

The Authority of Christ Over His House

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ezra 7:11-28

Preached on: Sunday, October 27, 2019

Providence Church

2146 Buford Hwy

Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Turn with me in your Bibles to Ezra 7 and as you turn, I do want to say another word about our Reformation celebration on Wednesday night. It's always a wonderful time of fellowshiping and, yeah, the egg toss in the dark out to be a lot of fun to watch. I don't think I want to participate in that one, but no, we're gonna have a lot of fun. We'll probably actually not be doing the egg toss in the dark. We're gonna do it earlier before dark, but a lot of fun games, good meal, but a time of really reflecting on the glory of what God did in the Reformation. About a 20 minute message and then also last year we had a really fun game of Reformation trivia. We divided up teams and we, you didn't have to do it all on your own, you know, team trivia. That was a lot of fun. We're gonna do that again, so some of you who were here last year, you'll remember and you'll probably want to come back, and others, we hope you join us as well.

This morning, we're looking at the seventh chapter again. Last week we looked at verse 10, this week our focus is gonna be verses 11 to 28, the rest of the seventh chapter, and the title of the message is "The Authority of Christ Over His House." The authority of Christ over his house. We've noted that Ezra, we're studying the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and we're looking at the events that these books discuss and cover are the returns of the nation of Israel, the nation of Judah actually, from the Babylonian captivity back to Israel. They've been exiled to Babylon, separated from Jerusalem and the temple and the place of worship, the temple actually destroyed, and so Ezra records for us, Ezra/Nehemiah records for us the three returns of the people, three installments of the return of the people back to the land of Israel. The first installment is when they build the temple. The second installment under Ezra we started looking at a couple of weeks ago, chapter 7 to 10 talk about this second return which happened in 458 BC in which they come back. The first return was to build the temple, to build God's house, the second return that we're looking at now is the purpose is to beautify God's house, to adorn God's house, we're gonna see as we read in a moment beginning with Scripture. And what we see is that the word of God is fundamental and essential in the building and beautifying of God's house and we've noted that, as we've looked at this we've seen that the application of this passage is not to building physical buildings, those are important but they're not the issue, they're just supports to help us really build the spiritual house today, the true house God wants us to build is the body of Christ, the church, one another. And so we're to be building each other and beautifying each other. That's the application.

So what we today come to see, though, is the authority of Christ in the building and beautifying of his house. That is essentially the essence of this message is Jesus is in charge, fully in charge of everything in his house, and that means everything about how we worship, everything about how you worship, how I worship, how we worship together. He's in charge and everything, he's also in charge about everything about how you and I live. If you're a part of his house, if you come to know Jesus Christ, he has supreme authority over you and me. That is the terms in which we come to Christ. We're saved by faith, as Luther saw, justified by faith alone, trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ, what he accomplished on the cross, his resurrection, but when we come to Christ, we come repenting and believing, and repenting, surrendering to him, to his Lordship, and he demands our submission. So we're gonna see in this passage an amazing relevance of this passage to us in which it really says to us, you know, surrender to his Lordship and be ready to do that continually in his house.

So let's look at this together, the authority of Christ over his house, and what we're looking at is we're gonna look at, we're gonna read verses 11 to 28 and what we have here is the recounting. We saw last week as we were looking at what made Ezra uniquely qualified to do the work God sent him to do, which was to beautify God's house, and really Ezra is a type of Christ. He really is an amazing type of Christ, that is, the Lord, remember his name means "help, azer" means "help, azara, help from the Lord." So he's the help from the Lord sent to the people of God to beautify God's house. Jesus, remember what he said in John 14 when he said, "Don't be worried that I'm going away"? You know, he's telling the disciples on the night before he's crucified, "I'm going away," and they're very saddened, they're grieved, they're afraid, and he says, "No, it's good for you that I go away for if I go, I will send another Helper." Another helper will come, the Holy Spirit is gonna come. He doesn't say it expressly but implicitly. Who is the first helper? He says, "I'll send you another Helper." What he's saying is, "I am the one who came as God's help to you and now I'm gonna go away and send another help to you who will help you just like I have." And I think Ezra typifies that help even in his character, even in his calling. We're gonna see this as we look at this and we're gonna see that the authority that Ezra was given by God through the most unlikely source, the Persian pagan king, the authority he has over God's house is typical and anticipates the authority that God's ultimate helper will have over his house, Jesus Christ. Absolute authority.

So we're gonna look at the letter that's from the Persian King Artaxerxes, that he puts in Ezra's hand and says, "Take this with you. This is what you're commissioned to do. This is what I've given you authority to do." And this is what we're gonna see is a shadow of the substance that God would later send with Christ. So let's read verses 11 to 28 of Ezra 7.

