

Hurst Green

30th Jun 19

Ezra 7

God's providence (again) and Love of the word

Last week in Ezra 6 we looked at God's providence and joy because our faith is meant to be one of Joy. We are not meant to be long faced in sackcloth and ashes (although as we will see next week there are times for that) but God is there that we might delight in him.

Our services here should bring joy to our hearts, our worship during the week should bring joy to our hearts, each time we think of our God it should bring joy to our hearts.

But that was all last week **but should not be forgotten!**

Now we have Ezra 7 and finally Ezra appears on the scene! Finally we have the return of Ezra.

The first five verses talk of Ezra himself and we will return to those in a moment but let us first look at his return because this sermon is about Providence and the Love of the Word. Or providence again perhaps I should say.

We had the providence of God at the start of this when the exiles were sent back to Jerusalem with the temple goods that had been taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar had taken and with at least £17M in today's money to rebuild the temple.

We had the providence of God when he turned the attempts of their enemies to stop the building into the blessing. Their enemies had to provide them with anything they asked for daily without fail on the threat of a rather gruesome death.

And now we have the providence of God again when Ezra returns with the second batch of exiles.

The King and people of Babylon gave them free will offerings (v16) and the treasurer of Trans-Euphrates is to give another huge amount of treasure,

The providence of God again – three times just in this Book and others hidden away in this book and the bible.

As you read the bible you can see God's providence for us – as individuals and corporately.

And it's all because of God's love for us. Our God is not the judgemental man with a long beard sitting on a throne waiting for us to get it wrong – or get it wrong again.

Our God created us because he loves us and is the loving father. He is the father in the prodigal son always waiting and looking for us to return.

Of course he hates the sin that we do but that does not diminish in any way his love for each one of us – we are all his special children and he has no favourites.

Billy Graham or any of the well-known teachers are not loved by God any more than you are.

It's amazing but true.

But did you notice what else the King did?

You have to pay attention to the Word or you miss out on all these things!

Look at verse 25 & 26

Ezra 7:25-26 (ANIV)

²⁵ *And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them.* ²⁶ *Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.*

The King already has a government of Trans-Euphrates; they are the ones who are the enemies of Israel and trying to frustrate the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

They are the ones who had to give the priests whatever they asked for on pain of a rather nasty death.

Now he gives Ezra the right to administer justice throughout the land. Their existing enemies lose their Department of Justice to Israel.

But that is not all – Anyone in Trans-Euphrates. Trans-Euphrates roughly covers Israel, the northern part of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Any-one who does not know our God is to be taught about him (v25) and then they are to obey the law (v26) under the threat of death.

Again a heathen Kings heart is moved by our God to bless his people. This is God's providence for his people. It does not stop the tough times. The Bishop of Truro has been asked by the government to do a study of religious persecution around the world and in his initial report he has said that 80% of the world's persecution is against Christians.

Probably not what the Government wanted or expected to hear but it is the truth. The Devil is still trying to stamp out Christianity after 2000 years. But he still will not succeed because we know that if we resist him he will have to flee (James 4:7) and he that is in us is stronger than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

These verses you need to know because they will strengthen you in those times when you need to stand.

Now I want to look at Ezra himself and show you how you can be just like Ezra.

Yes you can – you might not lead the people back to worship but you can be just like Ezra; in fact you can be even better than him. Listen and try and take this in because this is for you today and should not be forgotten by the time you tuck into your Sunday lunch.

Three times in this chapter we are told the same thing about Ezra.

Ezra 7:6 (ANIV)

⁶ ~~*this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.*~~

And

Ezra 7:9 (ANIV)

⁹ ~~He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him.~~

And

Ezra 7:28 (ANIV)

²⁸ ~~and who has extended his good favour to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.~~

Three times we are told the **Hand of God** was on him and the reason you can be even better than Ezra is that you have the Spirit of God living in you every minute of every hour of every day.

But why did he have the hand of God?

The answer is in verse 10

Ezra 7:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ ~~For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.~~

Devoted, observed and taught. Three things you can do if you want. Actually three things you should be doing because you love the Lord your God just as he loves you.

