

Lessons In Leadership

Non-Series Ezra

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If you would please turn to the book of Ezra, chapter 8. We are going to be in verses 21 through 23 tonight. Ezra, speaking,

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." 23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the good day that it has been as has already been acknowledged, the way we were challenged this morning. Lord, it was a faithful word. It was a good word. It was a needed word. We thank you for it. Now Lord, we ask your blessing upon your word in this next hour. I confess to you and before this congregation my absolute need for you. Without Christ I can do nothing so, Lord, help me to give clear expression to the things that you have taught me. Be at work in my own mind and heart as I preach that I might glory in you and enjoy you as I declare your word. Lord, be at work in us as we listen tonight. We don't learn anything unless you teach us and so, Lord, may you be our teacher in this next hour. May you deal with our hearts in such a way that when we leave this room we will say it has been good to be in your presence, it has been good to receive the teaching ministry of your Spirit and our lives are different because of what we have heard. Lord, we are mindful that always in a setting like this, in all likelihood there is someone who doesn't know your Son and we ask for salvation, Lord. We pray that you would open hearts tonight, that you would draw someone to saving faith in your Son. So Lord, save and edify your church. Lord, make much of yourself in our midst tonight. We ask for these things in Jesus' name amen.

What kind of a leader do you desire to be? Leadership is something that every believer must embrace. Every one of us is called by God to be a leader in some realm, some area

of our lives. If you're a mom, there is a leadership that you give to your children under the headship of your husband but nonetheless, it's a leadership that you give in the home. A man gives leadership to his family, to his wife, if they have children to his children; as a parent he gives leadership there. A Christian businessman gives leadership to those who work for him, those who work with him. If you're a Christian worker, you give leadership in the way that you respond to those who are in authority over you and the influence you exert on those around you. Everywhere we live our lives, everywhere we live for Christ, there is a kind of leadership that we are to embrace whether it's in school or on a ball field or it's in business or it's in the life of the church. We are all called to be leaders and the question is: what kind of a leader do we want to be?

Well, there's a natural kind of leadership. There is a kind of leadership that the world values and understands and then there is a supernatural kind of leadership. It's a leadership that exists only where there has been salvation. It's a leadership that requires the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's a leadership that exists in the place of humility and dependence. It's the kind of leadership that was perfectly embodied in our Savior. It's the kind of leadership that he taught. He talked about this often; you see in different settings throughout the Gospel accounts Jesus talking about this issue. For example, in Luke 22:24, we read this, "A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.'" Is that not amazing? The Son of God came to serve, to give his life a ransom for many. Not to be served. Mark 9:35, "And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all'" and servant of all. Mark 10:42, "And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.'"

That's the kind of leadership we must desire. That is the kind of leadership we must embrace. Leadership in the natural realm is often a matter of pride. It's a matter of self-confidence and self-accomplishment. It's about personality. It's about talent. In the realm of God's work, in the realm of spiritual leadership, godly leadership, God still uses personalities. He still uses talents after all, the God who saved us is the God who made us and so he often takes these natural leadership qualities that he has put into a person and he transforms them by the work of his Spirit so that it honors him and magnifies him and reflects him. So God uses men to give real leadership and women in the realm of the home and with other women to give real leadership but it is a leadership that emanates from a different place. It is animated by a different power. It is expressive of a different character. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the powerfully used but short-lived Scottish preacher, he died at the age of 29 during an epidemic of typhus, he made this very famous statement. He said, "It isn't great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus." He was right. That's the kind of leadership we need, the kind that is much like

Jesus. And so leadership for us is not so much about great personality or great talents, it's about calling. It's about the equipping work that God has done in our lives. It's about character. It's about consecration. God calls us for what it is he means for us to do. He equips us for what it is he means for us to do. But then we must be consecrated to him. Devoted to him. Surrendered to him. And then he builds character in us that he can use in the lives of other people.

