

I. Introduction

- A. From the time the Jews begin to return to the Grand Opening celebration of the new temple: 23 years.
- B. From chapter 6 to 7: 60 years.
- C. For this fall, we have been opening our hearts to God's message from a book in the Bible called... Ezra. Today, starting at Ezra 6:13.
- D. Please think with me on the topic:
 - 1. *All the Grace*
- E. I'll read the verses, and we'll backfill the backstory as we go along.

II. *Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. (Ezra 6:13)*

- A. The time is 500 b.c. The situation is a building project.
- B. Actually, it is a rebuilding project. The Jews were rebuilding their temple. Why were they rebuilding their temple, you ask? They were rebuilding their temple because their temple had been totally destroyed.
- C. In fact, the whole city of Jerusalem was destroyed. In fact, the whole nation of Judah and Israel were destroyed. In fact, the people of Judah and Israel had been forced into exile.
- D. But by the time we reach Ezra chapter 6, all of that is a bad memory, like a nightmare of days gone by.
- E. Because, now they are back. Now they are making a comeback. This is one of the greatest comebacks ever on the stage of world history. The Jews are back home, back in the promised land.
- F. But it isn't just a political comeback — though it is that.
- G. The most important thing is that it is a spiritual comeback. To rebuild their temple, and to rebuild their nation was to rebuild their hearts with God.
- H. I am sure that there are some here today whose life with God is messed up. The message of this book is that you can make a comeback. You can rebuild what was ruined, no matter how ruined it was. This is the power and grace of God.
- I. I'm not saying this is easy. It wasn't easy for the Jews. In fact, from the time they came home and started rebuilding, they faced a lot of opposition. There was opposition from their neighbors. Opposition from the government. Opposition from their own wayward hearts.
- J. And all that opposition, ultimately comes from the devil.
- K. But God delights in stomping on the devil's toes, till one day Jesus and all of us stomp on his head.
- L. All of the people mentioned in this verse are part of the Persian Government. The first two people tried to stop the temple from being rebuilt, until the third person, King Darius, intervened. "Build the Temple, O people of Judah!" Darius commanded. "And you shall pay for it and deliver supplies for it every single day, O Tattenai and other former bad guys."
- M. So, as our story opens today, these people are diligently doing everything the king decreed.
- N. That one verse can stand for my whole message today... because it stands for the rest of chapter 6.
- O. Your King has spoken.
 - 1. Your King has put forth a decree.
 - 2. He decrees your rights and privileges.
 - 3. He decrees your powers and provisions.
 - 4. He decrees your properties and says, These are the borders of your Promised Land.
 - a) In this land, you will experience the maximum blessing possible.
 - b) In this land, you will reflect back to Me the maximum glory possible.
 - c) In this land, the world will see evidence that God and his gospel are true.
 - (1) These are the borders of your Promised Land, says God's decree. They are generous borders. They are expansive borders.
 - 5. Now, go forth and test me, and see if you can occupy it all. See if you can possess in your experience all that you now possess in the charter of grace.
- P. And the core, and the nucleus of all of it is that sacred temple — that sacred space where the Almighty Creator God and Savior gladly joins to fellowship with his frail earthly children.
 - 1. Come to me, he says, and enjoy fellowship with me. Come to me, and find rest, and joy, and comfort and everything a soul could need. That is his decree.
 - a) The king has decreed a decree, not of thundering obligation and duty, but a decree of mercy and kindness and grace.
- Q. And as our story opens today, the people are diligently doing everything the king has decreed.
 - 1. *Lesson 1: God is looking for a person eager to experience all the grace he has stored up for them... will you be that person?*
- R. This is faith. This is risk. This is growth. This is getting outside your comfort zone for Jesus. This is maturity in the Lord. This is going deep. The alternative is to settle.
- S. God says to his children, I will give you a kingdom and a royal realm.
- T. And so many of his children answer back, I'm happy with a double wide.
 - 1. Isaiah said the Lord is waiting to be gracious to you (Isaiah 30:18).
 - 2. Paul said he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the upward call of God (Philippians 3:14).
 - 3. Ezra wrote that the people diligently did what the king decreed (v. 13).
 - a) This is the open door for you.
 - b) This was the open door for the people of God 2,519 years ago. And they took it.

