

## We Need a Nail

(Ezra 9:8-9)

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

### A. Introduction:

1. Today's text is taken from the book of Ezra, chapter 9. While turning
2. Comments on Uncertainty / How change has become so rapid / Financial uncertainty in our day, etc. And we all desire security, certainty, something we can depend on in every area of life. There are countless examples that could be cited of how we misplace our confidence in things in this life only to discover that they are mere illusions of certainty or security we seek. To cite one very simple example, have you ever visited a construction site, perhaps where a house was being framed and leaned up against a rail or a stud that had not been nailed in place yet? Why if so, you're liable to fall or it won't hold you.
3. Well at Eager Avenue Grace Church, we focus, not on how men naturally yearn and strive for temporal security during our brief lifetime here on earth, but rather our main purpose is to preach God's gospel which proclaims a sure and certain eternal security or eternal salvation that is found exclusively in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Yet so many (even all of us, initially by nature), as we consider our eternal security or as we face our own mortality and the certain prospect of dying and going on to meet our Maker so to speak or we naturally seek salvation (to gain the blessings of heaven and all of its glory) by a way that is anything but secure or a way that in reality is absolutely insecure; and definitely not God's way. Contrary to our natural religious inclinations, God's way of salvation is a certain, secure, nailed down, count on it, cannot fail way of salvation.
5. You often hear me and others quote Prov. 16:25. (quote) Accordingly, we know that apart from God's intervention, we will persist in trusting in a way of salvation (a gospel) that is worse than just untrustworthy, but is a way that results in certain failure, described by our Lord as the broad and popular way that leads not to heaven, but to destruction or an eternal death.
6. Upon our first serious consideration of spiritual things, we begin to seek for that which we as fallen, sinful creatures of change might do in order to find ourselves in God's favor so as to be saved and eternally blessed in heaven's glory. And in so relying on our response, our faith, our works, our decision, etc. we vainly trust in that which is just as uncertain (even more so) than the uncertain things of this temporal world in which you and I live. In relying upon our own attempts to establish or meet the condition(s) for our own salvation, we are truly grasping at a straw that shall not stand at the judgment. It's like leaning against that rail that has not been nailed down. It will fail us.

A. Introduction (Con't.):

7. But in contrast to that, through the good news of God's Gospel, salvation for a people is set forth that has been nailed down. It was nailed down when their Substitute was nailed to the cross. And that brings me to the title of today's message, "We Need a Nail." That may seem to be an odd title, but actually I chose this title based on a phrase found in verse 8 of our text. In Ezra 9, verse 8, Ezra prays to God and makes note of God's bountiful grace in having given unto the Israelites what he calls, "...*a nail in his holy place.*"

B. Background for Ezra 9 Text:

1. As some of you may recall, there were 3 stages to the deportation of the Jews as they were taken captive by the Babylonians. Likewise, there were 3 stages of their return to their homeland. The first 2 of these 3 stages of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity is recorded in the book of Ezra.
2. The return of the 1<sup>st</sup> group from exile is recorded in the 1<sup>st</sup> 6 chapters of Ezra and was led by King Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David. There were some 50,000 Israelites and their servants who returned and under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they eventually completed the rebuilding of the temple. Its completion is recorded in Ezra, chapter 6.
3. Then in Ezra, chapters 7-10 (wherein our text falls today) we have the record of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Return from exile under the leadership of a priest and scribe, Ezra himself, who descended from Aaron, the 1<sup>st</sup> anointed priest over Israel. From my study, it appears to me that just under 1500 returned in this 2<sup>nd</sup> group with Ezra, returning so they would be able to worship God according to the Law of Moses.
4. But at the beginning of chapter 9, Ezra is informed that many of the Israelites had already intermarried with the Gentile idolaters ó an action forbidden in the Mosaic Law, as God had commanded them to remain separate, consistent with God's purpose to maintain their national purity so as to bring the promised Messiah through the tribe of Judah.
5. In hearing this news, Ezra reacted strongly and in great sorrow because this was the same kind of sin and disobedience that brought Israel into bondage in the first place. And in Ezra 9, from verse 5 to the end of the chapter, we have the record of his prayer to God where he expresses his great sorrow and ashamedness over the sin of the people, particularly in light of God's goodness towards them that was so undeserved.
6. I encourage you on your own to read the entire broader context surrounding and including chapter 9, but today I want to focus your attention primarily on 2 verses found in the middle of Ezra's prayer, Ezra 9, verses 8-9.