So what kind of leadership do you want? The leadership that is a natural or the leadership that is supernatural? The leadership the world understands and values or the leadership that Christ demands? But I think this captures my heart because there is another way that I can state this: do you want to see God do great things in and through your life? Do you long for that? Do you desire it? Realize when I say great things, I don't mean great by the world's estimation, I mean great in this sense: God putting God on display in and through your life. Do you desire to live a life that makes much of him? That he can use to put himself on display in unique ways? Do you desire to see him work in your own life that way? Do you desire to see him work in his church that way? Do you desire to see him work in your family that way where you have personal ministry and influence? Do you desire for the Lord to use you as an instrument to make much of himself? Do you long for that? Because listen, God tends to use a particular kind of person as he puts himself on display. Look throughout the pages of Scripture, look across the landscape of church history and you will recognize that there are certain identifiable characteristics present in the kind of person God is usually pleased to use in ways that it puts God on display powerfully. Do you want to be one of those kinds of people? And do you long for that for the right reason? For the only reason that is acceptable? Not for your sake but for his? Not for your name but for his? Not for your glory but for his? For the advancement of his kingdom? For the advancement of his Gospel? The glory of his Son? Do you want that? I read it this morning, a time of offering, Psalm 115:1, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory." Is that your heartbeat? What kind of person does God normally use when he's doing such things? I mean, God is absolutely sovereign and he can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, wherever he wants, through whomever he wants, he can use a donkey.

But if you look at the pattern, what kind of a person does God use when he puts himself on display? We find such a man in the scribe, priest, named Ezra. This man God used powerfully to put God on display. What do we see in his life? Let's begin tonight with understanding something of the situation. What we are witnessing here has been described by some as something like a second Exodus. God delivered his people from Egypt about 1445 BC. Moses led them out. Joshua led them into the Promised Land. And there the Lord conquered enemies and blessed them but they proved unfaithful to the covenant. They fell into idolatry and the sins that accompany idolatry and then God disciplined them. In 722 BC at the hand of the Assyrians, the 10 northern tribes were scattered and then the Babylonians led Judah into exile. Three deportations: 605, 597, 586 BC. There they stayed in Babylon for seventy years just like God said they would. Through the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 29, God said, "You will be there 70 years," and they were. But God also said there was something else that was going to take place, something amazing that he said. You see this in Isaiah 44 and in Isaiah 45.

God said that he was going to raise up a servant named Cyrus who was going to be like a shepherd to his people in that by the influence of Cyrus, his people would be allowed to go home, to return to their land. I'll tell you what's amazing about it is: God named Cyrus. I mean, God says, "This is the man's name," and he does it 150 years before Cyrus lived. So in 539 BC, Cyrus, king of the Persians, the Persians conquered the Babylonians and in 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. Just as there had been three deportations, they return to their homeland in three stages. Zerubbabel led the first one: about 50,000 Israelites returned home with him. Then in 458 BC, this man Ezra led a second convoy back to the city of Jerusalem and about 7-8,000 people went with him when you include women and children, it's estimated. And 13 years after Ezra, Nehemiah led another group and you know about the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem.

It's amazing what God did because he does this through the influence of pagan kings. Cyrus, then Darius, then Artaxerxes. Just as when he led his people out of Egypt, they plundered the Egyptians, there is a sense in which when he led his people out of Babylonian captivity under the Persians, there is a sense in which they plundered the Persians because these kings not only allowed them to go back to their homeland but they funded the rebuilding of the temple. No one could have imagined outside of the word of God, no one could have imagined that this could happen. And so I want to make something very clear: the story of the book of Ezra in the ultimate sense is not about Ezra, it's about God. It's about God putting his faithfulness on display and this eighth chapter is not ultimately about Ezra, it's about God putting God's faithfulness to his word and his promises on display. God's sovereignty on display. God's Providence on display. God is making much of God in this eighth chapter and yet Ezra gets to play a strategic role. He gets to be a part of it. He gets to be an instrument through whom God puts God on display. His task was to reestablish life and worship in the land of Israel in the city of Jerusalem according to God's law. If you were to compare what happened under Zerubbabel, what happened under Ezra, under Zerubbabel, you have a rebuilding project, under Ezra, you have a revival project. The first group that goes back, they have to deal with the enemies that are without. When Ezra goes, they are dealing with the enemy within: intermarriage and idolatry and those sorts of things. So this is a story about God. God's ability. God's activity. But this man gets to be a part of God putting God on display. Is that would we desire? Do we want to be someone that the Lord can use like that?

