

From Jerusalem to Babylon

Series on Ezra

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Let's again turn to the book of Ezra, thinking to begin an occasional series on Ezra, not every week but occasionally dipping into this and maybe working our way through it. Let's just read again Ezra 1, let's read just verse 5.

5 Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

Let's begin with prayer.

O Lord, we praise You for giving us this book which is a miracle, the living word. We thank You, Lord, that every word is inspired, every jot and every tittle and, Lord, we come to it with eagerness and with anticipation. We pray, Lord, that You would help us this evening as we study passages which perhaps we're not so familiar with. We pray that Your Spirit would come and be our teacher, illumine our hearts and minds that we may receive Your truth, that we may go on our way refreshed, that we may have a new sight of Christ our Savior, that we may live for Him with greater zeal and greater love in our hearts. Lord, we pray that You would come down and make this to be a profitable time as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

From time to time I will read a book about the life of Churchill, Winston Churchill, and I recently read one in which I came across another interesting idiosyncrasy about the life of the great man, and apparently the author of this book said that Churchill's maxim was that he's talking about his reluctance to move and to use too much energy, and apparently Churchill's maxim was that he would never run if he could walk, he would never stand if he could sit, and he would never sit down if there was the opportunity to lie down. His idea was that it was about energy conservation, moving as little as possible.

Now that may work for longevity, apparently he lived until I think he was 90 years of age, but in the spiritual realm it's not a good policy. Our desire should be to move or rather to be moved by God himself. In and of ourselves we can be sluggish and we can be sleepy, disinclined to engage in Christian service, so what we need then is the Spirit of God to come and move and to stir our hearts and our affections to give us this desire to be

involved in the service of the Lord. That's one of the main themes that we have in the book of Ezra. God's people have been in Babylon for some 70 years, many of them were settled there, they'd become very comfortable there, they had become quite inclined to stay there, but then there is this movement of God's Spirit which stirs in them a desire to return to Jerusalem and to begin the work of rebuilding and restoring the temple, and that's what we're going to look at this evening, the return to Jerusalem, a moving experience, and we're going to see how it was God himself who began this, he initiated this by moving them, by stirring them, stirring the people, all kinds of people we will see in this chapter and in chapter 2. God moves the heart of the king, first of all, then he moves the hearts of his own people, and then also he moves the hearts of the Babylonians as well. So that's what we want to look at. We're going to work through those three people groups and then we will make some application to ourselves and consider how it is that God might be moving us.

Let's begin, then, with the king. God moving the heart of the king. This is Cyrus. He was the king of Persia at that time and verse 1 says, "in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom." So the year here is 538 BC and we're in Babylon and King Cyrus of Persia has recently come to power and Cyrus was a powerful and a very successful king. Soon after coming to the throne, he defeats the mighty of the Medes and their armies and he's able to gather them under his own leadership and then with their help he's able then to conquer the other great superpower of the day and that was the Babylonians. He then enters their city, he overruns that city, he captures the city for himself, and as he does so he discovers that the city is also home to many other captive people also. That was the policy in those days, when a nation conquered another nation, generally what they would do is they would plunder their goods, they would grab their silver and gold, their idols and the people, and they would take them back to their own land, and that's what had happened with Judah where God's people were. The Babylonians arrive in 586 BC, they invaded, they plundered the land, they got the gold and the silver and the people, and they brought them all the way back to Babylon.

So this is what Cyrus discovers when he comes to take over Babylon for himself, he discovers there is this large exiled Jewish community there in Babylon, and so what he does, rather surprisingly for a great ruler so early on in his own reign, he makes this dramatic pronouncement in verse 2, "All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem." So, as I say, this is quite a surprising policy. If anyone desires to return to Jerusalem to begin the work of rebuilding the temple and restoring the city, if any one of you wants to go and do that, let him go ahead. You have the blessing of the king.

Now this is quite a turnaround. This is an amazing event. Why ever would one of the leaders of the biggest superpower empire of the world act in such a generous and a benevolent fashion? This was most uncharacteristic of tyrannical despots of the day. What's the reason for this? Well, we have the reason there in verse 1, it was the Spirit of the Lord. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king. The Spirit of the Lord moved his heart, it inclined him to look favorably upon these exiles and grant them their desire to return home.