11 Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel: 12 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now [these are the words of Artaxerxes] 13 I have issued a decree that any of

the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 Forasmuch as you are sent [you are sent] by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand, [Ezra is sent to inquire with the law of God in his hand] 15 and to bring the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, 16 with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; 17 with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. 18 Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. 19 Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 The rest of the needs for the house of your God, for which you may have occasion to provide, provide for it from the royal treasury. 21 I, even I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the provinces beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it shall be done diligently, 22 even up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt as needed. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons.

That's really the whole motivation of this whole letter. I submit to you, the king is not, he is not a believer, he has no interest in surrendering to the God. Remember he said, "Your God, your God, their God." But he's motivated to protect himself but our great God is using that motivation. He continues on, verse 24, "We also inform you that it is not allowed," now he's writing to all those other treasurers out there in the land Ezra will be returning to,

24 We also inform you that it is not allowed to impose tax, tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim or servants of this house of God. 25 You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment."

What an amazing letter. Now then this is Ezra's response. After recording the letter for us, he erupts in praise to God. He says,

27 Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended lovingkindness to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king's mighty princes. Thus I was strengthened according to the hand of the LORD my God upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

Let's pray together.

Father, we praise and honor You. You are truly the God of heaven. You are the one who rules over all and as You ruled over King Artaxerxes and You had his heart in Your hand, just as Proverbs 21:1 says, like a water course You channeled the heart of the king which wherever You will. We praise and honor You that You are ruling over the nations today; that the nations are a drop in the bucket to You and yet You reign and rule over every movement that happens in politics, in wars. You are over all. We rejoice that You're also over everything that's in our lives and we come this morning asking that You would open the eyes of our hearts that Your mighty word would have its way in bringing repentance and faith to those who don't believe yet, and deeper repentance and faith to those who do that Christ might be exalted, that His authority might be honored. We pray in His name. Amen.

So the authority of Christ over his house. Now what I want us to think about and, remember, Ezra's going back to beautify the house of God. He said that at the end when he was reflecting on what the king had done, verse 27, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem." Isn't it amazing that God has put this in the king's heart? Astonishing and that the king gave such explicit and firm instructions to Ezra. In fact, what I want to do, consider this passage under three headings, three points, and the first is we need to look at the commission of Ezra. The commission of Ezra. That's our first point. What we have here is a letter which is commissioning him to a specific purpose and that purpose is summarized by Ezra as beautifying the house of God, but that general summary that he gives is carried out in really specific ways that are really striking when you really examine them.

He's received a letter of authorization. In fact, two subpoints under this first point, the commission of Ezra. The commission of Ezra and the first subpoint, he is fully authorized by the king. He is fully authorized by the king. This letter is basically giving him full authority over the house of the Lord. He basically is commissioned by the king, think about this, he's commissioned by the king to overhaul temple worship in Jerusalem. He is commissioned by the king to implement structural legal and moral reforms. You see the commissioning about the temple in the first half of the letter, and then in verses 25 and 26, his commissioning to implement whatever legal reforms need to happen is there. "You, Ezra," verse 25, "according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand,"

7:25, "appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him." He's saying Ezra has authority to go in and overhaul the temple worship. He's gonna go in, he's sent to search and inquire. That's a key word in verse 14, "Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire." This is what he's telling him, "You are sent to inquire."

That word "inquire," now it's interesting we actually have in verses 12 to 26 the author goes from Hebrew in verse 11 to in verse 12 to 26 Aramaic, which was the basically the legal language of the day, and he's basically giving us word for word what he received from the king in the language it was given. He's given it to us in Aramaic. It would be like in the middle of a sermon, I think I've said this before, if I went into Spanish. That would really be funny, wouldn't it? Spanish would not sound good coming from me anyway with my Southern accent. I guess maybe Southern Mexico. But anyway, he's giving us the letter he received from the king in the actual language in which he received it.

Now the people, the Jews know how to speak both languages. Everybody basically knows how to speak Aramaic. You have all these different peoples who are united with the use of Aramaic as the legal language and even though the Persians have their own language, they've decide to use Aramaic as the language because it's the easiest one that everybody can relate to. At one point this same king talked about in chapter 4, "I had your letter translated to me out of Aramaic into my language and now I'm translating it back into Aramaic to you." That happens a couple chapters back.