So what do we see in this man? So what do we see in this eighth chapter? There are three headings that I'm going to give to you. We're going to talk about the actions of a godly leader and then we're going to talk about the principles of a godly leader and then we're going to talk about the passions of a godly leader. The actions of a godly leader, the principles of a godly leader and the passions of a godly leader. I say to you again, this is for all of us. What kind of leadership will we long for and embrace as we serve God wherever he plants us to serve him?

First, the actions of a godly leader. Let's just notice what he does and listen to him as he tells us why he does what he does. What does he do? Why does he do it? Verse 21, "Then

I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.' So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty." What does he do? Well, first he proclaims a fast. They are at a river in Babylon named Ahava. They are about to launch out on what will be a four month journey and before they set out, he proclaims a fast. They are going to abstain from their regular approach to food and they are going to do this for two very specific reasons which he identifies. Why a fast, Ezra? Why are you proclaiming a fast? Well, he says this, "That we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children and all our goods." He says, "We are going to engage in this fast to embrace humility and to express dependency. To embrace humility and to express our dependence, our need, before God."

He says in verse 21, "That we might humble ourselves before our God." We need to consciously embrace our absolute neediness before God. Before we set out on this journey, we need to know and we need to confess in the presence of God how much we need him. We're going to consciously acknowledge that God is great and we are not. God is powerful and we are not. God controls these things and we do not. Our safety will not be in our own hands. Our safety will not be in a king's hands. Our safety will be in God's hands. Isn't that our need? When is the last time before you embarked on something that you just prostrated yourself before God and acknowledged how much you need him? You've got a decision to make, you've got something you are about to start, do you just acknowledge in your own mind and in your own heart before the Lord, "I am nothing. I am nothing."

He's leading the people. This fast is about embracing the truth. You see, when we embrace humility, we're just embracing the truth, just having an accurate self-perspective. An accurate view of our God and an accurate view of us. But not only are they going to embrace humility, they do this in order to do something else: they embrace their humility, a humble position before God, in order to seek something from him. To seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children and all our goods. Literally, a straight road or a straight pathway. That's what they are seeking. A straight way. Straight in the sense of without obstacles. Straight in the sense of free from trouble. So it refers to safety. A safe journey, "Lord, would you grant us safety?" Why does he ask for this? Because he's very clear about what's at stake. "A safe journey for ourselves, our children and all our goods. Our lives are at stake. Our families are at stake. Everything we carry with us on this trip is at stake and not just the things that we transport that belong to us personally," but they are also transporting as you read later, a great deal of money, silver, gold, things that will be used in the temple service. There is a whole list of what they were taking that you can read about in chapter 7, verses 11 through 26. And they are going to be traveling through a region that is extremely dangerous. In fact, just look at verse 31, "Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way." This is what they are fearful of. This is what they know is a

reality. This is a man leading a people, they are leaving a place where they have been settled now for a long time. 586 BC, 458 BC. It's over 100 years that they have been in this land and they are leaving it and all the life they have known to go to Jerusalem in obedience to the word of God and this is going to be a dangerous journey. So they humble themselves and they ask God for safety. That's the first thing he does.

But notice there is something that he does not do which would represent, I guess, something that he does. You see it in verse 22, "For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.'" He proclaims a fast. Here's what he doesn't do, he doesn't ask the king for protection. I mean, someone could look at this and say, "You know, this isn't very wise, Ezra. This isn't very practical. I mean, the king has already indicated his willingness to help you guys. He is already sending a great deal of money and things with you. I mean, why don't you just ask him for a military escort?" That would not have been sinful in the right circumstances. Nehemiah does that later. But Ezra does not do that here. Here is the second thing he does: he chooses to leave their safety to God. He tells us why he did it. Verse 22, "For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us." That is, he could not from his vantage point with a clear conscience ask the king for protection. "Why not, Ezra? Why could you not ask for that?" He says, "I couldn't do this. I couldn't ask the king for horsemen and soldiers to protect us against the enemy on our way, since, because we had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.' You see, we've already given a testimony that God has a different relationship toward those who seek him than he does toward those who forsake him. The hand of God is for good on all those who seek him but his hand deals in powerful anger against all who forsake him." You see, he believed that in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of this pagan nation, that truth would be compromised and doubted if he asked for protection.