Now on a human level, there could have been all kinds of factors at work behind the scenes here. You think about the influence of a man like Daniel. He had been taken to Babylon as a captive when he was a young man. Do you remember he was among that second wave of captives that Nebuchadnezzar took away from the land and brought them along with the likes of Ezekiel, the old man, the prophet, and many others, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and they're brought into Nebuchadnezzar's palace and there he shows he has these tremendous abilities and he's put on that fast track program, the graduate recruitment program and he works his way right up to the top. We were looking at this a few weeks ago, Daniel 6, and there it says that it pleased Darius to make him one of the three governors overseeing the work of the three satraps, who themselves had 120 provinces.

So Daniel has one of the most senior positions in the land and there we see that he's a man of influence and respect. While kings and rulers and leaders come and go, there is Daniel, he's there all the time. He's faithful, he's dependable, he's reliable, he's prayerful, remember that, he's praying three times a day with his windows opened towards Jerusalem. What was he praying? Well, he was praying those great Old Testament prayers, the words of Solomon in 1 Kings, that when God's people are taken away by their enemies, that when they cry to the Lord towards Jerusalem he will hear and he will gather them again. He's praying the words of Jeremiah 25 where the Lord after 70 years, he says, he will remove his chastening hand and he will restore his people once again. Jeremiah 29:14, "I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive." These are the promises that Daniel has in his mind. These are the promises that he's making the subject of his prayers.

And he has a name as well in mind. He knows the man. He knows the name of the man, the human ruler who God will use to bring about his purposes. How does he know that? He knows because some 200 years earlier, Isaiah the prophet has already revealed it. Isaiah 44, his name is going to be Cyrus. Cyrus, my shepherd. Isaiah 44, "He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built, And to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" Into chapter 45, "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held--To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the

LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel." All of this is 200 years before Cyrus is even upon the scene. Isaiah, the prophet, he gives us the name of the human instrument through whom all of these things will come to pass. It will be Cyrus, the king of Persia.

Daniel himself has all of this information. He's got it there in his Old Testament Scriptures. Do you think he shared this with Cyrus? It's kind of interesting to think about that, isn't it? When these two great men met, did he say, "Ah, Mr. Cyrus, I've been expecting you. I've heard all about you. I've been reading about you. Here, it's in this book in the Bible, let me show you. Would you like to see? I knew you were coming." Could be, couldn't it? Maybe it was through that kind of influence from Daniel and the other remnant believers that Cyrus came to see his place in all of this. He came to see his place in God's purpose, that God was going to use him to be the human means to fulfill his word to bring about his own ends. It could be, couldn't it? We don't know for sure. Some commentators suggest this, that Cyrus was suddenly seized by this desire to fulfill God's place for him. Others say, no, Cyrus was actually more of a pragmatist than he was a believer, more of a politician than he was a proselyte, that he and the Persians had this sort of open ecumenical toleration towards other religions basically because they wanted to keep their options open. They didn't want to burn any bridges. They wanted to curry the favor with as many of these possible gods as they could.

It's actually interesting if you ever go to London, you can go to the British Museum and they have an artifact there and it's called the Cyrus cylinder and among the things that are written on this artifact, part of it relates to this decree and it says this, "May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me." So, you know, Cyrus, it seems as much as anything, he's a polytheist. He's operating this sort of widespread program of toleration because he wants to keep his options open. He wants the favor of all the gods. I could be that that's the explanation. Maybe it's a combination of the two. You know, whichever way you want to take this whether it's the influence of Daniel or whether it's just Cyrus being a pragmatist, ultimately behind the scenes, behind all of this there is a first cause, there is a hidden hand at work, there is the good hand of the Lord at work.

That's a phrase you'll find often in the book of Ezra, the good hand of the Lord several times in this book and it's the determining influencing driving factor here. It's the good hand of the Lord that's at work in Cyrus, stirring him, moving him, the heart of this pagan king, heathen king. He's got no knowledge of Yahweh or of his ways, his word, or his people, and yet here we find under the sovereign hand of the Lord he's moved, he's stirred and he becomes this instrument for accomplishing God's purpose.

And you know, it's the kind of thing that happens throughout world history, isn't it? Just to give you an example from England. We had that man William Wilberforce, that great Christian statesman who was mightily used of God for the abolition of the slave trade, but he couldn't have been anywhere near as successful as he was if it wasn't for the help of his close friend William Pitt who was the Prime Minister. He wasn't a believer by any stretch of the imagination but even though I believe Wilberforce tried to witness to him

and he brought him along to church, he listened to some great preaching, but he wasn't a believer. But it was actually William Pitt who got many of the opportunities that Wilberforce had to debate and much of his success was due to the intervention of William Pitt. And this is what God does, he works in this way. He uses men who are not believers but he uses them to accomplish his design. Now we can apply this, can't we? We should think about our own land today and the lawmakers, senators, congressman, the president, the hearts of these men are all in the hands of the Lord and we need to pray that just as God moved the heart of Cyrus, so he would move their hearts also.