So Ezra wants us to have the authentic letter and so in the king's own words, in the legal language of the day we have this commissioning and in that verse 14, he says, "This is what the king told me, in effect, in his own words. You are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem." The word "inquire" means literally, it implies an investigation. It's not like you're just supposed to go ask, "Hey, how's everything going? Any needs?" No, "You are sent to make a careful search and inquiry, to investigate how are things." The king wants worship to be done right in Israel according to Israel's God and he's sending Ezra because there's apparently information that's come to the king that things are not going the way they ought to and he sends Ezra with this commission, "Go back and straighten things out in the house of God."

In fact, the word "search," this Aramaic word, there are other passages of Aramaic in this book, another letter from Artaxerxes in chapter 4, in verse 15 and verse 19, the same word is used. In fact, you turn back over, Ezra 4:15, it shows you how what this word means. The same Aramaic word, verse 14, this is where a letter from Artaxerxes from the bad guys, the enemies of the Jews, and it says in verse 14, "Now because we are in the service of the palace," this is Ezra 4:14, "because we are in the service of the palace and it is not fitting for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers." This is the same word, that a search may be made, that you will go and look through all the record books

and find out what we're talking about right here. The same word in verse 19 of that same chapter, "A decree," then the king responds back and says, "A decree has been issued by me, and a search has been made." I made the decree and the search was made, this careful investigation of the matter that you've inquired about, and the result is now I'm giving it to you. The same thing is used also in chapter 5, verse 17, in another letter to the king, "Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild," etc. etc. etc. So make a search in the treasure house and find this decree. Chapter 6, verse 1, this is Darius now writing back in a letter and he says, "Now the king issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives."

So it's the, that's the same word when it says Ezra sent to inquire. It's not to ask questions like, "Hey, how's it going?" It's, "You go and dig and investigate and find out how things are in Judah and Jerusalem according to the laws of your God." Because he says back in chapter, back now to that verse 7:14, he says, "inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to," what? "The law of your God which is in your hand." You go and take the law of God in one hand and you look at everything that's going on in Judah and Jerusalem and you judge it by that law. It means temple worship is to be judged by that law and Ezra has the authority to do it, this investigation. He has the authority not only to do the investigation of temple worship but as we saw, to appoint judges and magistrates who will judge the people of Israel who were not doing the law in their lives, those who weren't keeping the Sabbath, those who weren't fulfilling their obligations as they are according to the Scriptures, and the king gave him authority and it's really emphatic. He says, "You have authority," in verse 26, "whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly whether for death or banishment or confiscation of goods or imprisonment. Ezra, you can sentence people to death, you can confiscate their goods, you can banish them from the province, and you can imprison them." That's serious authority and that's over the people.

Now I think it's hard for us to get this but if we put ourselves in the place of the people that Ezra's going back to see, the Jews who are already in Jerusalem and around Jerusalem, here comes Ezra, this outsider, and he's coming in to take authority over the temple and over our lives. I mean, Ezra's family wasn't, think about this, Ezra's family wasn't even in the first group that left Babylon and went back to Jerusalem. His dad or his granddad didn't even think enough of what God was doing to come back from Babylon to Jerusalem. In fact, one of the things that we learn as we study the other documents from the areas, that Jews had gotten very at home in Babylon, very at home in Persia. There's evidence that Jews had become, many Jews had become very wealthy in Persia, in Babylon. They were bankers. They were successful business people. God's, the way that the Lord had allowed them to be treated when they were over there, they were able to conduct business and they were doing well and God kind of blessed them and they were doing well.

So they wanted to stay and so think about Ezra's family didn't come back and now here he comes with this letter saying he can come in and he can overhaul everything and you're thinking, "Who are you?" Man, I think that's actually the right, you should be

asking, "Who are you?" And that's why in the letter itself there's such an emphasis not just on his authority but the second point, second subpoint, this is the first point, the commission of Ezra. We saw he was fully authorized, that's 1A, fully authorized, 1B, he was completely qualified for what he was authorized to do. He was completely qualified. This is why Artaxerxes first of all says, he gave, he says, "King of kings, Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest." He repeats that in his letter again, "Ezra the priest."

That's why we saw a couple of weeks ago the first five verses of chapter 7, remember when we were looking at this? Chapter 7, 1 to 5, now go back to that, "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, there went up Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok," oh no, another genealogy. What's that genealogy about? It's telling you he's qualified. He was born into the priesthood and here Artaxerxes, the king, the pagan king who doesn't know much about the religion of the Jews, he's learned a little bit because he knows it's to his benefit to know something about it, he basically says, "I'm sending Ezra the priest, Ezra the priest." That's why he has authority to take over what's going on in God's house.