III. *So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. (Ezra 6:14)*

- A. The king of heaven made a decree. The people eagerly built.
- B. And the rocket fuel for all of this was the word of God. Here, it is the preaching of two prophets named Haggai and Zechariah.
 - 1. *Lesson 2: The high-energy fuel for expanding your experience of grace is ever increasing depth in knowing God through his Word.*
 - a) The Bible isn't just information, it is power.
 - b) Supernatural power, taken in, set in place, and built into a rock hard fortress for a life of faith.
 - c) For the Jews, the Word of God came through the two prophets.
 - d) Generalization alert here, but...
 - (1) Zechariah was the good cop... Go and rebuild this temple because you can.
 - (2) Haggai was the bad cop... Go and rebuild this temple because you should.
- C. The people needed both. Different Christians need different styles of motivation. That's well and good.
- D. It might be a good idea to ask yourself a question. Good cop or bad cop, what's it going to take for God to break through the lethargy in your life when it comes to exploring the boundaries of his grace.
- E. Either way, the fuel is the Word of God. There will never be a substitute for the in-depth study of God's Word, and for the disciplined grace of hammering out well-prepared, well-crafted sermons to feed the flock of God.
 - 1. We will never stop needing our Haggai's and our Zechariah's.
- F. This is how we bring the work of God to completion!
- G. Think of that moment. From the day the Jews first returned from exile, to the finishing of the temple... do you have any idea how long that was? Twenty-three years.
- H. That is long enough to have a kid, and then for that kid to grow up, get married, to give you a grandchild... all while we're out there building this temple.
 - 1. It didn't need to take that long. It shouldn't have taken that long.
- I. But I guess some of us are in the school of grace for slowpokes.
- J. I'm glad God loves slowpokes. Because I have to believe God was looking down from heaven with a huge smile on his face, as the rest of this chapter unfolded.

IV. *Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses. (Ezra 6:16-18)*

- A. The emotion here is joy. Pure, unmixed joy.
 - 1. We did it! We did it! I didn't think we would ever get this thing done! I had a ton of doubts. A lot of times I wanted to quit. But look, we did it. What a moment!
- B. When that last mason shoved that last carved block into place. When that last worker spread the final trowel of mortar. When the last apprentices put away the last bits of sawdust, what a moment!
- C. Finished. Done. Complete.
 - 1. Paul said, "...that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)
 - a) For Paul in his day, life was a race, and he finished it with joy.
 - b) For the Jews in Ezra's day, life was a building project, and they finished with joy.
 - 2. There is a construction progress in every soul. Your heart is a palace for a great king.
 - 3. As you grow in maturity, you set the house on solid foundation.
 - 4. As you grow wisdom, you furnish it... just the way you and Jesus like it.
 - 5. As you pack on spiritual muscle, you build its walls, glorious and strong.
 - 6. As you weather the storms, and keep faith with God in the fights of life, you find a refuge within a secret place where nobody can mess with you. A sanctuary in the soul.
 - a) Our church's ministry, and my ministry, and our small groups, and our Celebrate Recovery, and kids, and students and young adults and services are all about keeping you moving forward along a pathway of spiritual maturity.
 - b) *Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches. (Proverbs 24:3, 4)*
 - (1) Where do you turn to for wisdom, for understanding, and for knowledge? The Bible.
 - (2) This is spiritual maturity.
 - (3) This is spiritual growth.
 - (4) This is spiritual muscle.
 - (5) This is the Grace Pathway... you moving forward to your destiny.
- D. *Lesson 3: The Word of God expands your vision of the grace that is yours in Christ, and of the life that could be yours by faith.*
- E. Everything that happens here is regulated, and energized, and defined, and rejected by the word of God. Haggai. Zechariah. The Books of Moses. Jeremiah. The Psalms.
 - 1. They were people of a book. So are we. Why?
- F. Illustration.