C. Ezra 9:8-9:

1. Picking up in the middle of Ezra's prayer, we read beginning in verse 8: ***“And now for a little space <that is for the moment> grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. <sup>9</sup>For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.”***
2. The Hebrew word that is translated *ōnailō* in verse 8 is a word that means a pin, referring to a constant and sure abode. Clearly, Ezra is referring here to the rebuilt temple and the holy sanctuary where sacrifices could be made in accordance to God's command under the Law of Moses. And of course the scripture makes it clear that this ceremonial law and the sacrificing of animals all pointed to Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross as the unblemished Lamb of God. As Gal. 3:24 reads, ***“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”*** <that is *ó* justified by the object of our faith, the one that the moral and ceremonial law of Moses pointed to, the Lord Jesus Christ.>
3. And just as Ezra made note of the *ōnailō* given to these Israelites in his holy place, likewise spiritual Israel (God's chosen people unto eternal deliverance) have a *ōnailō* that is given to them *ó* a nail that all sinners desperately need. *ōWe need a nail.ō* And my friend, that nail we need, the nail given to all whom God saves is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who was nailed on the cross to provide for His people a salvation they did not deserve and could not merit for themselves, but that which He alone could, did, and does provide for them *ó* a full, free, certain, *ōnailed downō* eternal salvation.
4. Now lest you think I'm taking too much literary license in suggesting that this *ōnailō* spoken of here is truly representative of Christ, turn with me to the book of Isaiah and let's examine how he used the same device, the *ōnailō* in a prophetic referral to the coming Messiah.
5. Look with me at Isa. 22, beginning in verse 20 where we read, ***“And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: <sup>21</sup>And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. <sup>22</sup>And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. <sup>23</sup>And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.”***
6. Now from this language, we know that, in addition to the current circumstances to which this pertains, that this also is a prophetic passage concerning Christ. From previous sermons, you may recall that the name *ōEliakimō* means *ōGod will raise him up.ō* So we see that Eliakim is a type of Christ who would be raised up, nailed to the cross of Calvary *ó* pointing to the promised Messiah who would be fastened ***“...as a nail in a sure place;...”***

7. And let's compare this now to the language of Isaiah 9:6-7 that likewise points to our Savior.
  - a. Keep in mind what we just read in Isa. 22, in the latter part of verse 21 and the 1<sup>st</sup> part of verse 22: *“and I will commit thy government into his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.”* <sup>22</sup>*And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder;...”*
  - b. Now compare this with Isaiah 9:6 where we read, *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: <clearly referring to the God-man> and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. <And then in verse 7> <sup>7</sup>*Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”**
8. And before we leave Isaiah 22, I want you to notice the certainty of salvation in and by Christ expressed in this prophetic language. Notice again verses 22 and 23: <sup>22</sup>*And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.* <sup>23</sup>*And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.”* He has the key. He shall open the kingdom and those to whom He opens it (for whom He dies), none can shut out. And likewise, no one else can open that door for themselves. It's as a nail in a sure place!

D. Spiritual Application of Text: Now having shown the validity of the “nail” as a metaphor for Christ, let's now return to the consideration of our text in Ezra 9 and consider its application to the eternal deliverance of spiritual Israel, referring to all those God chose from the foundation of the world to this sure and certain salvation in Christ.

1. First, notice the beginning phrase of our text in Ezra 9:8, *“And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, ...”* In reading this, I was reminded of the truth of the common grace afforded all of mankind in that we all have “a little space” — a time to live on this earth. And the scripture is clear, that all who, in their respective lifetimes, (in this little space of time) believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in Him alone for all of their salvation, shall indeed be eternally saved. As Heb. 9:27-28 tells us: *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: <a declarative judgment that takes place after having been granted this “little space” of time on this earth>”* <sup>28</sup>*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him <the “many” who's sins He bore> shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”*