He's completely qualified. He's born into the priesthood. But not only that, back to the letter, verse 12, Ezra 7:12, "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven." He's not only completely qualified because he was born in the priesthood, he's completely qualified because he is a scribe skilled in the Scriptures and the king makes this emphatically clear in the letter he's given to Ezra so that Ezra can turn around and give it to people and says, "This is what the king has said."

Look what he says in verse, first of all in verse 12, it's the scribe of the law of the God of heaven. He repeats that same phrase in verse 21 when he says, "whatever the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you." You see the emphasis on his qualifications.

Not only that but he makes the point of saying "the law which is in your hand." We read that phrase just a moment ago from verse 14. Ezra's qualification, he's going to judge things, he's going to inquire, he's going to search out things according to the law of your God which is in your hand. Ezra, you have such command of the law of God, it's as if it's in your hand. He repeats that same phrase later in verse 25 when he's telling him now not only to deal with the temple but deal with people's lives, he says, "You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand."

So Ezra is qualified. He is completely qualified. He is an outsider at first glance. I mean, somebody comes in trying to say, "Hey, the temple, this is not right." I mean, imagine somebody comes in right now and they walk up and they say, "Look, you guys, I mean, seriously," I'm preaching, "I've got something to say." They raise their hand. I actually had that happen one time in one sermon years ago, a guy in like over to the left over here raises his hand and, you know, you think somebody could be stretching or something like that, so I see it and I keep preaching, then I see it again and I'm thinking, "What do I do?" And finally he didn't put his hand down. I thought maybe he'll put it down so I kept preaching. He didn't put his hand down so I finally said, "Do you have a question?" And

he asked a question and the question really wasn't that relevant to the message and I quickly answered it and went back to the message. But he never came back. I don't know. He should've come back. I mean, I answered your question, what do you want?

But if somebody came in right now, walked down that aisle and said, "Listen, you guys need to hear from me. I've got something to say. You're just not doing things right." We would be right to question their authority. "Who gives you the authority to do this? Do you have even the knowledge to do this? Do you have the knowledge in the Scriptures? Do you have the qualifications?" Now if we're wise, we would want to at least give some consideration, maybe the Lord's doing something. It's very unlikely that that would happen and be endorsed by God. That's not the way that he would normally work. But if someone came up and said after the service, "I'd like to talk to you about it," this would be the more appropriate way. They'd be following Scripture, everything done in order. "I think what you said was completely wrong." Well, I need to listen to that and are you right biblically? Be open to that.

Well, but you don't just, you can understand it would set you back, take you aback to have someone claim authority like that. Ezra's coming in with a document that says he has complete authority. That had to be offensive especially to the priests. The priests didn't like people coming and messing with their domain. So he had a hard calling. Now one thing he had going for him was that that document also told the priests they didn't have to pay taxes, so there was some good news for the priests in that message. But that basically he's saying, "I have authority to come in and do anything I need to do to make it, it's got to conform to the law of God."

So God's help is sent, it comes from an outsider. He's sent to help and to aid and to beautify God's house and what this basically teaches us is God has complete authority over his worship and over his people and he will exercise it how he chooses. He will send whom he wants to send and his people have to learn to deal with that. Now they have to be wise and test it, like I said. You don't just, anybody who claims authority, you don't give them authority. No, God tells you how to test those claims of authority. But there's a sense in which the Lord is saying, "I have authority to fix worship at any time I want to and I have authority to enforce obedience any time I want to in my life and your life." That's what he's saying. The commission of Ezra teaches us that.

Now, secondly, I want to think for a moment about, brief number two will be a shorter point. This is the second point: the motivation of the king. I alluded to this a little bit already in telling you I'm convinced when you read the text carefully, this king is not interested really in the things of God, he's interested in his own protection. We saw that it's all that in verse 23, "so that there will not be," all these things, you need to be doing these things diligently, "so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons." Artaxerxes is like the Persian kings before him, Cyrus being the first, that they had a policy that was different than the Babylonian kings. Nebuchadnezzar and his sons, they weren't concerned about continuing to show homage to other gods. They were not pluralists. They believed their god was the true god. Give them that, they were exclusivists. So Nebuchadnezzar when he defeated Israel and Judah, what he did was he

took the vessels of the temple, destroyed the temple of Yahweh and he took those vessels back into the temple of his god in Babylon as if to say, "My god has shown he's the true god and defeated the God of the Jews."

