

- A. All life long, and all throughout the Bible and all human experience, God has been working to get his people to a certain place.
- B. In that place, you will experience all the grace that became yours the day that you became God's.
 - A. In this life, that place is called the Promised Land.
 - B. In the life to come, that place is called Heaven.
- C. All of history shows God's endless dedication to lead his people into the maximum possible experience of grace.
 - A. And all of history equally shows humankind's endless RESISTANCE to this work of God's grace.
 - A. The question the Bible keeps asking is, *If God has made you rich, why are you thinking and living like you are poor?*
- D. Today, we will discover what it takes to reclaim a forfeited treasure. That is the message of the book of Ezra. And it only echoes a thousand other teachings in both the Old and New Testament books of the Bible.
- E. What it takes is...
 - A. Grace-Driven Holiness.
 - B. Grace-Driven Consecration.
- F. The talk today is number 17 from this book of Ezra. We're actually going to finish today. I hope it's been a blessing.
- G. Let's get right into it.
- I. Grace-Driven Consecration
 - A. *Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. (Ezra 10:1)*
 - 1. Who is Ezra and why is he so upset?
 - 2. Ezra is a highly educated priest and scribe of Ancient Israel.
 - 3. Ezra is also a leader. For about a century now, God's people have been in exile. They were forcibly removed from their Promised Land. Their land was ruined, and the people were sent into exile.
 - a) They already own this land. Their name is on the title.
 - b) But they do not experience the riches of this land. They are in exile.
 - (1) They were rich in grace, but poor in experience.
 - (2) God made them rich in identity, but they made themselves poor in experience.
 - (a) This is always the mother of all disorders for the half-hearted child of God.
 - (b) You could be luxuriating in the promised land, but you've got yourself stuck wandering in the wilderness, exiled from mountains of grace that has your name on it.
 - (3) That is the situation Ezra faced with God's people.
 - 4. That is the background.
 - 5. But along comes God. And God does some incredible things in the heart of pagan kings like Cyrus and Artaxerxes... and he sends his people out of exile, back home to the Promised Land.
 - 6. The people come home in waves. Three waves to be exact.
 - a) The first wave happens in chapter 1.
 - b) The second wave happens in chapter 7, and Ezra is their leader. When he returns to Jerusalem, he becomes the leader of all the Jews. So that's who Ezra is.
 - 7. Now, why is he upset?
 - 8. Ezra is upset because he has just uncovered some massive guilt, and sin on the part of the exiles who returned home in wave number one.
 - a) What is that is you asked?
 - 9. They completely violated the will of God, and the law of God, and the word of God.
 - a) How did they do that, you ask?
 - 10. By marrying people of the local tribes who worshipped idols. That is how they violated the laws of God.
 - a) Before you think, no big deal, it's just an idol, you have to understand something.
 - b) Idols are horrible in the eyes of God. Any idol. It's a big deal.
 - c) The idols of the tribes of Canaan are a particularly big deal. This is because of how gross and perverted and violent and dehumanizing their religions were. Child sacrifice. Temple prostitution

forced on boys and girls. Fertility rites. Sexual perversion. This was an X-rated religion with heartless cruelty to infants and children and women thrown on top.

- d) To worship these idols was to disrespect God. To worship these idols was to radically dehumanize the sacredness of human life.
- e) Most of all, to worship these idols was to doom yourself to spiritual poverty, when God has made you rich in spiritual treasures.

- (1) In God, you would enjoy a vast inheritance.

- (2) In these idols, all you would have are mud pies in fake gold wrappers. You settle for a cheap imitation of the real grace of God.

- 11. God knew that marrying into this religion wouldn't convert the pagans into believers, it would convert believers into pagans.
- 12. God prohibited it. Do not marry those who worship any other god.
- 13. Everybody knew that law.
- 14. Four months after Ezra makes the pilgrimage back to the Promised Land, he finds out that God's own people are doing it again. They are embracing idols again. They are throwing away the treasures of grace again.

- a) They are doing again the very sin that got them exiled in the first place.

- 15. He is angry. He is sad. He is dumfounded. He is speechless.