Now secondly, consider not only does he move the heart of the king but also he moves the hearts of his own people as well. This is verse 5 where it says, "Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem." This is the activity of God moving hearts, this time it's the hearts of his own people, heads of families, priests, and Levites, moving them, stirring them to go. I mean, you could imagine the joy and the delight they had when the news was first delivered to them, when the town crier or the messenger, whoever it was, came into the village or the community and made this proclamation, what joy there must have been, what delight. Hadn't there been a time 70 years before this when they first arrived in Babylon, do you remember the contrast with that when they were first set down on the banks of the river, their sorrow, their grief, their homesickness, that plaintive lament as they were subject to the taunts of all of the Babylonians, "Come on," they said, "sing us a song. Sing us a song about Zion," they said. But instead they sat down and they hung up their harps on the willows and they said, "No, how can we? How can we sing the Lord's song here in a foreign land?" What sorrow and grief and weeping there was.

So now you can imagine the joy, the hope, the excitement at this news. Actually Psalm 126 tells us all about that, "When the Lord turned our captivity, we were like those that dreamed." It was like a dream, there was astonishment, wonder, at this news. But then also there's a sense of foreboding as well, isn't there? You know, think about it, 70 years have passed. It's a long time since they've been in Zion. They've been many years there in Babylon. Many of these are second generation exiles and Babylon is all they've known. They've grown up there, families there, their livelihood is there. Do they really want to leave? Babylon was getting to be a pretty affluent place and Jerusalem, well, Jerusalem was 1,000 miles away, a very difficult, dangerous, arduous journey. And when they got there, what would they find? They would find the city was in ruins, the temple was desolate, and the places where they used to live were now overrun with heathens and pagans and unbelievers.

This was actually quite a big decision to make. Did they really want to leave after all? There was actually an awful lot to keep them there and yet it didn't, 42,000 of them it says in chapter 2, verse 64, 42,360 of them, families, children, servants, priests, Levites, they decided to pack their things and go, to leave behind their homes, to leave behind their livelihood, their security in Babylon and make that long, arduous, dangerous journey towards Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord.

Notice how often that phrase occurs in this opening chapter, "the house of the LORD. Build the house of the LORD." Verse 2, verse 3, verse 4, 5 and 7. This was their concern, to rebuild the temple, to restore the temple, to restore true worship. That was their concern, worship, the worship of the living God, the true worship. This was their *raison d'etre*, their reason for being. It was the worship of the living God. And yet the interesting thing is they had to be stirred up by God to do it. Left to themselves, they would never have done it. Left to themselves, they would have stayed where they were. They would have had no inclination to pack up their bags and leave Babylon. They would have stayed put, unconcerned, untroubled about the ruins and the desolation in Jerusalem. But because the Spirit of God came and stirred them and moved them, they made the move and they were obedient to God's call and they left.

It was the Lord, the Lord was the first cause behind all of this. It was the Lord who was the prime mover behind all of this, as he is behind all of our acts of service and obedience. And what Paul said to the Philippians in chapter 2 when he speaks about their own desire to serve and to obey God and to do what pleases him, what was the reason? He says it's God who is at work in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. Or from one of the more newer translations puts it this way, God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him. This is the reason why these people responded the way they did. This is why they left Babylon. They were stirred. They were enabled by the Spirit of God.

It's the same for us today. The good things that you and I hopefully do in the church and for other people and in the kingdom, acts of kindness, acts of love, all of these things where do they originate? They originate in the heart of God. They're prompted by God. It's not we ourselves. As much as we may like to congratulate ourselves for them, it's actually the Spirit of God who moves us to do them. This is something that should humble us but also it's something that should encourage us as well to pray all the more that God would continue to work in us and to move us and to stir us, one another in the fellowship, our young people.