1. Here's a pint, just a pint of your favorite ice cream. It's an illustration. Use your imagination. I'm going with Ben and Jerry's Phish Food, but you can go with whatever you want.
 - a) Also, since it's imagination, you can set aside all the dietary stuff your mind might go to here... stick with me. It's an illustration.
2. Pint of your favorite ice cream. You're hungry. You're tired. You're hot.
3. Here's a spoon. One pint of ice cream. How much do you eat? Be honest.
 - a) It's only a pint! For me, there is zero chance there will be any ice cream left at all. I will eat it all.
 - b) I will scrape the container with my spoon, to get the last streaks of creamy goodness out of that thing.
 - c) I will lick the inside of the top. All of it. No leftovers. Not a drip.
4. What if God is up in heaven saying, "I wish they would do that with my grace."
 - a) Hebrews 12:25 Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God...
- G. Because the Word of God expands your vision. It blows out the limitations. It overrides the doubts and self-protective instincts.
- H. When you become a person of the Word of God, you begin to see for the first time the massive contours of the life God sees you capable of living.
 1. There are hurting people to heal.
 2. Lost people to find.
 3. Lonely people to welcome in.
 4. Special people to embrace and cherish.
 5. Defiant people to win over with kindness.
 6. There are blessings to unwrap.
 7. There are prayers to pray.
 8. There are joys to experience.
 9. There is fun to be had.
 10. There are mountains to climb.
 11. Holiness to experience.
 12. And heavenly blessings to fore-taste.
 - a) Because the Word of God expands your vision of the grace that is yours in Christ, and of the life that could be yours by faith.
 - b) And then... the word of God strengthens your faith to go live that life of adventure and grace.
- I. I am talking about All the Grace.
 1. All the grace God had in mind for you to experience on the day you were saved. Don't leave anything on the table.
- J. The Jews in Ezra's day didn't... and look at what they did...
- V. *And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. (Ezra 6:17)*
 - A. This had to be a pretty big spectacle.
 - B. At the dedication of the temple, they sacrificed all these animals. Seven hundred twelve animals in total.
 - C. That's a pretty big deal.
 - D. To us, that's a mess. That's the part of the butcher shop nobody wants to see.
 - E. But to them, it was a beautiful moment. For three generations... there were no sacrifices to God at the temple in Jerusalem.
 - F. But now, what a comeback.
 - G. I want to say two things about these sacrifices.
 1. One... every sacrifice commanded in Scripture illustrates and points to the Ultimate Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 - a) These were symbols of the way of salvation...
 - b) These were symbols of the only approach of a holy God...
 - c) These sacrifices were expressions of the heart of worship.
 - d) And these sacrifices were practical, because most of these sacrifices provided food for priests and feasts for the people.
 - e) But they all pointed to Christ. That's the first thing.
 2. Two... if you compare the sacrifices made at the dedication of this temple to the sacrifices made at the dedication of the original temple... well, let's just imagine how that might go down for a moment.
 - H. So, the main builder of this temple — his name was Zerubbabel — is in heaven.
 - I. The main builder of the original temple — his name was King Solomon — is also in heaven.
 - J. Let's imagine the conversation when they first meet.
 1. Zerubbabel: King Solomon great to meet you! Guess what, we finished the temple, and we had some sacrifices. It was awesome. Never anything like it!
 2. Solomon: That's great Zerubbabel! What a testament to the grace of God, amen?
 3. Zerubbabel: Amen, bro. Oh man, you should have seen it. We did these sacrifices... it was over the top. Get this... 712 sacrifices! 712 on the altar. It smelled so good and we ate for days!! 712. So, Solomon, how many sacrifices when you guys dedicated your temple?
 4. Solomon: it really doesn't matter, 712 is awesome.
 5. Z: no it's cool... seriously, how many?