- 16. Welcome to chapter 10 of Ezra.

- a) Welcome to Ground Hog day.

- 17. Stay with me, because I want to show you the hope here.

- 18. And then, I want us to think through of what this all means for us.

B. *And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. (Ezra 10:2)*

- 1. Shechaniah is a super-hero. A flawed super-hero, but still a super-hero.

- 2. Yes, we have sinned, he says. Yes we have married idol-worshiping pagan wives, for ourselves and our children.

- 3. It's really really bad, what we have done.

- 4. But... yet now there is hope in our lives in spite of this.

- 5. And this is what I want to say to you today. No matter how messed up your failures. No matter how deep your scars. No matter how crimson the stain... yet now there is hope.

- 6. And what is the hope?

- a) *Hope is born when you separate from cheap imitations and embrace the vast inheritance that was given you the day you were saved.*

- 7. You can't enter the promised land without leaving behind the exile. You can't enter the promised land without leaving behind the wilderness.

- 8. You have to separate from one to enjoy the other. You can't have both.

- 9. That is Ezra's lesson. And for his generation, that is about to happen.

C. *"Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. "Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it." Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. (Ezra 10:3-5)*

- 1. This is the complete separation from the false gods, and in this case, it is accompanied by the dissolution of illegal marriages.

- 2. Now this is where I said there could be misunderstanding.

- a) I don't want anybody today to hear me giving them a go-ahead to get a divorce.

- b) That is not the point of this message... because... it is not the point of this Scripture.

- 3. And the second thing I want to say is to plant a seed.

4. What what cheap imitation of grace has captivated your heart? What good-but-not-great priorities have displaced God in your life?
 - a) What makes you less godly?
 - b) What makes you less bold as a Christian? Less regal, less confident, less prayerful, less trusting as a child of God?
 - (1) What is that thing?
 - c) What competes with the priority of the Bible, and of church, and of worship in your life?
 - d) What little thing? What big thing? What repeated thing?
 5. I want you to name it. That action or choice, or possession, or habit — whether immoral or just distracting — name it. Name thing thing that you need to divorce if you're ever going to experience all the grace God has for your life.
 6. You need to name it so you can get rid of it.
 - a) In the New Testament, when people came to Christ out of witchcraft, they burned their books (Acts 19:19). Those books were worth, get this, several millions dollars.
 - b) Maybe there's something God wants you to burn... or turn away from... of leave in the rear view mirror... or leave town for.
 - c) Maybe it's something you know you need to start or do or add into your life.
 7. Name it... because later I'm going to ask you to write it down.
 8. Which is essentially what happens in Ezra, because all the names get written down.
 9. So Ezra and the leaders all agree the idol-saturated marriages have to be dissolved.
 10. And they make a plan.
- D. *Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. (Ezra 10:6-8)*
- E. *And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering. (Ezra 10:19)*
1. Don't pass by the atoning sacrifice here... there is forgiveness with God for all your sin.
 2. Then you have a list of about 100 names... and the book ends with one of the most unsatisfying endings of any book in the Bible, or anywhere
- F. *All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children. (Ezra 10:44)*
1. Okay, let's talk about the elephant in the room. Isn't God anti-divorce? How is this not a contradiction?
 2. This is a painful topic, and divorce is nobody's plan A.
 3. So look at this particular situation legally, emotionally, from the kids' perspective, and the alternative.
 - a) Legally, these were annulments, less like divorces, because the marriages weren't legal in the first place.
 - b) Emotionally, this is painful, but isn't it even more painful to orient your life around an idol who hates human life, burns kids, exploits boys and girls sexually, and is nothing but lie upon lie stacked upon the devil's lies? To separate from all that... That isn't emotionally damaging... that's deliverance.
 - c) In terms of the kids... ouch, ouch, and more ouch. But kids always pay the price when their parents make bad decisions. False religion is always bad for kids, and these idols were as bad as could be. Plus, it's safe to assume that the kids would be financially cared for as much as possible.
 - d) And then the alternative. Nobody had to divorce. And nobody was forced to break up their family. You could simply pack up and leave. Yes, you had to leave behind your house and farm and inheritance and kinship with God's people, but you already crossed that bridge the day you lined up idols on your mantel. You're doing again the very thing that made every person in the nation forfeit

everything they had a hundred years ago... if you keep making choices that lead to spiritual exile, don't blame God when what you get is exile.