Well, the Persians had a pluralistic view. They were more like Americans today, Romans in the first century. All roads lead to God and whatever's truth to you is truth to you. Live and let live. This was kind of the way the Persians thought. Well, that's not biblical but the Lord used this unbiblical philosophy in his sovereign superintending grace to bless his people. So the Persians basically, their idea was when Cyrus took over, what he was motivated by was, "Hey, I want my reign and my rule to be unopposed and if you keep people happy, let them worship the way they want to worship, also their gods will not be against me and they won't be as likely to be against me." So that's why he sent them back. "Go and rebuild the house. Yeah, we've got to get temple worship to Yahweh restored. We've got to get temple worship to all the other gods too." He was probably concerned about Dagon and the Philistines and all that too, but in the providence of God that did bring blessing and the Lord worked in bringing that about.

The Lord uses ungodly people and ungodly motives to accomplish his holy will. What a God we serve. This is the message of this part of the book. Ezra is marveling that this Persian king who does not really care about worshiping Yahweh is at the same time as he's trying to do his own thing and worship himself, he is bowing the knee unwittingly to Yahweh. He's doing God's will. Though not from the heart, he is doing God's will. His motivation is his own protection.

We see that because if you, now I don't want to confuse you but those of you who have been with us, remember that when we were looking back at chapter 4 a couple of months ago I guess, and remember when we talked about opposition, how in chapter 4 he lines up three examples of opposition: they were opposed when they were building the temple, and then he tells two other times where they were opposed. One of those times was what Artaxerxes is gonna do in a year or two from chapter 7. It actually if it had been chronologically, chapter 4 verses 7 to 23, you can write this down and look at it later, chapter 4:7-23, if it was chronologically ordered would come after chapter 8 of Ezra because what's gonna happen is Artaxerxes says, "Ezra, go back and do all this because I'm scared. I want your God to be happy with me." Then he's gonna receive a letter from Shimshai, why would you trust a guy named Shimshai? Doesn't that sound like somebody you shouldn't trust? He's gonna receive a letter from Shimshai and he's going to then say, "Stop the work on Jerusalem. Stop it." And he's gonna send a decree and they're gonna stop all the work that Ezra and them are doing by force of arms. Then Nehemiah is gonna come to the same king and say, "I'm grieved. I want to go back to Jerusalem." And he's gonna say, "Go ahead and rebuild the walls." Like this, Artaxerxes, blowing whichever way the wind blows.

So he's not motivated out of anything other than his personal self-interest, and yet God is using that. That's why Ezra says in verse 27, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD." Because even though it's not from the heart, the specificity of his instructions

and the commission he gave to Ezra is astounding. I mean, he's telling him, "Go back and you do whatever you need to do to make temple worship right." You know, he sends him with a large sum of money. This is staggering. I'm gonna mention this. We'll talk about it more next week because it's spelled out in chapter 8. He sends them, now he gives some, Artaxerxes gives a significant portion, we don't know how much. The people, the Israelites who were in Babylon and Persia who are now becoming wealthy send money. But they come back with wagon loads of silver and gold. Do you know that the estimate of the talents that are talked about here, 25 tons of silver, 3.75 tons of gold. They have wagon loads of silver and gold. That's why it's amazing they weren't, bandits didn't attack them and all that. But the king wants them to take the silver and the gold, he's making an investment in his protection and the protection of his sons. He sends it back, "Beautify the house and do whatever it takes to get temple worship right. Ezra, you have full authority." And not only that, "I've learned from the other Jews that I know that your God wants his law to be followed in every area of life. It's not just what you do on Sunday or back then on Saturday. It's what you do every day of your life. So you have authority to appoint judges and magistrates who will enforce the law of God which is in your hand. Do it."

God is interested in the lives of his people, not just the times when we gather together to worship. He's interested in every part of our lives being lived in worship and worship is obedience. In fact, it's interesting in the commission he gives when he says in verse 26, this is an example of the king's language that's just astounding, "Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly." In Aramaic what he says, it literally, it could almost be translated, I mean, it's a difficult phrase but there's a sense in which it could have been translated, "Whoever will not become a doer." The word "observe" means "to do" and it's used with a being verb as well, but it doesn't come through in English. And so, "Whoever will not observe," is a good translation. The other translation is, "Whoever will not obey." But it could almost be translated when you look at the meaning of the word, "Whoever will not be a doer of the law of your God." Whoever will not be a doer of the law of your God, and then he turns the phrase around. The same words are used because when it says executed is literally the same two Aramaic words. Really observe and executed are the same Aramaic phrase and what it reads is like this, "Whoever will not be a doer of the law of your God, let the law of your God be done to him strictly, quickly." That's the force of it. "Whoever will not be a doer of the law of your God, let the law of your God be done to him. Let him be punished and that swiftly."