There's a story about a man called William Still. He was a minister in Aberdeen in the UK in the second half of the last century. And one time he and his church were having a crusade for the young people in a nearby town and towards the end of the campaign, he decided he would have a question and answer session with the young people, and as the meeting was going on, he felt he had this unusual facility and skill in answering the questions of the young people. Afterwards he dismissed them and they went home and he was walking around the building, he was locking up, making sure there was no one still in the building, and he went into the vestry and he couldn't get the door open, and as he looked in, he found there were all these people on their knees praying, praying for him, that he would be given great help in answering the questions of the young people. Then he knew, of course, the secret behind his success. It was God who was at work stirring his own heart and stirring the hearts of those young folk as well. Ultimately it is a work of the Spirit of God and that's what we need to seek for and pray for too.

So that's our second point. He moves the heart of the king, he moves the hearts of his own people, thirdly, he moves the hearts of the Babylonians. That's in verse 6, "And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered." This is God at work there in Babylon, a work in the hearts of the people of Babylon. It says all those who were around them, so that is neighbors and friends, the people that they lived amongst, those who they'd grown up amongst, who they'd shared meals with, their children played with, the people that they had borne witness to, shared the Scriptures with. These people came out and gave them gifts. It shows how they had endeared themselves to the local people, how they had lived such good upright lives among these people. If the life of Daniel is anything to go by, what an immense blessing they had been to these people. They had worked and served there amongst those people. They were salt and light in that community and so now that they're leaving, the people are sad.

They're very sorry to see these kind of people go and so they give them gifts, freewill offerings it says. They came and gave silver and gold. They gave what they had to help them as well, of course, as look at verse 7, it says, "the articles of the house of the LORD." These were returned as well. These are the things, remember, that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and then put in the temple of his gods. Do you know what happened in those days? When a nation conquered another nation, what they would do is they would go into their temples or their sacred places, they would seize their idols and they would take them with them back to their own land and then they would put their idols in the temple of their god, as much as to say, "Look, isn't our god much better than yours?" This is the way that they thought.

But of course, when they came into the temple in Jerusalem, they didn't find any idols. There weren't any there so what they had to do was grab the silver and gold, the utensils, the instruments, the basins, the cups, and they brought all of those back. And you know, they broke some of those up for gold, and some of them they put away in storage, and of course, you remember Daniel 5, what happens there, and Belshazzar decides he's going to have a feast and what's he going to use for the feast? "Ah, let's get some of those utensils out." And of course, that's the night when the hand appears and the writing was on the wall for Belshazzar, "You've been weighed in the balances and you have been found wanting." That was the night that Belshazzar died, wasn't it? So probably they didn't use those utensils too much after that, probably Cyrus thought, "You know, probably not going to use one of those for my feast."

But the point we have here is that they're all being given back. All the utensils, all the instruments, the basins, the knives, the cups, they're all being given back. God is stirring the hearts of the people here, the king, the Babylonians, even actually people from other nations as well. That's in chapter 2. Chapter 2 is interesting. It may just seem like a list of names here, I mean, there are many names. You have the names of the 12 leaders of God's people, verse 2, under Zerubbabel, and the 11 other leaders. These are going to be the men who will lead the exiles back home.

But then also you've got thousands of priests mentioned in verse 36 and 39, 4,300 of them. That's about 10% of the total. One in 10 of these returnees was a priest. That's an inordinate amount of priests. Why ever do you have so many priests going back? Well, think about it, what were they going back to do? They were going back to rebuild the temple. Who is going to get excited about going back to the temple? It's going to be the priests, those who want to serve at the altar. That's what they couldn't do in Babylon. You're going to get a huge number of priests, aren't you? They want to go back. Psalm 84, "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." The priests are longing to be back there.

You've got slaves as well, 7,300 slaves, that's in verse 64. These were people who worked for the Jews, so obviously God's people had become quite prosperous. They now have their own servants and what's interesting among these servants is that many of them have foreign names. You've got Persian and Egyptian names here, Bigvai in verse 14 is Persian. Ziha, verse 43, that's an Egyptian name. Asnah in verse 50, that's an Egyptian name. These are foreigners who'd settled there in Babylon. In fact, one commentator says that 68% of the names of those servants are of foreign origin. So these are people who have joined themselves to the people of God. They have maybe come into contact with people like Daniel and the other remnant believers and they've come under the sound of priestly instruction. They have come and joined themselves to this pilgrim band. Why? It's the same thing, isn't it? It's the Lord. It's the Spirit of the Lord that was moving them and stirring them, inclining them to hear God's word, to receive that word and to believe God's word so that they along with thousands of others, they have this longing to go back to Zion and to rebuild the house of the Lord. It's all sovereign grace, a sovereign work of God's Spirit moving upon the hearts and souls of men. This is a wonderful work of grace that took place.