(1) You reap what you sow.

G. So that's the Word of God. Let's worm it into our own hearts.

H. Ezra forges a chain with five links.

II. Five Links

A. *GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY — God is the absolute ruler over all, and no one can stop him him from accomplishing his purposes.*

1. He is sovereign. He is Lord. He is Master and Commander of the cosmos. He rules over the mightiest kings, like Darius and Cyrus and Artaxerxes. Even the most powerful rulers on earth bend to his will in heaven.
2. All earthly potentates sit in the palm of his hand.
 - a) *Why do the nations rage? Why do the people waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the LORD and against his anointed one. "Let us break their chains," they cry, "and free ourselves from this slavery." But the one who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. (Psalms 2:1-4, NLT).*
3. The rage of nations, and the wrath of the devil, and the fury of depraved humans... never make him wring his hands. God is in control. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history.
4. There is no god beside him.
5. There is no ruler like him.

B. *GOD'S GRACE — God has sovereignly chosen to bestow on every believer the treasures and riches of Christ.*

1. His stuff is your stuff. His treasures have been made yours. This is mind-boggling grace.
 - a) Ezra called it "the good hand of God" (7:9, 8:18).
 - b) He says, "grace has been shown us from the Lord" (9:8).
 - c) He says, God "has extended mercy to us" (9:9).
2. Jesus Christ came to deliver us FROM sin.
3. And he came to deliver us INTO a God blessed life that is richer than anything money can buy.
4. On the day you were saved, God wrote your name on a mountain of riches for you. A new identity. New labels. New powers. A whole new nature. The "unsearchable riches of Christ" became YOUR POSSESSIONS.
5. *God has willed that you possess your possessions and experience all that became yours the day that you became God's.*
 - a) But, what if you're saved, and what if you're not feeling the love, not feeling the grace, not feeling the mercy of God?

C. *HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY: The experience of divine riches awaits the free-will choice and faith of God's humble people.*

1. In chapter 8, Ezra stated the basic law of all divine/human interaction. Back when we studied it, I called it the Secret Decoder Ring of life.
2. No one can avoid this law, evade this law, or break this law. It's like gravity. You can deny it, but when you step off the diving board, you're going down.
 - a) *"The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." (Ezra 8:22)*
3. That's reality. The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him. God works all things together for good to those who love him.
4. *The gracious blessings of our sovereign God await the free-will choice and faith of God's humble people.*
5. The grace is there for you... but it's waiting for you.
 - a) *Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you...(Isaiah 30:18)*
6. What's he waiting for?
7. He's waiting for you. Human responsibility never goes away in light of divine sovereignty. Human free will matters. Grace is highly resistible. Ezra proves it.

8. Ezra weeps over it.
9. So he teaches about it. God's grace is right here, waiting for you. END YOUR RESISTANCE.
10. Waiting for what?

D. GRACE-DRIVEN HOLINESS — *Grace-driven holiness eradicates my resistance and embraces my riches as a child and heir of God.*