So what does he do? What are the actions here of a godly leader? He proclaims a fast. They humble themselves. They seek God's help, safety on the journey and he chooses to leave that in the hand of God. He does not ask the king for protection because he is ashamed to do so because he has already proclaimed something to this king and in the eyes of the king, what he has proclaimed might be compromised if he does ask for protection. Now, that leads us to the second thought tonight: the principles of a godly leader. We look at this and we ask: what do you see here in terms of principles that are operating in Ezra's thinking as he makes these choices? These choices reflect what's going on in his mind and heart. These choices reflect principles that he's living in accordance with. Let me give you five principles. First of all, we see a man who thinks in terms of God's activity. We see a man who thinks in terms of God's activity. What did he declare to this king? Verse 22, "We had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.'" "Artaxerxes, we believe that God is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. He is for those. He does good. He acts in goodness towards those who seek him and he is powerfully angry with those who forsake him. We believe this to be true. We know

this to be true." In other words, God is active in his world. God is active on behalf of his people. God is active against their enemies. When Ezra sees the world, he sees God's activity. He sees God's hand at work. He sees God moving and acting in the world. Do you know what? Here is what that means: when he is saying this to the king, he is not just mouthing words, he really believes this. This is how he sees life. This is how he lives his life.

It's sad but there are many professing believers who live like practical atheists. They proclaim a faith in God but then they think and they plan and they act as if God isn't, as if God doesn't really reward those who diligently seek him. As if God isn't the protector of his people. You look at what he writes in chapter 7. Just walk with me there beginning in chapter 7:6. Notice how mindful Ezra is of God's activity in the world. Verse 6, Ezra is the writer of this book so he's recording his own history here. Verse 6, "This Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him." Why did the king grant his request? Because of God's hand, that's why. Chapter 7, verse 9, "For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem." How did they get there safely? "For the good hand of his God was on him." Chapter 7, verse 27, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king." How does he explain the thinking of the king? The heart's desire of the king? He says, "Our God put this into his heart to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem," notice, "and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers." "God is at work in the heart of the king. God is at work granting me favor before all these people." And then notice what he says, "I took courage for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me."

Then you come down to chapter 8, verse 18. Ezra immediately as they are about to set out, he runs into a crisis. Here they are at Ahava for three days and he sort of surveys the situation and he discovers there are no Levites there. Levites are necessary for the work that he is going to be doing and there are no temple servants there. So he sends out a message and God works in the hearts of people and he sends Levites and he sends temple servants. Look at verse 18 of chapter 8, "And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen." He goes on to describe that but how does he explain it? He says, "The good hand of our God was on us." The good hand of our God was on us. He was working on the hearts of these people who now volunteer.

Then in our text, chapter 8, verse 23, "so we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty." He listened. And then we read earlier in verse 31, he gets to the end of this journey when they arrive in Jerusalem and at the end of verse 31, he writes, "The hand of our God was on us and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way." So here's a man who is able to make these decisions and say the things that he says because this is how he sees the world. This is what he believes. This is how he lives. He sees God's faithful activity in the world, in history, at work in

nations, at work in kings, at work in it his own situations and decisions, at work in the hearts of others, at work in safety, at work in everything he sees God.

That leads us to the second some principle that we see about such a man. This is a man committed to the word of God. Where does he get that perspective from? God's activity in the world, where did he get it from? Let me give it to you in a way that I think you can remember: Ezra could see God's hand because of what Ezra had in his hand. Ezra could see God's hand because of what he had in his hand. Look at chapter 7 and verse 10, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." And then you have an amazing testimony because beginning in verse 11, you have a letter, a copy of a letter from the king of Persia, from Artaxerxes to Ezra. And so in the words of this king, here is what we get: we get the king's perspective of this man. We get this pagan king's perspective of this servant of God. I want you to notice how this king associates Ezra with God's word. You could just say, "Well, that's just because that was his job," except for the fact that listen to the descriptions that he uses as he describes Ezra's relationship to the word of God. It's more than just a job. There is a certain character to it that the king is able to recognize in this man. Look at verse 11, "This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven." Of the law of the God of heaven. "Peace. And now I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem," get this, "according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand." This is the work you put your hand to. This is the message you hold in your hand, you carry with you to the city of Jerusalem. This is going to be the guide for all the work that you do. What a description, "because what you hold in your hand." So Ezra can see the hand of God. Why? Because of what he holds in his hand. What does he hold in his hand? He holds the law of God in his hand.