Now let's think about ourselves today. How do we apply this to ourselves? Well, I think we can apply this in the same way. We can apply this in the same three areas. We need the Spirit of God to work in each of these three areas today, in the hearts of kings, in the hearts of the unbelievers, and we need the Spirit of God to work in our hearts as well.

Let's think about this, firstly, in the hearts of kings. Paul says that in his first letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 2, "I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority." That's who we're to pray for, for kings. What are we to pray for? We're to pray that under them we might be enabled to live peaceable and quiet lives, that we might be free to worship God without any hindrance or without any fear. We're to pray that for ourselves and we're to pray that for people in other lands as well. Where God's people are under oppressive, brutal regimes, where they persecute God's people, we are to pray for leaders in those lands. We pray for countries like Iran where you have an Iranian pastor facing the death penalty. We pray that God would move the hearts of the leaders to show mercy. Or think about North Korea where you have a despot in that land who has 60,000 believers locked away in brutal hard labor camps. We pray that God would move the hearts of these men. God hasn't changed. He can change the hearts of a Cyrus, he can change the hearts of an

Aminadab or a Kim Jong-il. Proverbs 21 says the king's heart is in the hands of the Lord, and like the rivers of water he turns it whichever way he wishes. We must pray that he would.

But then we pray for unbelievers around us as well. Think about those around us who have no interest in the things of God, no concern about the things of God. Can they be reached? Can they be saved? Can they be found in the house of God? Yes, they can. Look at this list here, you have all of these foreign names, Babylonians and Persians and Egyptians, and they're all going on pilgrimage here, aren't they? Why? Because the Spirit of God moved. God moved their hearts. God can open hearts, can't he, just like he did for Lydia on the banks of another river there in Philippi. What was it that made Lydia want to go and join herself to that little pilgrim band? Well, it was the same reason, wasn't it? It was because the Lord opened her heart.

And that's what we need to pray. You have, don't you, friends and colleagues, you have children and maybe they just have no interest whatsoever in the things of God and you think they're never going to be saved, they're just so sunk down in worldliness and sin. Can they be saved? How can they be saved? Jesus said, "No man can come to Me except the Father draw him." And so we must pray that the Father would draw them, that he would move by his Spirit.

But then also we need to pray for the Lord to move in our hearts as well. I want to spend a bit of time thinking about this. We need to be moved as well, moved in the service and worship of God. Why was it that God stirred the hearts of these people in this way? The reason was for renewal and restoration and ultimately for his own glory. You know, the temple was the place where his glory was seen. That was where his glory was manifest. But after the temple was destroyed, then what happens? One of the things that happens is you find this new name for God appearing, this name, "the God of heaven." The God of heaven. It's a name that you find particularly in these post-exilic books. You find it nine times in Ezra and many times in Daniel and Nehemiah and in 2 Chronicles. Why does that name, the God of heaven, suddenly appear? Well, one writer suggests it could be that with the destruction of the temple due to the sin of God's people, that his glory was not being revealed so much on earth, that there was this kind of withdrawal, that the glory departing, as it were, until the temple is rebuilt and restored when the glory will be manifest once more. That's what some have suggested.

It could be the case, but ultimately however, see where this is pointing. These temples, where does it point? It points to the true temple, the place where the glory of God will ultimately be so clearly and undeniably manifest. That is in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son. He is the true temple, isn't he, the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person. When he appeared in the temple itself, it was said God's salvation which he prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel. The glory of God shone there in the temple, in fact, there was an eclipse when the true glory shone there in the person of Jesus Christ.

And today on earth, where is God's glory displayed? It's in the body of Christ, in the church here on earth and, of course, we are subject to the onslaughts of the world and the devil and so this is a body that needs continual renewal and restoration. God's people need to be committed to the work of restoration just like God's people in the days of the exile. We need to be a people who are committed to building up the walls of Zion and to making her to be a healthy, joyful, worshiping, witnessing community, and it's something that's going to require a lot of effort and a lot of sacrifice just as it did for all of those people so long ago, uprooting a family and making a thousand mile journey to Jerusalem. That was something that required effort, sacrifice. That was a lot of hassle, and so it may be for us if we want to see the walls rebuilt and the kingdom enlarged and the church of God beginning to flourish, then there's going to be a need for labor, an inconvenience. Maybe some things will need to go so that other things can be done. Maybe the tv or the computer needs to be switched off so that prayer for the kingdom can be taken up. Maybe a night in will have to be replaced by a night out on Wednesday evening at the prayer meeting to pray for the kingdom. Or maybe it will be the sacrificing of time and energy to commit to a particular ministry or program. It could be any of these things, couldn't it, but whatever it is, it's going to require inconvenience, hassle, sacrifice.