6. Solomon: doesn't matter.
7. Z: oh come on, we're up here. What's God going to do, kick me out?
8. Solomon: One hundred forty two —
9. Z: [Interrupting] Oh. 142, that's still good. Not 712, but it's respectable...
10. Solomon: 142 thousand. 142,000 sacrifices. ... Then we stopped counting.
 - a) Let's pause here. 142,000 animals sacrificed, just for a start... and 2 Chronicles 7:7 says Solomon had to relocate some of the sacrifices because there wasn't enough room to offer them.
 - b) What should this say to us?
 - (1) It should say that 142,000 sacrifices is only scratching the surface when it comes to representing the matchless value of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. 142,000 thank you's is not enough.
 - c) I am going to state this next lesson in the most theologically profound words I can use:
 - d) *Lesson 4: Grace is a really big deal.*
 - (1) I know this is stating the obvious, but let's state the obvious.
 - (a) There is no force in heaven or on earth as mighty as the grace of God.
 - (b) There is no truth more counterintuitive and life changing than the grace of God.
 - (c) There is no wonder more startling to angels than the grace of God.
 - (d) There is no policy of God more despicable to demons than the grace of God.
 - (e) There is no reality of the spiritual realm more despised by religion than the grace of God.
 - (f) There is no promise to the child of God more life-giving and relieving than the grace of God.
 - (g) There is no worldview more threatening to the spirit of the age than the grace of God.
 - (h) There is no philosophy more twisted by Satan than the grace of God.
 - (i) There is no truth more beloved by saints than the grace of God.
 - (j) There is no quality more characteristic of God than the grace of God.
 - (k) There is no teaching more definitional of Christianity than the grace of God.
 - i) Grace is a really big deal, and you will find it no where else in all of history, theology, philosophy and religion, than in biblical Christianity.
 - e) Grace is a really big deal, but Christians stop feeling it is a really big deal when:
 - (1) We feel entitled, because the beginning of entitlement is the end of grace. God doesn't owe you or me or anybody anything. Not one good thing. If there is one good thing in your life, if there is one speck of forgiveness from God to you, it comes undeserved, unearned, and unrecompensed, courtesy the shed blood of Christ and the grace of God. But if you think you're entitled, you've murdered grace.
 - (2) The second reason we stop feeling grace is a big deal is because we've hunkered down inside a comfort zone where no grace is required besides our daily maintenance, which most of us take for granted.
 - (a) God says, Go out and push the borders, and you'll be amazed, finally, at the grace that shows up in your life.
 - f) Of all the big deals in your life, grace is the biggest deal of all.
 - (1) *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23, 24)*

K. But back to the comparison between the two temples.

L. The first temple, and the second temple, no comparison in size, in grandeur, in glory, in impressiveness, in dedication. The first temple blows the second temple away by a mile.

M. But...

 1. Do you think that mattered to God?
 2. Of course not... because of all the millions of sacrifices ever offered, there was only one point which was to point to Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Savior.

N. And I think God is pleased no matter what that looks like, or how big or small or grand or humble that message may be.

 1. *Lesson 5: The expansion of grace in your life will look radically different from the expansion of grace in other people's lives. Don't judge by appearances.*

O. We look at the outward appearances but God looks at the heart.

P. You do not need to compare yourself with anybody else. You do not need to be like anybody else.

Q. Grace is the power of God for you to be yourself, without editing, without pressure, without putting on a show.

R. Grace is the power of God for you to be comfortable in your own skin, growing at your own rate, and proclaiming Christ in your own voice, and style, and setting.

S. I stand in front of thousands of people and speak of Christ. I preach.

T. You stand in a kitchen, or sit in an office, or a classroom, or beside a hospital bed or anywhere and do the exact same thing.

U. And God is pleased with both temples, because both are lighting up the gospel in a dark and desperate world.

V. Be yourself, growing in grace and in knowledge, and bringing glory to his name (2 Peter 3:18,19).

W. This is me, on the basis of Ezra, urging you to pick up your tools, and keep on building the royal palace in your soul, keep on growing in maturity, and keep going deeper in the Bible... because that is how you expand your life to reach the borders of the Promised Land of Grace God has marked out for you.