Chapter 7, verse 21, "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence." 7:23 says, "Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven." So what is Ezra going to teach and enforce? The decrees of God. Then you get to verse 25 of chapter 7 and listen to this description, "And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand," what does he have in his hand? He's got the law of God in his hand. How does now Artaxerxes describe that? "The wisdom of God that is in your hand." Ezra has made statements to this king that allows him to see that what Ezra has in his hand is the law of God, the God of heaven, the decrees of God, the wisdom of God. And the Lord is so at work in the heart of this king, I mean, he's willing to stand behind it. Verse 26, "Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment." This king clearly sees Ezra's relationship to God's word. How do you explain Ezra's perspective of the world? You explain it by what he has in his hand. What did he give his heart to study?

What did he give his heart to teach? What did he give his heart to obey but the law of God?

I wonder, do you see God's activity in the world because you are looking at this world through the eyes of Scripture? Through the eyes of God's word, his perfect word? That leads to the third principal we see in this man. He's a man who sees God's activity. He's a man who sees that because of what he has in his hand, the word of God, he's committed to the word of God. Third, we see a man willing to risk all and to devote all in the desire to do God's will. When you see the world in terms of God's activity because the word of God is in your hand, that is, you are a man whose mind and life is saturated with Scripture, then what follows that is a will that is held captive by that word. Your word is your will. "Your will, Lord, is my will. I want to do what you say. I want to do what you teach. I want to do what's important to you, what you want done. I want that done to this extent that I am willing to spend and be spent to see it done. I'm willing to sacrifice. Lord, strengthen me to be courageous. I am willing to put it all in, fully devoted, because your word has not just captured my mind, your word has captured my will." That's the kind of man that God uses in this world, a man who can see God at work because he sees the world through God's word and the word of God has taken his own heart captive to do his will. You see that kind of leadership throughout the word of God and throughout the story of church history. You see it especially, I think, in the life of Paul. Paul writes to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:15, "I will most gladly," not reluctantly, not regretting the thing, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." "I'll be used up for you because that's God's will. He loves you. I love him and therefore I love you and I will be used up for you." 1 Thessalonians 2:8 says, "Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." Philippians 2:17, Paul writes, "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice offering of your faith, I and glad and rejoice with you all." Here's a man along with the other apostles constantly putting his life on the line in the service of Christ for the sake of souls. He saw the world through the eyes of God's activity because he saw the world through the eyes of God's word and the word had taken captive his will.

I tweeted out a message this week as I was reading these verses. I asked the question: I wonder, do we see God do little because we risk little, we invest little and we care little? When the word of God has taken your heart captive, "I want to do his will." You are not in this to a little degree. "Lord, what do you want from me? My whole life is yours."

So the fourth thing I want you to see about this man, do you know what this leads to? This leads to a man who is God-centered. He is not self-centered, he is God-centered. Because he is God-centered, he is community-centered. When I say community-centered, I mean the community of God's people. His will held captive by God's will means that he now is willing to risk everything along with God's people to do God's will. Something wonderful here, do you notice the "we's," the "ours," that are in our verses? He says in verse 21, "Then I proclaimed a fast there," because he did, he proclaimed a fast but now notice as soon as he says that, "at the river Ahava, that *we* might humble *ourselves* before *our* God, to seek from him a safe journey for *ourselves*, *our* children, and all *our* goods.

For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect *us* against the enemy on *our* way, since," interesting, "*we* had told the king, 'The hand of *our* God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.' So *we* fasted and implored *our* God for this, and he listened to *our* entreaty." Not a lot of "I" there, is there? There is a lot of "we, our, us, ourselves." Godly leadership is not a Lone Ranger affair. Godly leadership is doing what you do for God and for his people as one of his people. As one of his people. You do this because you are not consumed with your will, you are consumed with God's will and you understand that it is to that end that you exist. "Therefore we have as our ambition whether at home or absent to be well pleasing to him." That's it. That we would just please him.