These are the words of the pagan king. Somehow God is bending his will and it's almost as if you hear him saying, the Lord speaking through this pagan king like Balaam's donkey, "Be holy for I am holy." That's the force of this and he's saying, "Ezra, you are the helper." God is sending Ezra the helper who has the word of the Lord in his hand and he's to purify worship and to purify the obedience of the people. The king is not motivated out of anything other than self-interest but God is bending his tongue to say exactly what he wants him to say.

The commission of Ezra is to fix the worship and to enforce obedience, and remember he's an outsider at first glance. Who wants to have this guy come in to tell us how we're to run our house? We're the ones that have been living over here, struggling to live for God. You've been over there enjoying, you know, it's like living in America versus living in the third world. You've been over there, you know, living in luxury in Babylon and Persia. We're living over here fighting for our existence and you come in telling us what to do. And God says, "Yes, he's My man. It's not him, it's Me who are stepping in to tell you what to do."

This is where we move to the third point, the authority of Christ. The authority of Christ. I stated at the beginning that I think Ezra is a type of Jesus. He, Jesus is the ultimate help sent by God. The New Testament word "paraclete" is the word translated "helper" in John; the one who comes to the side, comes to aid. And Jesus is an apparent outsider. Isn't that interesting how God did that? Remember when he shows up? They're like, "Who is this Galilean? Can any good," remember what Nathaniel says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? This guy's from Nazareth?" And then the Jews, the priests as he comes in and he, what does he do? He comes in and claims to have authority, complete authority over God's house. This outsider, what's the first thing he does when he comes to Jerusalem? John 2, well, the Gospels together show us that Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, the first thing he does is goes and he cleanses, what? The temple. And before he's crucified, what does he do again? He cleanses the temple. He is God's man sent to clean up God's house and he is an apparent outsider.

That's why they're, "Like, who is this Galilean that's coming in here doing this?" And they ask him, what do they, now they ask him the question that we should ask somebody if they'd walk down the aisle and tell us, "Hey, you're doing everything wrong." "By what authority do you do these things?" They asked the right question. They just didn't want to hear his answer. They weren't really willing to submit to the outsider sent by God, the apparent outsider. It's not really an outsider. God has a way of confounding our expectations to humble our proud, wicked proud hearts.

And they listen to what he said. Remember what he said in John 2? You know, turn over there, John 2:13, "The Passover," this is John 2:13, "The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business.' His disciples remembered," this is later, "they remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house will consume Me.' The Jews then said to Him, 'What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?'" And Jesus said this, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." Yeah, I have authority over this house and you want to know my authority?

Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is what testifies to his authority.

So he's an apparent outsider but he's fully authorized by God. In fact, in John when you read through the Gospel of John, one of the things that we did when we preached through that years ago is we saw that how often it says Jesus referred to himself as the one sent. "My Father who sent Me. My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him who sent Me." He's the sent one. He's sent with the authority of God the Father. He's authorized.

When they heard him teach, the first reaction that you find in the Gospels, you read Matthew, when he first preaches, what do they say? They can't believe his preaching. He speaks as one having authority, not like the scribes. He has the authority. He claims the authority, he has the authority, because he has been fully authorized by God to come in and enforce obedience to his house, and not only that, to enforce true worship, he's seeking true worship but he's also, he has the authority to enforce obedience in his house. He has the law in his hand and he can command obedience.

He is fully authorized and the same two subpoints here. The authority of Christ, he's an apparent outsider who is fully authorized and completely qualified. He looks like he's from Nazareth but where was he born? He was born in Bethlehem. In Matthew 1 and you start reading the New Testament, maybe you decide I'm gonna read the New Testament and the first thing you hit in the New Testament is a genealogy. "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez," etc. etc. etc. until we find in verse 16, "Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah." What is Matthew doing? He's saying he's completely qualified. This man who is apparently an outsider, just like Ezra 7:1-5, this man who appears to be an outsider, unqualified, is in fact God's man and he's authorized and he's qualified.

Now here the qualification for the Messiah is that he has to be of the line of David. That's what the point there is. He's the son of Abraham and a son of David. The whole book of Hebrews is essentially an argument that Jesus is fully qualified to do the work he's done. Why? He's greater than the angels. He's greater than Moses. He's greater than Aaron, the priest. He, in fact, is of the order of Melchizedek, the king/priest. That's the argument of Hebrews. He's saying, "Listen," he's writing to Jews who would be thinking, "By what authority has He done these things? Does He have the authority?" And the author of Hebrews says, "Yes. He has the authority." And he actually draws on exactly the same thing Jesus said. When they asked him, "By what authority, what sign will You show us?" What did Jesus say? "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it." Hebrews 7, I think it's verse 16, his high priesthood is vindicated, the fact that he can bring sinners to God, the proof of his qualification is this, by virtue of an indestructible life. His life is not destroyable. He was dead and yet he lives. The same thing Jesus said in John 2, "This is how you know that I have authority from God to rule in His house, to control how He's

worshiped, and to enforce obedience among His people, I live forever." He is qualified. This means that he has authority to regulate worship and to regulate our lives.