D. Spiritual Application of Text (Con't.):

2. And then notice as Ezra 9:8 continues, we have the phrase, “...**to leave us a remnant to escape...**” This can be likened to the “...**remnant according to the election of grace**” as recorded in Romans 11:5. That is referring to a people chosen unto salvation in Christ from every tribe and nation, a spiritual Israel, whose very election is by grace ó that is based upon no merit whatsoever foreseen to reside in them, but rather due solely unto God’s sovereign choice of an undeserving people, all simply owing to His own good pleasure ó choosing them to be represented by a Substitute, the One upon whose shoulders all the government of the heavenly kingdom rests. They, this remnant according to the election of grace, escape God’s just wrath due unto their sins ó for that wrath, in satisfaction to God’s justice, was poured out on their Substitute and Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He was nailed to the cross for their sins. And thereby ó they go free.
3. And then as we consider the rest of verse 8, notice it reads: “...**and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.**” Now I’ve already shown how this nail is prophetically speaking of Christ as we consider its application to spiritual Israel. But notice the results of God’s gift of this nail (and observe that it is given to us):
  - a. First, it tells us that He gave us this nail ó **that our God may lighten our eyes,...**” This can be likened to the truth that all of God’s elect who were given to Christ and for whom He came and died, will in time have their eyes opened spiritually so as to become enlightened to His truth ó to achieve God’s grand design in all things ó that He might be glorified. As 2 Cor. 4:6 tells us concerning those God saves: “**For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**” And this enlightenment is a direct fruit and effect of having been given a nail in the holy place ó Jesus Christ death on the cross. As the latter part of Heb. 9:12 puts it: “...**but by his own blood** <referring to the blood of Christ> **he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.**”
  - b. Secondly, we see that He gave us this nail that He may “...**give us a little reviving in our bondage.**” As the passage continues in Ezra 9, at the beginning of verse 9, we see a further reference to this bondage as it reads: “**For we were bondmen; <slaves> yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage,...**” Spiritually speaking we all come into this world in a state of spiritual death, in bondage to sin and Satan. But God does not forsake and leave His sheep (His elect) in their bondage.
  - c. As Romans 6:17-18 reads, “**But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, <bondmen> but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. <sup>18</sup>Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.**”

D. *Spiritual Application of Text/ 3) Results of the Given Nail (Con't.):*

- d. Christ makes it clear in John 6:37 when He says, ***“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”*** All whom the Father gave this nail to, (all whose sins were nailed to the cross) shall be delivered from their bondage as God gives them spiritual life ó ða reviving.ö Death passed upon all men due to their representation in Adam so that they need ða revivingö ó to be born again. You see, in order to enlighten our eyes, we must have spiritual life. Dead men do not see. As we so often quote from Eph. 2:1: ***“And you hath he quickened, <made alive> who were dead in trespasses and sins;***” He gave us Christ that we might be made alive and thereby, His design to glorify Himself in the hearts of His people is achieved as we behold His glory.
- e. Now notice as Ezra 9:9 continues, we observe that this remnant to whom God gives a sure and certain salvation ó even access to the presence of God (the holy place), all based upon Christ, the nail given ó it says of these (who God doesn't forsake in their bondage), that He ***“... extended mercy unto us...”*** Clearly, in the immediate context of Ezra's day, it is referring to their new-found freedom, even in the sight of the Babylonian ökings of Persiaö as they are called in Ezra 9:9. And spiritually speaking, those who are given a sure and certain salvation in Christ are likewise objects of His mercy. In the New Testament, Christ is referred to as our mercy seat ó for it is by the satisfaction that He alone made unto the Father by the sacrifice of Himself that God extends mercy unto spiritual Israel ó those for whom Christ lived and died. As long as a sinner relies upon something that proceeds from him or her (his decision, his faith, his sincere interest in religion, etc.) he doesn't really need the mercy God extends to those He enlightens unto salvation. Such a one doesn't need mercy, they just need to cut their end of the bargain they mistakenly presume God has made wherein they tragically try to save themselves. That's not the nail in his holy place that God gives to those He saves.

E. Why do we need a nail?

1. Well, eternity is a long time to spend. It never ends. And no one shall enter into the presence of God in heaven at the expense of His holy justice. He will not just lay it aside. No, we need a nail given in the holy place to render all that is due unto a just God. In doing a word study of this word ðnailö I read where it was much like a tent stake that would keep a tent standing when tested by a strong wind. In their Babylonian captivity, the Israelites were often dispersed about and Ezra's prayer is making note of God's mercy having been extended to them in providing a constant abode ó a place (with the temple having been rebuilt) where they could worship in God's prescribed manner.