The fifth principle, the last one I want to point out is here you have a man who is able to take universal principles and apply it to his own unique situation because what does he declare to the king? He declares a universal principle. It's not just about Ezra. It's not just about this trip. It's not just about this particular work. It's a universal principle. Verse 22, "We had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.'" You see, this is just a principle that applies across the board. God is, he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. God is and his hand is against the proud. He gives grace to humble people but he resists the proud. This is a universal truth but he is making a decision in light of that universal truth. He has made the decision not to ask the king for help because he has taken this universal principle and in this particular situation, he has been led by God to believe that the best way to apply that universal truth in this particular situation is, "Don't ask for help. Put this into the hands of God and leave it there. That's the right decision to make." Isn't that precisely where we often fail? We know principles that we never apply to our own situation. We know things we've heard and have been taught from God's word, we know these principles and we can repeat these principles and we can teach other people these principles but do we apply these principles to the situation that is right in front of you right now? I wonder, what are you facing tonight, dear ones? What are you facing tonight that you know the truth but the issue is this: will you take that truth and apply it to that situation? Will you apply it to your own unique situation? Will you be guided by God's word?

So his actions. He declares a fast. He doesn't ask the king for help. Why? Because there are principles operating in this man's life. He sees God's activity in the world because he has the word of God in his hand and his heart has been captured by that word to do the will of God and he wants to carry out this work not as a Lone Ranger but as a part of God's people. Together we serve the Lord. And what he's doing is he is seeking the truth that he knows from God's word and he's applying it to his own unique situation. God uses people who can do that.

Here is the last thing tonight: the passions of a godly leader because a godly leader is not just known by his principles, he is known by his affections, holy affections that have captured his heart by the grace of God. God has done something in a person's heart, in a believer's heart, man or woman, and they will never be the same so that they have affections, desires that have been taught by God. We can say it this way: the principles

are real and on fire in the life of Ezra because his heart is alive with affections taught by God. We've all known people, haven't we, they know the principles but those principles have no living expression in their life because the affections necessary to apply the principles are absent.

What affections do you see in this man's life? First of all, you see holy shame. Verse 22, "I was ashamed." There is a kind of shame that's found in sin. There is a kind of shame that is found in righteousness. This is holy shame. That is to say this: he could not preach one thing and practice another. It was unacceptable to him. He could not do it and in this situation, that was what it would have represented had he asked the king for help. It would have meant that he declared something to the king that then he himself was not willing to walk in. He could not proclaim a God who is absolutely trustworthy and then not trust that same God with his own situation, with his own affairs, with this particular journey. He couldn't do it. He understood that to be hypocrisy. I pray the Lord would give us a holy aversion to hypocrisy, that we would say in preaching first to ourselves, "I cannot say I believe these things and then not live them. I can't do it." We see holy shame.

Now, do you know what fuels that holy shame? Holy jealousy. Holy jealousy. Jealous for what? Jealous for the name of God. Jealous for the reputation of God. Jealous for the reputation of the truth. He couldn't stand the thought of God's reputation, the truth's reputation being diminished in the eyes of unbelievers. There is an unbelieving king watching this. "There is an unbelieving nation watching this and I cannot, I cannot do anything that would not make much of my God." Jealousy for his holy name.

Then we see holy humility. There is false humility; there is fake humility. There is humility that isn't humility. That's not what you see in Ezra. This fasting, this imploring of the Lord, this was nothing fake. This was reality in his life. That's why God rewarded it. That's why God listened to them. They weren't acting humble. He really had a right view of God and a right view of himself. That's an affection, that's a passion that only salvation can produce. The desire to make much of God while recognizing we are nothing. Only the Lord can teach that, to be able to admit our need for God. Is there a situation you are facing tonight and you just need to admit your need for God? "I can't do this. I can't do this. Lord, you must do this. Now, I have responsibility in the matter. I know you're going to call upon me to obey in various areas but I can't do this."

