

## I. Introduction

- A. Last weekend we began a new series. The title of the series is Regather and Restart. The subtitle is a Journey Through the Book of Ezra. Let's find that book together in our Bibles, and turn to chapter 2.
- B. This is an expository study of the Bible. This means we are going verse by verse through a book of the Bible, or sometimes section by section. Because this is how Christians grow mature, this is how Christians grow strong. And that is exactly my job as a pastor.
- C. The writer is named Ezra. Ezra is a priest. Ezra is devoted to God and to God's Word.
- D. The time is very roughly 500 years before Christ.
- E. The situation is painful. God's people have been driven out of their promised land. God's people are in Exile. They have been scattered among the nations. Their Temple is destroyed. Their city of Jerusalem has been flattened. The nations of Judah and Israel are flattened.
- F. But something good happened in chapter one. In chapter one, the Persian King Cyrus, who ruled most of the known world, ordered that the Jews could go back home. He ordered that they could return home, and rebuild their temple.
- G. King Cyrus also took the really remarkable step of giving back to the Jews all the incredible mountain of treasures that had been looted from Solomon's temple.
- H. Actually, as we will see, this is the tail end of the Exilic Period, because in this book of Ezra, some of the exiled people get to go back home. All of this is history. It's in the history books.
- I. But all of this is history set inside a frame of theology.
  - 1. It was God who stirred the heart of King Cyrus to send the Jews back home.
  - 2. It was God who stirred the hearts of his people to want to go back home.
    - a) The invisible realm of the heavenlies influences the inner world of the soul to effect outcomes in the outer world of the streets...
- J. And that is exactly what begins to happen in chapter two.
- K. Chapter 2 has to be one of the worst chapters in the whole Bible if you're going to preach it. Take a look.
  - 1. Ezra 2 is 70 verses long
    - a) 1 verse is set up (v. 1)
    - b) 3 verses are wrap up (vv. 68-70)
    - c) 2 verses tell some of them to hold up (vv. 62,63)
    - d) 64 verses of mind-numbingly boring names, and cities, and numbers of travelers.
  - 2. Today, we basically get to study a spreadsheet. That's what Ezra 2 is.
    - a) *The people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two;*  
*The people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two;*  
*The people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five;*  
*The people of Pahath-Moab, of the people of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve;*  
*The people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;*  
*The people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five... (Ezra 2:3-8)*
- L. Shall we study a spreadsheet together? Challenge accepted!
- M. Because tucked into this spreadsheet is a gem of a truth that will change your life if you let it.
- N. Please think with me today as we consider:

## II. How to Make a Comeback

- A. I am getting this title from verse 1:
  - 1. *Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city. (Ezra 2:1, NKJV)*
- B. The people were in captivity. Now the people return home, to Jerusalem and Judah, from captivity.
- C. They turned back, returned, they made a comeback. When nobody in the world believed that this nation could rise from the ashes, back they came, and up from the ashes they arose.
- D. The end of verse 1 says they returned, "everyone to his own city."
- E. This is a really big deal. It's repeated again way down in verse 70, "they all dwelt in their cities." Why does this matter?
  - 1. Because the Promised Land was divided up, tribe by tribe and family by family. Each family had their historic cities. (Joshua and the dividing up of the land.)
    - a) When they went into exile, they lost their cities. But now, they get their cities back.
  - 2. Five hundred years earlier, the Psalmist equated these cities with *spiritual renewal*.
    - a) *They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; They found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, Their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, That they might go to a city for a dwelling place. (Psalms 107:4-7)*
  - 3. And five hundred years early, Moses equated their cities with the experience of grace.
    - a) *"So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant--when you have eaten and are full-- then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)*
  - 4. In the epic story of God's people, you could summarize it this way:
    - a) Living in their cities meant that they were living in their privileged place.
    - b) *All life long, God is leading you to your privileged place... by growing you along the Grace Pathway.*

5. To be a child of God is to possess privileges that other people do not have.
  - a) Either you know those privileges or you don't know those privileges.
  - b) Either you use your privileges or you don't use your privileges.
  - c) Either you enjoy your privileges or you don't enjoy your privileges.
6. The spreadsheet that is Ezra chapter 2 chronicles one of the great spiritual comebacks in all of history.
7. This is good news for anybody who has blown it.
  - a) Good news for anybody who has crossed boundaries they promised they never would cross.
  - b) Good news for the part of your soul where you feel like a failure.
  - c) Good news if you've let God down.
  - d) Good news if you've let yourself down.
  - e) Good news if you have let the people who love you down.
    - (1) If the stubborn, finicky, ornery people of God could make a comeback from exile, you can make a comeback from the exile of your guilt, or shame, or addiction, or despondency, or despair.
8. How? What are the steps?