1. There's so much confusion about holiness. Yes, it includes purity, and separation from sin, and all that, but it's so much deeper.
2. Holiness is how you answer the question, where do I find my treasure?
 - a) If you find your treasure behind moral performance, thinking that you must earn God's blessing, that's LEGALISM.
 - b) If you find your treasure behind worldly success, thinking you must become your own source of your own blessing, that's SECULARISM.
 - c) But if you find your treasure in your salvation, and in the promises of God, and in Christ in you, and your union with Christ and your walk with him, that's HOLINESS.
3. What is grace-driven holiness? What do I mean when speak of grace-driven holiness, or grace-driven consecration?
 - a) *Grace-driven holiness is the awareness that holiness is not what I do for God, but what God shines through me in Christ. (Phil 1:6)*
4. Christ is in me. Christ is holy.
 - a) Christ lives through me. I am holy.
5. Let's go deeper.
 - a) *Consecration is you stating your intention to live a life of grace-driven holiness and then backing it up by continual growth in grace and faith.*
6. This is me, inviting you, to consecrate your life to God.
 - a) This is me, inviting you, to state your intention to live a life of grace-driven holiness.
 - (1) This is me inviting you to write down the things that must be eradicated, the idols that make you limp spiritually, and to do something very specific with those things.
 - (2) Give them to God. I'm going to give you a way to do that.
 - (a) Make your soul's cleansing God's problem.
7. Instead of stressing and straining to work up your own holiness, your job is to let Christ live and shine through you.
 - a) *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)*
 - (1) Grace-driven holiness is not imitation, it's habitation.
 - (2) Grace-driven holiness is not an attainment, it's an obtainment.
 - (a) Holiness...
 - (b) is...
 - (c) a...
 - (d) GIFT.
 - b) My job is faith... God's job is my holiness. He says, I am the Lord Who Sanctifies you (Ex 31:13).
8. The links in a chain...
 - a) The sovereign God decrees massive amounts of grace for me which continually await my free will choice of grace-driven holiness...
 - b) Here's the last link:

E. THE PROMISED LAND — *I live everyday in the place where I experience maximum grace of God, God receives maximum glory from me, and the world sees a maximum testimony of the saving life of Christ.*

1. This is your promised land.
2. This is spiritual maturity.
3. This is the God-blessed life.

4. This is Victorious Christian living.
5. This is the Unconquerable Spirit.
6. This is the mystery of Christ in me, the hope of glory.
7. This is peace in any storm.
8. It is the end of resistance, the end of ground hog day, the end of lukewarm Christianity.
9. It is a heart set strangely warmed by the grace of God...
10. And a life of possessing your possessions and stepping into all the unsearchable riches of Christ that became yours the moment you were saved.
11. *In this Promised Land, you become the devil's biggest nightmare, the angels' greatest amazement, and the seeking soul's dearest friend.*

F. This is the *foundation*. It is PRIORITY ONE for our church. It is more important and more lasting even than getting back into any of our buildings.

G. Let's get our hearts right with God, and worry about everything else later.

III. Conclusions

- A. All life long, and all throughout the Bible and all human experience, God has been working to get his people to a certain place.
- B. I am inviting Pathway Church to go there. To end the resistance and go there.
- C. How?
- D. It starts with consecration. It starts with you telling God, and telling the world, of your intention to live a life of grace-driven holiness.
- E. We're going to do that in prayer.
- F. And then we're going to do that in a very tangible way.
- G. I'm going to ask you to write down your idols... because God wants to grant you a divorce from them.
- H. I am inviting you to take that piece of paper to church, to our campus. If you aren't local, check the box below this video for instructions.
- I. On our campus, we're doing two things...
 1. First, you can deposit your list of idols into a special box... we're not going to read anything... we're going to destroy all those lists and burn them or run them through a shredder.
 2. Second, we have some special wood panels set up. We'd like you to put your hand print on one of those panels. This is you saying, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
 3. I am stating my intention to live a life of grace-powered holiness, one day at a time, for all my days.
 4. We'll have instructions for you on site. This is open right now, and for two hours after the end of each live broadcast.
 5. It will be open a few other times, please check our website.
 6. I won't belabor this.
 7. I'll just pray, and invite you to pray too.

IV. Prayer

- A. Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to thee.
 1. I let go of my idols. I make a clean break with them.
 2. I take hold of my riches. I embrace them as my birthright in Christ.
 3. I find my treasure in you, God. Not in a thousand other things.
 4. I want to be holy.
 5. I want Christ's life to shine through me.
 6. I want to get out of the wilderness, and leave spiritual exile behind.
 7. I want to live every day in the Promised Land of the fullest possible experience of your grace.
 8. So God, I consecrate my life to you.
 9. I state right now my intention to live a life of grace-driven holiness. And I open my heart and my life to all these things as best as I can.
 10. Through Christ my Savior and Lord, amen.