Let me just read to you a passage from Maclaren. Alexander Maclaren has a sermon on this passage. I just want to read this to you. He says, "How many of us have had great opportunities offered for service, which we have let slip in like manner! To have doors opened which we are too lazy, too cowardly, too much afraid of self-denial, to enter, is the tragedy and the crime of many a life. It is easier to live among the low levels of the plain of Babylon, than to take to the dangers and privations of the weary tramp across the desert. The ruins of Jerusalem are a much less comfortable abode than the well-furnished houses which have to be left. Prudence says, 'Be content where you are, and let other people take the trouble of such mad schemes as rebuilding the Temple.' A thousand excuses sing in our ears, and we let the moment in which alone some noble resolve is possible slide past us. Neglected opportunities, unobeyed calls to high deeds, we all have in our lives. The saddest of all words is, 'It might have been.' How much wiser, happier, nobler, were the daring souls that rose to the occasion, and flung ease and wealth and companionship behind them, because they heard the divine command couched in the royal permission, and humbly answered, 'Here am I; send me!'"

So that's the challenge, isn't it? What are we going to do? Are we going to sit back in our La-Z-Boy recliner and enjoy the good life in Babylon, or are we going to get up and seize the moment and sense the need? It's not going to be easy. If you're anything like me, your whole flesh will cry out against it and say, "Let someone else do it." But at such times then we need to pray and plead with the Lord, "Lord, move my heart. Lord, stir my heart. You were able to stir the hearts of 42,000 people to make them make great sacrifice in service for You. Lord, stir my heart."

And if you do that, you know, that could be a very significant prayer indeed. Derek Kidner in his commentary, the end of chapter 1 he says that those little words at the end of this chapter are very significant words, a turning point in the whole of history. Do you see them at the end of chapter 1? Four little words, "from Babylon to Jerusalem." From

Babylon to Jerusalem. If we take those four words home with us tonight and think about them and apply them to ourselves during the week, that could have an enormous impact upon our own lives, upon the church, even upon the kingdom of God at large.

I just want to close by telling you about David Wilkerson. I'm sure some of you have heard of him. He was the minister of a work that was built up in New York City some years ago. He died recently, but he wrote the book, "The Cross and the Switchblade." I'm sure some of you have heard about it, and before that he was a minister in a Pentecostal church in Pennsylvania and things were going well, the church was growing, they had a new building but he sensed that he was just at a plateau, that he was just kind of sitting on his heels and he decided that things needed to change. So what he did, he got rid of his tv, threw it out, and the time that he would spend watching tv he decided he would spend in prayer, and out of those times of prayer came this burden and this vision he had to begin that work in New York City amongst the teenagers and amongst the New York gangs. It was because he saw the need to get up and make the move, that move from Jerusalem to Babylon.

It's only four little words, spiritually it's a long journey to make, so we tonight need to pray that God would help us to make that journey.

Let's close our worship now by singing together #58 in our blue hymnals, #58,

The Lord is King! Lift up thy voice,
O earth; and all ye heavens, rejoice:
From world to world the joy shall ring,
The Lord omnipotent is king.

The Lord is King! Who then shall dare
Resist his will, distrust his care,
Or murmur at his wise decrees,
Or doubt his royal promises?

The Lord is King! Child of the dust,
The judge of all the earth is just;
Holy and true are all his ways:
Let every creature speak his praise.

Alike pervaded by his eye,
All parts of his dominion lie;
This world of ours, and worlds unseen,
And thin the boundary between.

One Lord, one empire, all secures;
He reigns, and life and death are yours:
Through earth and heaven one song shall ring,
"The Lord omnipotent is King!" Amen.

O gracious God, we praise You that You are the Lord omnipotent and that You are King. We thank You, our Lord, that You continue to move and stir the hearts of men. Lord, we pray this evening that You would work and move in this land in the hearts of those in positions of power, in the hearts of unbelievers, in our hearts, O Lord, that You would continue to build Your church here. Lord, forbid that we would give ourselves to a life of ease and cowardice. Lord, we pray that we would commit ourselves with all our hearts to working for the building of the kingdom of God. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.