### III. Steps to a Comeback

#### A. Remember your identity. (Ezra 2:2)

1. *Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: (Ezra 2:2)*
2. These are the people of Israel. Even when they were in Persia, they were still the people of Israel. In Egypt. In Babylon. In Assyria. No matter where they were, they were still the people of Israel, and the sons and daughters of Abraham.
3. But what happens when you forget who you are? What happens when you embrace the beliefs and culture and even the gods of Babylon and Egypt and Assyria?
4. You lose the experience of your privileged place.
5. And part of getting that experience back was remembering their identity.
6. God was using their physical descent to teach a far more important line of descent.
7. It's not just that they were people of Israel and Abraham.
8. It's that they were people of the God of Israel and Abraham.
9. You are a Christian. You are part of the church.
  - a) Question: Who is the head of the church? Answer: the Lord Jesus Christ.
10. What is your connection to the head? What is your spiritual genealogy?
  - a) You are a child of God (John 1:12)
  - b) A Kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6)
  - c) A Citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20)
  - d) A Forgiven One (Ephesians 1:7)
  - e) An Accepted One (Ephesians 1:6)
  - f) A Beloved One (1 John 3:1)
  - g) A Saint of God (Romans 1:7)
  - h) A Partaker of the inheritance (Colossians 1:12)
  - i) The Dwelling place of God (Romans 8:9)
  - j) The Powerhouse of the Spirit (Acts 1:8)
  - k) More than a Conqueror (Romans 8:37)
  - l) The Rejoicing of Angels (Luke 15:10)
  - m) The Terror of the devil (James 4:7)
11. When we say we are the people of God, we mean all these things and so much more.
12. This is the first step in a spiritual comeback, the first step in a restoration to grace.
  - a) Let me pause here to pry a little. Do you ever hear yourself calling yourself names? What kind of names would those be?
    - (1) I caught myself just today saying things about myself, that if you ever said about me, we couldn't be friends anymore. Does anyone know what I mean?
    - (2) Let me remind you something about grace.
      - (a) Grace lives at the intersection where theology meets psychology. This is where it's not enough to say I am forgiven, and am powerful. I am God's child.
      - (b) We need to believe it down to our bones. We need to own it deep inside.
    - (3) How do I change the script in my heart?
    - (4) Through the Word of God and the gospel. Keep studying God's Word, like we are doing today. Along with that...
13. Remember the day of your salvation. Recall the facts of the gospel.
  - a) Call to mind the day Jesus died, and review earth's best/worst moment.
  - b) Remember the people who told you about Christ. Remember the work of God in your heart.
    - (1) What was happening on that day you first believed?
    - (2) Where were you? Who were you with?
    - (3) Remember what it felt like to be forgiven, and to be set free, and to know for sure you are going to heaven.
  - c) The day of your salvation is the day God set you in a highly privileged place.
    - (1) Remember your identity — this is step one of the Grace Pathway (God Saves You.)
  - d) You can never move away from your salvation. You can never lose it.

e) But you can move away from your experience of it. And that is when you need a comeback.

14. You are in your privileged place, when you can stand up and say: I am a child of Almighty God, a joint-heir with Jesus, a servant of a Great King.
15. And you doubly know you are in your privileged place when you can declare those things when life isn't going the way you wanted it to.
16. No matter how big the problems, no matter how deep your exile, nothing can change who you really are if you belong to Christ.

B. *Reclaim your inheritance. (Ezra 2:1,70)*

1. *Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity... and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city. (Ezra 2:1, NKJV).*
2. *So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities. (Ezra 2:70)*
3. The cities were their inheritance. This was the place where they would experience maximum blessing from God, and where God would receive maximum glory from them.
4. It's a win/win. God wins by receiving glory. You win by experiencing grace.
5. So this long spreadsheet of people go back to their cities.
6. The cities always belong to them, just like your spiritual riches always belong to you, and your identity in Christ always belongs to you.
7. But the people did not always experience the good stuff of their cities, just like we don't always experience the good stuff of our salvation.
8. Why not? It's always the same reason. Whether it's the Jews 2,500 years ago, or 3,500 years ago, or you and me today, it's always the same.
  - (1) Be careful not to forget the Lord who brought you to a place of privilege in the first place.
9. Christian, you have an inheritance. It is the massive collection of riches, and possessions, and privileges and powers that belong to Christ, and now belong to you because you belong to Christ.
10. That is your inheritance. That is the riches of divine grace. That is your acres of diamonds.
11. You have your blessings, now enjoy your blessings.
  - a) There is a truth that makes Christianity unlike any other religion across all the ages of time:
    - (1) *As a child of God, you don't serve God for blessing, you can only serve God from blessing.*
12. When you got saved, God made you rich in treasures that money can't buy.
13. You've been joined to Christ. His treasures are your treasures. His possessions are your possessions. His privileges are your privileges. His glory is your glory. His destiny is your destiny.
  - a) Not because you earn it.
  - b) Not because you deserve it.
  - c) Not because you work for it or pay for it or strive for it.
  - d) No, all these treasures are yours because they all belong to Christ, and you were made one with him on the day you first believed.
    - (1) Will work for blessings? NO! Never!
    - (2) Will believe in blessings that are already mine? Yes.
14. Or, in the case of the Jews here, you have your cities, why are you living in exile? Go back and enjoy the blessings God has given you.
15. That is always the pattern in Scripture for Christians.
16. God is not sending you on a quest to earn your blessings. God is sending you on a quest to know and enjoy the things that have been freely given you at the moment of your salvation through Christ.
17. It's time to take up again what belongs to you in Christ. And by take up, I mean believe it when you need it.
  - a) Are you stressed out? Do you need peace? Peace is part of your birthright in Christ.
  - b) Do you keep on getting tripped up by the same temptation and by the same sin? Do you need power beyond yourself? Power is part of your birthright in Christ. Believe it enough to act like it's true.
  - c) Does discouragement hold you back? Are you easily saddened? Courage is part of your birthright in Christ. Believe and move forward in grace no matter how you feel.
    - (1) The simple truth is that God has already provided everything you need for every circumstance of your life. These provisions are already there. Already yours. They are perfect. They are beautiful. They are all sufficient.
    - (2) But God has piled all those blessings in a very specific place.
    - (3) They are piled in your privileged place... just as they were, in a sense, piled up back the cities for the Jews so long ago.
  - d) I'm not saying you need to change physical location.
  - e) I'm saying you might need to change spiritual situation... and bring a heart that is far from God back home to him.
  - f) Because that is where the blessings are. That is where you experience your birthright, and your identity, and all the things that belong to you because you belong to Christ.

