



GOD'S WORD

FOR LIFE

LAUNCH SERMON NOTES

TEXT

Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

They'd been waiting for this day for many years. The first wave of the children of Israel were returning under Cyrus to rebuild the Temple over an eighty- to ninety-year period. The answer had always been, "Life will be better when we get back to the Temple." The long-time hope and promise of returning had sustained them during captivity, but back at home, it wasn't everything they anticipated. The old men wept when they got back to the Temple—it wasn't everything they remembered (Ezra 3:12).

At this critical juncture, Ezra stepped on the scene. He was critical to the faith formation of the Jewish people—both in his lifetime and for the future of God's people.

Ezra 7:10 - "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel."

Ezra studied and taught the Law. It's hard for us to grasp in 2021 when Bibles are everywhere, but it appears they had collected the Torah as part of oral tradition. Ezra was critical in loving the Torah, living by it, and teaching it. He helped Israel apply the Scripture to life.

Nehemiah 8 - Ezra read through the Torah to the people of Israel. It appears this action by Ezra is what saved Judaism. They began to not only read the Torah but live it and teach it. That's what formed what we call second-Temple Judaism.

We know from Deuteronomy 6 the people of Israel had learned to teach their children, but it was probably so focused on the Shema that they had lost comprehensive teaching of the Word of God and thereby lost their identity. It was Ezra's gift to teach all of the Torah to shape their lives—a return to a daily commitment to the Word of God. It shaped what Judaism is even today. It remains a vibrant faith through all kinds of diaspora.

The process of rediscovering the Torah broadened the focus beyond the Temple. The method of learning the Law from the Temple alone did not sustain the people. They needed the ongoing teaching of the Law, and the change from the first-century Temple to later synagogue worship involves a move from the complex sacrifice system to the daily handling of the Torah.

The Temple didn't get replaced, but the Synagogue got added. Just as the sacrifice of animals was central to Temple worship, studying the Torah was central to Synagogue life. By comparison, we could say that the Temple of that time parallels this church today. The daily study that happened in the synagogue is a model of what should be happening in our homes.

To be clear, the Temple served an important purpose. In Acts 2 the church met in the Temple and house to house. We need both today as well. The church should be central to our lives. Yet we also need ongoing study of God's Word more than just within the walls of the church. The way to sustain spirituality is to commit to daily study of the Word in our homes.

In the same way Israel was, North America is at a turning point as a culture. Culture at large used to be undergirded by biblical values and Judeo-Christian ethics. That fabric is ripping in front of us.

- In 2018 The Barna Group released a study indicating that atheism doubled from Millennials (born 1980-1995) to Generation Z (born 1995-2010). If this trend continues, it suggests we can no longer assume that North America is primarily Christian.
- The idea of a moral compass is shifting. In 2015 Barna surveyed teenagers and while 56% responded it is always or usually wrong to not recycle, only 32% acknowledged it as always wrong or even usually wrong to view pornographic images.
- In 2016 Barna surveyed engaged Christian families and even among that demographic, less than half said they read the Bible in the home.

We are in uncharted waters with the cultural landscape changing underneath our feet. We must look to the Word of God to reshape our hearts and daily depend on it for our identity and direction. If we are not committed to living by God's Word and making it the absolute foundation of our lives, it will be lost in ensuing generations.

1. Studying the Word in Our Homes Is Essential

- a. We are Apostolic. We are people of the Spirit, but even that process is shaped by our understanding of God's Word.
 - i. Hebrews 4:12; James 1:22-25 - The Word shows us our heart.
 - ii. Psalm 119:11, 105; II Timothy 3:16 - It is how we learn to be blameless and complete; it is how we learn doctrine to be His people.
- b. Merely having access to the Bible does not transform us. Actually accessing it does. The Bible is God's Word for life. But it is not a magic book filled with mystery and sacred spells. For the Bible to change us, we need to dig in and apply its message.
- c. We need a daily commitment to God's Word.
 - i. Joshua 1:8 - "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do

according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

- ii. The only way that will happen is if we are committed to studying the Word of God in our homes each day.

2. Parents are the First Disciplers

- a. Everything is discipleship. Our kids’ brains are wired to absorb everything in their environment. You are discipling them whether you want to or not. Everything you do teaches by word, by example, and by attitude. You can choose to be proactive and intentional and chart a path.
- b. A significant amount of research indicates children make the decision of whether or not to serve God by the age of twelve. We have to prioritize shaping that decision.
- c. What can you outsource? You can have someone else teach your child how to play a musical instrument. A tutor can teach them a second language. But there’s no substitute for your involvement in their spiritual lives. That’s not something you should be willing to outsource. It’s not enough to drop your child off at Sunday school. That’s good, but it’s not enough. The home must set the commitment to being lifelong Apostolic disciples.

3. The Church Comes Alongside to Partner

- a. While parents lead discipleship at home for our children and adults and youth commit to daily devotion beyond the church walls, the church is an important partner in this journey to be lifelong followers of Jesus Christ.
- b. The heart is often best shaped in community because those who love us will point it out when we restrict access to certain corners of our hearts.
- c. We need—and yes the word is need—others to help us understand and apply the Bible to our lives.

4. Altar Service

5. Covenant Pledge Ceremony
