

I. Introduction

A. Please think with me today on the topic:

1. *The Paradigm*

- a) A paradigm is a pattern. It is a repeatable pattern. A paradigm is a super clear, repeatable pattern in philosophy, in science, or in life.
- b) In our chapter of the Bible today, God lays out a paradigm that makes sense of everything in your whole life. I know that's a big claim, but once you see it, you can't unsee it.
- c) In fact, it's such a big claim, I'm going to invite you to make a personal decision today. I'm going to invite you to embrace a big truth, personally for yourself today.
- d) My message today is part 15 in a series going through this book of Ezra, section by section... a series called Regather and Rebuild. You can find all of our sermons online, for free, in audio, video, and print, on our website.
- e) Here is God's Word today, beginning at Ezra 8:21... we have already studied through verse 23, but I want to back up a little to catch everybody up.

B. *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. (Ezra 8:21)*

1. The time is 500 BC.
2. The place is just outside of a Babylon. Babylon was the capitol of the Persian empire.
3. For over a century now, the Jews were exiled from the promised land. At the time of this book, they are under the rule of the Persian empire.
4. They are in exile. They are scattered across the empire.
5. But when this book begins, they start to go back home. The exile is lifted, and Ezra tells the story of a world-class comeback.
6. In chapter one, the first wave of exiles returns home. This is about 43,000 people, a small number out of the millions of Jews worldwide. This small remnant rebuilds the temple of Solomon which had been destroyed. They rebuild the altar. And the restart the sacrifices that had been ceased for two generations.
7. Here in chapter 8, a second wave of exiles prepares to journey home. This wave only has 7 or 8,000 people.
 - a) It is led by a priest named Ezra. Ezra will wind up being one of the most influential leaders ever in the history of the Jews.
8. Ezra and this group are traveling from Babylon to Jerusalem. Before they begin their epic trek, the people rendezvous at a river.
9. They have a massive caravan. It's like a scene from Arabian Nights. Kids running around. Animals. Tents. Barbecues. Noise. It's a festival atmosphere, here at the rendezvous.
10. But in three days, when they begin their journey, it's nothing but danger.
11. Travel in those days could be harsh. Wandering tribes, heavily armed and fortified, could swoop in at a moment's notice. Ezra knew the dangers.
12. He has two choices: to ask the King of Persia for an armed guard to travel with them... OR to ask God to look after them.
13. He asks God, and God answers their prayer... and now he tells how that unfolded.

C. *And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests--Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them--and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. "Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD." So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God. (Ezra 8:24-30)*

1. I'm going to go through these verses without too much comment, and then come back and see how it is teaching the one paradigm, that if you take hold of it will make sense of your life and heartbreaks and struggles, and will motivate you to stay strong no matter how difficult life begins.
 2. So what's going in?
 - a) We have a starting point: Babylon.
 - b) We have travelers: the people of God, with a special focus on the priests. Priests are people who stand between God humans. Priests represent us to God, and God to us.
 - c) We have treasures: a massive amount of treasures: gold, silver, and sacred articles. This would be worth almost billions of dollars by today's standards. It is a mind-boggling treasure.
 - (1) You can see why they were worried about thugs and bandits on this journey. They are scrawny, unarmed rich people in the wrong place at the wrong time.
 - d) We have something entrusted: Ezra measures out this treasure, and divides it up among the priests. You have one job. Deliver the treasure back to God at your journey's end.
 3. And that is exactly what happened.
- D. *Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days. (Ezra 8:31, 32)*
1. Babylon was the starting point.
 - a) We have a finish line: Jerusalem.
 2. The end of the journey, courtesy the grace of God.
 3. The journey is bookended by a 3 day rest period, at the beginning, and then at the end.
 - a) Because God is into all of us taking naps when we need them.
- E. *Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time. (Ezra 8:33, 34)*
1. So the treasure that was entrusted to them at the start of the journey, they now hand back to the house of God... They give account for it all.
 2. And the chapter ends with this:
- F. *The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. (Ezra 8:35)*
1. The journey ends with thanksgiving and worship.
- G. *And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God. (Ezra 8:36)*
1. And the end of the journey sets up the beginning of the next journey.
 2. So that's the story. Now, let's set up the paradigm.
- II. The Paradigm
- A. One of the super-important forgotten truths of Christianity is this.
1. We are pilgrims. We all are. I am. You are a pilgrim. Life is a pilgrimage, a journey to a new and better home.
 2. *Lesson 1: You will never make sense of your life until you embrace the mantle of a pilgrim.*
 - a) Peter said that Christians were "sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11).
 - b) Hebrews calls us "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13).
 - c) King David confesses, "we are aliens and pilgrims before You... Our days on earth are as a shadow, And without hope. (1 Chronicles 29:15)
 - d) Paul says that "our citizenship is in heaven."
 - (1) We are in this world still, but if you have received Jesus as your Savior, you do not belong to this world.
 - (a) You do not belong to its philosophy.
 - (b) You do not belong to its worldview.

(c) You do not belong to the systems of this world, because this whole world has been splattered with the devil's acid spit (1 John 5:19).

3. We are people who are far from home. We do not belong here for long. Jesus himself said this about you. "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16).

B. If you take this away. If you do not self-identity as a pilgrim, you set yourself up for all kinds of confusion, all kinds of disappointment, all kinds of heartbreak, and all kinds of misplaced values.