Now what does that look like? What does this mean? How do we apply this to ourselves today? I mean, there are a number of ways that you can see this. One passage where you can see this real clearly is in Matthew 18. This is the New Testament passage on church discipline verses 15 to 18. This is where it says, "If your brother sins," and it gives four steps to church discipline. If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he repents, you have won your brother. If he doesn't repent, take one or two others with you, step 2, so that by the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses every fact may be confirmed. Find out, try to convince him or find out, the other witnesses may decide that, no, you're the one that's wrong, not him. But whatever, sin will be dealt with. But if he is in the wrong and 2 or 3 have gone and he's not repenting yet, then step 3 is tell it to the church and let the church pray for him and reach out to him, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as a pagan or tax collector, that is, excommunicate him. Tell him that, "Listen, our hearts are broken over this but you are acting as an unbeliever, a person in whom the Spirit of God is does not reject correction to the level you are rejecting it. We can't see your heart, we don't know but Scripture tells us based on your fruit we are to see you as an unbeliever. Only God knows ultimately but we have no assurance of your salvation based on your behavior." And that is actually loving shepherding and that is actually Jesus himself coming into his house and running things. When you look at it in context, it's just clear.

I love how he sets this up in verses 12 to 14. This is so important to read the context. "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." So if one of the sheep starts straying, what's supposed to happen? Jesus, this Good Shepherd, wants to go after them. How does he go after them? Verse 15, he goes after them through his people. "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault." Do you see the context? This is Jesus going after his sheep. This is Jesus claiming authority in his house.

This is Jesus loving. In fact, it's actually really clear when you read on down, verse 18 after the four steps are laid out he says, "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you," this is key, "that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in your midst." What he's saying is that when the church discipline process happens, that Jesus, when two or three are pleading with that brother to repent, who is there? Jesus is there pleading with him. That's why when someone doesn't repent, they directly insulted Christ.

They've directly rejected the presence of Christ in his people and that's his love for us. He loves us and comes after us. His sheep need to be rescued. When you go into sin, you

start believing the lies of the world and you think your spouse doesn't make you happy and God wants you to be happy, and I've heard people say that so many times, "God wants me to be happy. I prayed about this and God wants me to be happy." And here they go and they're leaving their family and I say to them, "No, God does not, God doesn't want you to be happy as much as he wants you to be holy and if you're holy then eventually you'll be happy, but that's a secondary thing. But God definitely doesn't want you to disobey His word. So whatever you're thinking from your prayer time and your emotions and your feelings are lying to you because the word of God says this and you say that." And that is love to say that to someone, and we don't say it in a condemning way, we say it in a pleading way earnestly, but we have to sometimes be bold and hard, I mean, sheep are dumb animals. We have to remember that. We're all dumb sheep.

I was talking to Anita Pitts yesterday and she grew up, they attend our church some, they're older folks in their 80s and she was born in Orkney Island, Scotland. It's an island on the northern tip of Scotland. And I was sharing with them about Psalm 23, talking through the 23rd Psalm and she said, "I grew up with sheep all around me and they are the stupidest animals." She said her dad had two collies and they had to work like crazy to get the sheep to do anything they wanted them to do.

Well, when God says we're sheep, there's a reason and part of that is because we are stupid animals. We don't learn from our mistakes. We need a shepherd. We need to follow Jesus closely to stay right at his feet, and we need one another to help each other follow Jesus and his shepherding, his rod and his staff come to you when someone loves you enough to speak the truth to you and to me, when they love me enough to confront me and say, "Ty, you're wrong. It appears to me you're wrong as I look at the Scripture. Help me understand what you're doing. It doesn't seem to match up here." That is love and that is Jesus coming into his house and this is what we feel all of us in our pride, we always in our old man, the old nature, there's something that wants to say, "Who are you to tell me what to do?" But to follow Jesus Christ is to crucify that through the cross of Christ and to humble ourselves under that.