Thankfully you don't have to know all the laws in Deuteronomy although some of them are still applicable – you simply have to know the laws of the New Testament and if your need somewhere to start go to Jesus summary of the Law

Matthew 22:37-39 (ANIV)

³⁷ ~~Jesus replied:~~ " Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

Devote yourself to that and life will change.

As I have said before devote is a very active word. It is not just sitting back and seeing what happens. To devote yourself to God you have to read and think about his word.

What does each verse mean to you; what does it mean **for** you?

Remember that exercise we did a few weeks ago when you looked at the 23rd Psalm for a week? That is how you should read your bible and you should be expecting God to talk to you through it.

He has something to say to you and his word is the source of most of what he wants to say.

Can you really say that you are devoted to God?

Could you say that if you are not reading and meditating on his word?

This series on Ezra is called “Love the Word” and if you love the word you will read and think about it.

You will devote yourself to it. Don't worry about not having time; make the time and everything in life will fit in around it.

So devote yourself to the Word of God and then observe it.

This is the tougher part. – knowing a book is relatively easy but this book is full of commands that you have to obey

But again remember what Jesus said

Matthew 11:28-30 (ANIV)

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

It is we who make the burden heavy – often by adding requirements. The things you have to do to be a “good” Christian.

Checking you are giving your tithe is one example but you know that the tithe is just the beginning and what God wants are cheerful givers. The bible tells us you decide what to give, the only proviso is that it comes from the top and not what you have left, and as to the amount you give you will answer to God on that final day along with every idle word!!

James, among many others, tells us what to do:

James 1:27 (ANIV)

²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James tells us how to deal with the word.

James 1:22-25 (ANIV)

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

Note that “looks intently” we are back to being devoted. This is not skim reading so that you can see how much you get done. That is why a chapter a day is dangerous – you miss what God is saying because you have to get to the end of the Chapter. Read and meditate – devote yourself to the word.

Because did you catch that last line from James?

he will be blessed in what he does.

God will add blessings to those who are prepared to observe the word of God!

So you must devote yourself to the word and observe what it says but then Ezra also taught the word.

Now this is one everyone tends to delegate to the guy at the front but it is not my job! It is our job!

Yes not everyone is called to stand up here and pontificate, sorry that should be expound, the word of God. But day by day you should be teaching one another for every word of scripture is profitable for the teaching of others.

This may be simply sharing what you got out of your daily reading today.

It may be to correct something you have discerned in a brother.

This is all teaching.

Do you talk about what impacted you in the sermon each week? I preach from the bottom of my heart with passion and enthusiasm and, usually, by the next Sunday you do not remember what the main points were. That is despite it being on the web site!!

How can you share what you do not remember? And if you remember anything remember not what I said but what the word of God says because that should be where you are devoted.

Devotion, observance and teaching these are the three legs of a stool. Take one away and you are unstable, take two away and you really have trouble balancing, take three away and you fall flat on your backside!!

Because of all of this Ezra had the Hand of God upon him. What did that achieve?

Well Artaxerxes gave him everything he wanted.

Ezra 7:6 (ANIV)

⁶ ~~this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.~~

This was not a name it and claim it approach – he could ask for anything to re-establish the worship of God in Jerusalem and it was his.

The King trusted him – he was above reproach.

He took yet more great wealth to Jerusalem for the temple and he had a blank cheque book with the local government.

He was kept safe in a four month journey, with all that wealth, through the Badlands to Jerusalem.

God was with him in all he did because he was devoted to, did and taught the word of God.

And remember God is with you. His spirit is in you.

Our faith is not a pie in the sky idea like so many others. It is for the here and now.

Last week you learnt of the joy and now you know about the Hand of God – How good is our faith!!!

Having God with you means that you will have all you need **to do his work** – not to live in the panelled houses of last week. To build the temple of God – to build each other up, to strengthen one another and to share your faith

Learn the word – how else could you do it?

Observe the word of God

Teach the word of God by example but also by words.

Then you will love the word of God – love the bible

God delights in blessing those who love his word.

And you cannot study the Word, practice the Word, and teach the Word without meeting Jesus.

Win, win, win and win.

Sounds good.