C. Why is that?

D. *Lesson 2: To refuse the mantle of Pilgrim is put too much emphasis on this life, and not enough on the life to come.*

1. If this life is all you've got—if that's your paradigm—then every minute of unhappiness is a source of panic, and grief, and loss. Because it's time you can never get back.

2. But if you have shifted paradigms—the biblical word would be repentance—if you have shifted paradigms then you know that this life is not all there is. There is an indescribable life to, and this life—good, bad, and ugly—is preparation for the life that never ends.

E. So what is the paradigm? The most life-giving, joy-producing, hope-embracing, love-creating paradigm you can ever embrace is the one in which you identify yourself as a pilgrim.

F. Our section of Ezra has mapped out the pilgrim journey. There are eight stages:

1. The Paradigm

- a) We have a starting point.
- b) We have travelers (sojourners).
- c) We have a treasure entrusted to us.
- d) We have an account to give.
- e) We have a finish line.
- f) We have a time of rest.
- g) We have a thanksgiving to offer.
- h) We have a set up for the next journey.

G. Do you see how this is the pattern laid out here in Ezra?

H. Can you also see how this can really help you make sense of your life?

III. Going Deeper

A. Here's where I want to blow your mind a little bit. I want to push this truth of our pilgrim journey a little deeper than you might have thought of before.

B. *Lesson 3: The Bible lays out Three Journeys for every child of God.*

C. And the cool thing is that all three journeys follow the same paradigm. They all follow the same eight stages.

D. Okay, so what are the three journeys?

1. The Journey to Salvation
2. The Journey to Spiritual Maturity
3. The Journey to Heaven

a) It's this journey to salvation that I want to focus on today. And it is this journey to salvation that I want to help you complete today.

IV. The Three Journeys

A. *The Journey to Salvation*

1. Salvation is a journey. You might be on that journey today.

a) *Starting point: Alienation (Ephesians 4:18)*

(1) A person who is not saved is utterly dead to the things of God. They might be a nice person, a good person, a loving person, a great person.... But if they do not know Jesus Christ as Savior, then they are spiritually dead.

(a) The Bible says they are alienated from the life of God

(b) The Bible even says there is a built-in hostility between an unsaved person and God.

b) *Travelers: Seeker (Jeremiah 29:13)*

(1) If you are investigating this whole Christianity thing, welcome. We feel honored to be part of your journey. We will help wherever you want us to help. We will back off wherever you want us to back off.

(2) But understand that you are in process with God... and he is doing something incredible in you.

c) *Treasure: The Gospel.*

(1) The truths and facts of the death and resurrection of Christ, and what it means (Romans 1:16).

(2) And this clear way of response: faith alone in Christ alone. Trusting. Believing. Receiving. Resting in his finished work on the cross as your only hope.

(3) God has handed you this information, this teaching, this revelation in Scripture.

(4) But more than that, God has handed you this person... Jesus Christ.

d) *Account: What have you done with Jesus Christ?*

(1) And the journey you are on is to answer the question: What will you do with Jesus Christ? Who is he to you?

(2) That is the question..

(3) Is Jesus part of your philosophy or is he all?

e) *Finish Line: Salvation (Ephesians 1:13)*

(1) *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, (Ephesians 1:13)*

(2) It is a decisive moment. A clear dividing line. There's a before, and there's an after.

(a) Greek word *telos*.

(3) You cross this finish line, and you are saved.

f) *Rest: Assurance (2 Timothy 1:12)*

(1) The biggest question of my life is settled, and I know for sure I will spend an eternity with my God.

g) *Thanksgiving: Gratitude for salvation (2 Corinthians 9:15).*

(1) Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.

h) *Set up: Christian life (sanctification) (Titus 2:11-13).*

(1) The end of the journey 1 is the beginning of journey two.

2. You might be on this journey of salvation, and all I can say, is keep on the path until you believe. Don't give up. Don't let bandits steal away the treasure. Don't let thugs bully you.
3. The most incredible, epic, monumental thing that can ever happen to you is that you will meet Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. That is the spiritual pilgrimage that will define your whole life and eternity.
4. And you can meet him today, if you're willing.

V. Invitation

- A. You might say, Bill I've failed too much. No one has failed so much that the Savior cannot reach to them, and pull them across the finish line.
- B. You might think, Bill, I'm doing fine... I don't really feel the need for this. I would say I'm so glad you're doing fine... but a) who knows how long that will last, and b) if you look deep within your heart, isn't there a small voice of conscience telling you that with God, you're not doing fine?

VI. Prayer

- A. ADMIT: God, I admit I'm on the wrong path. I've been here longer than I should be. I need you. I have let you down. I have not followed your ways. I have kicked against you. I have sinned. And I admit it.
- B. BELIEVE: But God I believe you sent Jesus to fix all this. I believe he is your son. I believe he died on the Cross for me. I believe he rose again for me. I believe he is alive right now, calling out to me. He is my pathway, my way to you now and forever, God, I don't get how all this works, but I'm telling you as best as I can that I believe in Jesus.
- C. CHOOSE: So God, right now, I choose to receive Jesus. I choose step into his way. I choose to trust in Jesus as my only hope. I'm asking you as best as I can, because of Jesus, please save me. Please forgive me. Please make me your child forever.