Then you see holy trust. There is a holy trust, you could say a holy confidence, in God. I love verse 23, "So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty." I love that because that is a retrospective verse. That is something that he writes, he announces for the reader, what was to be proven later along the journey. He tells us in advance what the outcome was and then he announces it again in verse 31. It reminds me of something that for the writer, for Ezra, the journey preceded the proof. For us, we get the proof before the final word in verse 31 but for him, you see, they had to launch out trusting the Lord, putting their entire case in God's hand. "If we perish, we perish. We are going to obey you. We're not going to ask for a military escort. We are just going to trust you, Lord. We're going to trust you." And he tells us in advance, "By

the way, the Lord heard us. He heard us. He helped us." We talked about it Wednesday night, walking by faith not by sight, resting everything on their sure word of God.

Do you know what that leads to? A wonderful thing, you see it in verse 31, "and he listened to our entreaty," that is holy joy. Holy joy. Holy satisfaction because God put himself on display. God proved himself. Jesus, Jesus, how I trust you. How I, what? Proved you over and over. I wonder, can we say that tonight? Have we proven the Lord? That is, have we trusted him in such a way that God has been able to put his trustworthy character on display through our faith? Matthew Henry said this, "He told the king, verse 22, what principles he went upon that those who seek God are safe under the shadow of his wings even in their greatest dangers but those who forsake him are continually exposed even when they are most secure. God's servants have his power engaged for them. His enemies have it engaged against them. This Ezra believed with his heart and with his mouth made confession of it before the king and therefore he was ashamed to ask of the king a convoy lest thereby he should give occasion to the king and those about him to suspect either God's power to help his people or Ezra's confidence in that power." Then the prince of preachers, Mr. Spurgeon, had this to say, "It is to be feared that few believers feel this holy jealousy for God. Even those who in a measure walk by faith occasionally mar the luster of their life by craving aid from man. It is a most blessed thing to have no props and no buttresses but to stand upright on the Rock of Ages, upheld by the Lord alone. Would any believer seek state endowments for their church if they remembered that the Lord is dishonored by their asking Caesar's aid? As if the Lord could not supply the needs of his own cause? Should we run so hastily to friends and relations for assistance if we remembered that the Lord is magnified by our implicit reliance upon his solitary arm? My soul, wait thou only upon God. But says one, are not means to be used? Assuredly they are but our fault seldom lies in their neglect. Far more frequently it springs out of foolishly believing in them instead of believing in God. Few run too far in neglecting the creature's arm but very many sin greatly in making too much of it. Learn, dear reader, to glorify the Lord by leaving means untried if by using them, thou wouldest dishonor the name of the Lord."

So what I'm saying is this, folks: we continue in the Christian life the same way we began it. What did we do? We believed God's report and we believed in his Son. We abandoned our lives to the Son of God. We abandoned our lives to the Son of God. We trusted in Jesus with all that we are. We took up our cross to follow him. We received him as the Lord who saves. We now are his possession, his property, blood bought. We are his. We exist for his purposes and we continue the way we began, just believing. That belief ushers forth in good works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. What kind of leadership then will we embrace? The kind that is full of humility, absolute confidence in God and his word and willing to spend and be spent to do his will. That's what I pray for our church. That's what I pray for you and that's what I pray for me. O Lord, let our sacrifice, let our investment, let our desires, let our everything reflect our view of who you are. We serve a big God. O Lord, may you do wonderful, mighty things through us, a work that is explained by you alone but, Lord, grant us just the privilege to be a part of it. Make much of yourself in and through our lives. If that is your prayer, would you say amen?

Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we love you. We thank you for what you have done. What you have done, we are reminded this morning, Lord, as we have been in Ephesians that salvation is all of God. It's your work and we just bow before you and give you praise and thanks that we are objects of your mercy. You have had gracious loving mercy upon us. Now Lord, we have one ambition and that is to do your will and to be well pleasing to you whether we are here on earth or we are standing before Jesus face-to-face. Lord, we need you for every step, for every decision, for everything we engage in. Without Christ, we can do nothing. So fill our hearts afresh and anew with those affections and passions that would allow us to live out the principles of your word courageously and with full confidence. If anyone listening to me tonight, Lord, is a stranger to all of this, they can't continue by this principle because they have never begun by it, they have never abandoned themselves to faith in your Son, O Lord, show them that and bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.