This is why being filled with the Spirit, you want to be full of the Spirit. What does that look like? One of the key, there are several participles. He says speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, be filled with the Spirit by communicating the word to one another, we help each other be filled with the Spirit, always giving thanks for all things. Then he says, what next? Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. What that, listen to that, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. When someone comes with a concern and says, "Look, I think I have a concern about the way you did that or what you said and I think you may be wrong," and they may be 90% wrong, they may be 10% wrong, they're always going to be some wrong, you can almost always find something. Your manner, "You were a little harsh in that well-aimed rebuke that you gave me. You were exactly right about everything you said but I felt you were a little harsh." No, I thought that was humorous but anyway obviously it wasn't. But the fact is even if they're only 10% right, a humble heart wants to listen and you have to catch yourself rather than bow up and get, "Wait a minute. Lord, You're sending this person to me. I thank You. I want to be gentle here and I want to listen well. I want to

hear before I speak. I want to consider what they're saying. I don't want to just give into whatever they say. No, I want to hear it really well. And maybe I say I am going to consider what you said, I'm not sure I agree with you but thank you for loving me enough to speak to me about it and I'll get back with you on that. We'll talk, let's talk about this again."

But submitting to one another. Why do you do that? Because this person knows so much Scripture? No, you do it out of reverence for Christ. Jesus Christ is our Shepherd. He is our King and out of reverence for him working through someone else in the body, I must submit to them, show a disposition, just speaking, this is true for every one of us. I mean, there's so many applications to this. We should be submitted to elders, yes, but even the elders submit to one another and even the elders are submitted to every other believer in this sense, because we're all submitted to Christ. So you can confront me, you can confront Ted, any of the elders, Jess, any of us. If you have a concern and you, you know, do it as lovingly as you can, of course, especially if you come and talk to me, I want you to be really loving. No, I'm just kidding. But I want you, we should always want to do our best but don't wait. Sometimes you've just gotta go. Go. "Hey, I don't understand this. Help me understand why you said that or what you said or your attitude."

Love each other enough to do that and realizing that when that's happening, what's happening is Jesus in the image we have in Revelation 2 and 3, he is walking among the lampstands. The King of kings and Lord of lords is free to walk among the lampstands. He's free to walk among this church and do whatever he wants to do and we want to be people who honor his sovereign governance in our lives, and we demonstrate that in the way we respond to one another in correction, and we want to bring everything into obedience to his word. It's a process. It's a daily process. We're all still in various stages, we're messy in different areas. We need to be cleaned up but beautifying God's house comes from speaking his word and submitting to his word and the Lord's plan is wonderful. Isn't it amazing how he humbles us through the way he does this? If we just had him speaking out of heaven every day, "Ty, you need to change this, you need to change that, you need to change this." That would be awesome. I love what Calvin says, it would show our reverence if God spoke out of heaven like that, but he says he commends our reverence and demonstrates our reverence even more, this is John Calvin, he demonstrates our reverence even more when a puny man risen from the dust stands up to speak the word of God to us and we submit to it. That shows our reverence for God. A puny man risen from the dust, Calvin says, who in no way excels us. Nobody, he's not ahead of me but I submit to him out of reverence for Christ. That is where, that's where real communion and life change and real beauty comes.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we praise and honor You and we marvel at Your ways, Lord, as we see You work in history and Your governance of the affairs of men, even moving the Persian king. We just stand in awe of You. We stand in awe of Your ways, that You have chosen to redeem sinners through the blood of Your Son dying in our place, and we stand in awe of how You continue to purify Your people. Lord, when we first look at these things, these

things seem strange to us, truly Your ways are not our ways and Your thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are Your thoughts above our thoughts and Your ways above our ways, and as we see them, Lord, we worship You and we say You have done it and it is marvelous in our eyes. You are so good.

Father, there are some of us who are You're working on this morning that need to submit to You. There are areas of our lives that are just in rebellion and that need to be brought under the authority of Christ. We pray that You would grant grace, the grace of repentance and obedience, that those who are wanting to hide, wanting to hold on, that they would run to Jesus right now, dirty and unclean, unwashed but just run to Jesus as they are knowing that He alone can cleanse them and deliver them, and that He though He is mighty, is a tender and loving and merciful Savior. How good He is. No more wonderful place than to be surrendered at the foot of Christ.

Father, we pray for everyone who already knows and loves You, that we would continue to flee from sin, to fight sin, to kill it by Your grace and Your power, and that we would help one another, that we would be more busy about getting in relationships where we can really help one another and we can be helped by one another. Help us, Lord, it's such a hard thing to do. It's hard to have time, to make time. Help us. Help us commit to do that. Show us ways that we can do that and then when we are together, Lord, it's hard to press onto the things of the heart. Help us to not waste time. Help us be about Your business. Lord Jesus comes and show us how. Lead us to be able to love and admonish and encourage one another. And Father, we ask all this so that You would be pleased with true worship and with true holiness and obedience in Your house and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.