IV. Acres of Diamonds

- A. There's a legendary speaker named Russell Conwell who delivered the same speech 6,152 times. He traveled around the country by horseback, and made a fortune giving his speech. He brought in millions of dollars, much of which he used to build Philadelphia's Temple University, a school still going strong over 125 years later. What was the speech?

- B. It was about a farmer who lived in Africa. He got tired of growing turnips, and he heard about all the diamonds people were finding in Africa. So he sold his turnip farm and went in search of diamonds. Years later, still no diamonds. He died penniless and alone.
- C. The new farmer who bought his turnip ranch, however, was doing fine just selling turnips. One day, he picked up an interesting rock and put it on his mantel.
- D. Some time later, a guest came over to visit. During his visit, he noticed the rock. He picked it up, and couldn't hide his astonishment. He turned to the new owner of the turnip farm, and said, "Do you know what this is?"
- E. The farmer said, "No, I don't know what it is. But those rocks are everywhere, all over this farm. I have to keep clearing them off my turnip fields. I have acres and acres of those rocks."
- F. His guest nearly fainted. "These rocks, my good sir, are diamonds!"
- G. The one sitting on the mantel turned out to be the largest diamond ever discovered to that day.
- H. Russell Conwell's talk was called Acres of Diamonds.
- I. I said there was a problem that Christians keep stumbling over:
  - 1. They have inherited acres and acres of God-given mercies, and God-given powers, and God-given privileges, and God-given rights, and *they don't even know they have them*.
  - 2. This not knowing, this cluelessness, this ignorance of all a supernatural portfolio of divine assets — this is the gigantic splat on the windshield of most Christian's lives. Maybe it's true of you.
  - 3. God is faithful. He has provided everything you need for your present happiness.
- J. There is no deficit in you, says God. No missing parts. No missing resources. No missing assets. There is no deficit in you.
  - 1. *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8, NKJV).*
    - a) Always — there's the time.
    - b) All sufficiency — there's the depth.
    - c) All things — there's the breadth.
    - d) Abundance — there's the weight.
    - e) Every good work — there's the situation.
  - 2. There is...
    - a) No time, no place, no situation, no circumstance,
    - b) No problem, no illness, no loss,
    - c) No heartbreak, heartache, addiction, or dysfunction,
    - d) No bad news, perplexity, confusion, or doubt,
    - e) No relationship, conflict, failure, trial, temptation, or trouble,
    - f) No chemical imbalance,
    - g) No family of origin chaos,
    - h) No habituated response,
    - i) No regret, no despair, no enemy,
    - j) No nothing.... But that God has already sprinkled acres of diamonds ahead of you on the path to see you safely through, and to enable you to rise above, to thrive, and be more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus.
- V. You Have Christ
  - A. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12, NKJV).*
  - B. I want to push this idea of treasures deeper. Because your riches in Christ are not random. They are not disconnected boxes of presents.
  - C. Instead they radiate, like spokes on a wheel, from one central hub. And that hub is Christ.
  - D. The reason you have acres of diamonds, the reason you have abundance, the reason you have a mountain of treasures that money can't buy, the reason you have riches in Christ.... Is because you have CHRIST!
  - E. You've been baptized into Christ. You've been plunged into him. You are one with Jesus. On the day you believed in Jesus, in that very first second of faith in Christ, the holy Spirit of God did the biggest miracle the world has ever seen: he placed you into permanent union with Jesus Christ.
  - F. You are so joined to Christ that he is in you, and you are in him.
    - 1. His status is your status.
    - 2. His powers are your powers.
    - 3. His privileges are your privileges.
    - 4. His glorious are your glories.
    - 5. His throne is your throne.
    - 6. His treasures are your treasures.
    - 7. His riches are your riches... In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and you are in him.
- VI. And now a spreadsheet of names leaves exile behind and steps back into their cities — their place of privilege and knowledge of their riches in Christ.
  - A. In that moment, they unleash a river of grace, that I pray we will see in our church, in our times, and in our generation.
  - B. We'll pick it up right here next time.