His Word

- Culture full of distractions
- God looks for those who "set their heart" on His Word
- Churches drift toward compromise without Word-centered leaders

2. Holiness Still Matters

- Pressure to blend in with world's idols
- Friendship with world is enmity with God
- Holiness means loving God enough to tear down idols
- Reordering relationships, habits, affections

3. Renewal Still Begins with Repentance

- Revival is more than emotional excitement
- Hearing Word, understanding, confessing sin, renewed obedience
- Ruined lives and churches need fresh hearing of God's Word
- Willingness to respond with brokenness and faith