E. Why do we need a nail? (Con't.):

2. Well, likewise, we need the one sure and certain way of salvation that is only found in the Person and work of Christ ó in the finished work of the cross to which He was nailed. Except you see your salvation is by Christ alone, based upon His finished work of righteousness alone, given (imputed to) the sinner ó salvation is not merely uncertain. Rather, there is in fact a certainty ó a certain and just eternal banishment from the presence of God in hell. As Christ said in John 14:6: “...***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.***”
3. Why is any other way a way of peril? Well, at the end of Ezra chapter 9, as Ezra finished his prayer in the latter part of verse 15 he said, “... ***behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.***” King David put it this way in Psalms 130:3 saying, “***If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?***” As Acts 17:31 teaches us, we will be judged in righteousness by none other than the perfection rendered to justice by the sinless God-man who, in His life and death, single handedly defeated Satan and sin, meriting life and overcoming death for all those He represented. Hear the extent of the law! We need a righteousness we canø produce. Thatø why we need a nail.
4. And we need a nail that ever intercedes on our behalf, all based upon what He accomplished at the cross. If you have time to read the rest of Ezraø prayer, you will see that much of it was an expression of his grief and ashamedness over their ingratitude so soon after having been delivered by the goodness of God (which none disputed). In verses 13-15a he makes note of this as he says, “***And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; <sup>14</sup>Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? <sup>15</sup>O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped,...***”

Ezra is lamenting over their ingratitude in having broken Godø commandments. Likewise, think of how we continue in our sin ó as Paul said, thinking and doing that which we would prefer not to do. But notice what that fact results in ó in a recognition that the only way of escaping the just desserts of our sins is if they have been taken care of by a way of righteousness ó by satisfaction to Godø justice having been made for us as those sins were imputed (or charged) to Christ in the same way that the merit of His work (righteousness) is judicially imputed or charged to all those given to Him by the Father ó those for whom He paid the sin debt in full.

E. *Why do we need a nail? (Con't.):*

5. You see, there is nothing but bad news for any who look within or anywhere other than Christ for all of their salvation. But there is wonderfully good news for those who have been given a nail ó to whom Christ was given. And that's the good news of the gospel! To trust in Christ alone for all of your salvation, based upon His imputed righteousness alone as your only merit before a righteous and just God is not only a sure and certain way of salvation. It is the only way of salvation. It's the nail we need.

F. Closing:

1. Listen to this description of the nail given unto God's people in his holy place as it is put in Heb. 6:17-20: ***"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: <sup>18</sup>That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: <sup>19</sup>Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; <sup>20</sup>Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."*** That sure and stedfast anchor within the veil is the nail given in his holy place.
2. Listen to the words of Col. 2:13-14: ***"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; <sup>14</sup>Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"*** Well, that's a sure and certain, ónailed downö salvation. If you find your hope there and no where else, then rejoice! For to be so enlightened is an exclusive fruit and effect of the demerit of your sins having been taken away, charged to your Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby nailed on the cross. If that's truly your hope, then God's mercy has been extended to you as well.
3. As occasion permits, I'd encourage you to read Ezra chapter 10 as well. There the story continues at the conclusion of Ezra's prayer. In reading that, you will discover that the Israelites who had intermarried in stark disobedience to God's clear command, then made a covenant to put away all the wives they had taken from among the idolatrous, heathen nations. And they followed through by doing just that. That provides for us a beautiful picture of initial spiritual repentance that always accompanies true, God-given faith. You see, in turning away their strange wives, they were forsaking and separating themselves from the idolatry they practiced. And so, as it was said of the Thessalonians in I Thess. 1:9, it can also be said of all who believe God's Gospel, that they ***"...turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"*** Those redeemed as the bride of Christ, will put away the harlot / the óstrange womanö to use the language of Ezra 10. Having been enlightened by God's Spirit, through the preached gospel, they turn from the broad road of false religion, from the way that seems right to us by nature, to Christ as He is set forth in the gospel ó the gospel wherein His righteousness is revealed as the only ground or basis of a sinner's salvation.



*F. Closing (Con't.):*

4. We all need this sure and certain abiding place ó this nail. How about you? Do you truly see your desperate need for this nail? If you have been so blessed with the God-given eyes of true faith, then it is because God has graciously given you this nail in his holy place ó a sure and certain eternal salvation in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.

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