

19.10.25 am

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Preacher: Stuart King

[0:00] Well good morning, it's wonderful to be able to come together as we ask that the Lord would bless our time together as we open up his word. I'll just touch on a couple of intimations, I'll not go through any of them in any great detail, but just throughout the course of the service for those of you that want to, hopefully not adults, there's a creche available, which is just through this door and to the left if you feel the need that you want to use the creche.

There will also be a holiday Sunday school, which is for primary aged young ones and some preschool as well, so some of the younger ones can also head off to Sunday school as well.

That'll be after the second singing, after we do a wee short children's address at the front. Tea and coffee will be served afterwards, so especially if you're visiting with us, it would be good to have you stay back for a time of fellowship for some tea and coffee after the service.

The evening service will be at six o'clock and it will be taken by Scott McLeod, so I would encourage you if you're able to come out to that service as well. Hopefully throughout the rest of the notices, they were all self-explanatory.

The only other one to add was for puddings, not for me, as I've not eaten my breakfast, but Scalladale Camp, so similar to the camp in May, the Scalladale Camp will be meeting next weekend for the S4 to S6, I think it is, and they're going to be having lunch here, similar to last time.

[1:27] They'll be having lunch after the morning service next Sunday, so there's a plea for puddings. Puddings, it's going to be one of those, one for the church, one for me, so if you want to speak to anyone about puddings, maybe potential dietary requirements, you can speak to Anna McRae and she'll be able to confirm if there's any dietary needs.

But if you're able to make a pudding, it would be great, and as another thing to commit to our prayers for the following week. We'll begin our public worship of God this morning by singing to God's praise from Psalm 1.

We'll sing the whole of this psalm, Psalm 1 to God's praise. That man hath perfect blessedness, who walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men, nor stand in sinner's way, nor sitteth in the scorner's chair, but placeth his delight upon God's law and meditates on his law day and night.

We'll sing down to the end of the psalm, Psalm 1, and we'll stand to sing to God's praise. That man hath perfect blessedness, who walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men, nor stand in sin.

That man hath perfected, nor stand in sin.

[3:22] That man hath perfected, nor stand in sin.

His season yields his fruit, and his regret in hell.

And all he does shall prosper well, the wicked are not sold, but like they are unto the God, which with thy two grand proof.

In judgment therefore shall not stand, such as the God of the earth.

Nor in the assembly of the just shall we in death appear.

[5 : 14] For why the way of the Lord be in hell? Unto the Lord is told, for the last of the way of the wickedness shall quite be overgrown.

Amen. Let's join together in prayer. Let's pray. Our eternal and ever-blessed Father, Lord, we give you thanks that we find ourselves here in your house, singing praises to your most glorious name.

We give thanks, Lord, that as we look to you, we see a God that is not distant from us, a God that is near to us, a God that asks us to come to him, Lord.

So we thank you that we are indeed able to. We're able to pray to you. We're able to bring before you all our petitions, all the concerns that we have, as well as all thanks that we have to offer up to you, Lord.

We pray that as we come to you, we are coming in a, not in a passive way, but in a way that has a desire to know more about you.

[6 : 47] As we open up your word today, we pray that it would speak to us. We pray that we would be able to glean much from it. That we would be able to see you on each and every page, Lord.

As we look to the cross, we see the sending of your only son, him who knew no sin, who became sin for us, Lord. So we pray that as we look to that cross, we are not forgetful of the brutality of what took place there, that we are reminded of the suffering that took place on account of our own sins, Lord.

So we pray that as we come before you this day, that we are indeed reminded of that, that we don't sanitise what happened at the cross, but that we take the truth of the suffering that took place there.

For it allows us to remember wherever we find ourselves, whether in the mountaintops or whether in the depths of the valleys, Lord. Wherever each and every soul here in your house or listening online are, we know that we can come to a God that understands, a God that suffered much for us, Lord.

So we pray that as we do, that we are coming before you on our knees and asking for mercy, not according to anything we have done, not according to anything that we can do, but according to your steadfast love and your abundant mercy.

[8 : 07] So we ask, Lord, that you would speak to us this day, Lord. We give you thanks for those who are here. We pray for those that are unable to be with us. We think of those that are maybe unwell at this time, maybe in hospital or housebound.

We ask, Lord, that you would indeed be with them, that you would comfort them in their time of difficulty and that you would minister to their needs, Lord.

We know that you are indeed the great physician. And we ask, Lord, that if it is indeed your will, that you would lay your hand upon them. We pray for those unable to be with us for other reasons, particularly those who are maybe in hospital, maybe going through treatment at the moment.

We bring before you Lydia again, Lord. We give you thanks that you've upheld her so far, Lord, and ask that you would continue with her through these weeks ahead of treatment, Lord, that you would go before her in all that she does and that the family would be comforted, that they would be comforted by your presence, that they would be turning to you in their time of need, Lord, that they would be asking for you to intervene, Lord, and that they would take comfort and refuge in you and in you alone, Lord.

So we pray for her at this time, Lord. We pray for others that are not here. We especially bring before you those who have woken this very morning with no thought of you and will put their head down on the pillow in the evening again with no thought of you, Lord.

[9:32] We pray for those who have made a conscious decision not to come here and ask that you would indeed minister to them as well, Lord. Make yourself known to them. Reveal to them their need of mercy.

Reveal their need of a saviour and ask, Lord, that they would indeed cry out for that mercy and that they would turn to you in all things, Lord. We give you thanks for the congregation here, Lord.

We thank you for our minister. We pray for David, Mary, and the family, Lord, as they have a time away at this moment, Lord. We pray that they would come back refreshed and that they would indeed have had a relaxing time away as well, Lord.

So we pray for his ministry here and ask that you would continue to go before David, Lord. We give you thanks that each and every week in his studies and his preparations and in his pastoring to your flock here, Lord, that you have continued to uphold him, Lord.

And we ask that you would indeed do so in the weeks, months and years ahead as well, Lord. We pray as well, Lord, in recent weeks for our new members, our five new members that came before you at the table, Lord, a couple of weeks ago.

[10:37] We indeed bring them before you this morning. We pray for Victoria. We pray for Gina. We pray for Kirsty, Marie, Lois and Ailey and ask that you would, in these early weeks, Lord, that you would be with them, that you would go alongside them and that they would indeed be encouraged to continue to come to the means of grace, to hear your word, to share your word with those that they encounter, whether in work or in the local community or even in their own homes, Lord, that you would bless them and that you would equip them, Lord.

So be with us just now, Lord. Go before us in all that we do. In Christ's precious name we pray. Amen. Amen. Okay, boys and girls. Girls, it's very Glaswegian, sorry. If you don't mind coming to the front, there's probably, oh, there's a few of you still around.

Come and have a wee seat. And then you're going to have a nice time in Sunday school afterwards. There's loads. Welcome.

Are you all enjoying your holidays? Come on. No? Are you having fun on your holiday? Yeah. That's better. That's what we want to hear.

Well, I'm going to speak to you a little bit about, I'm going to call it being coachable. Now, you've maybe not heard that word before, but I'm going to ask you, have any of you, who's got a teacher?

[11:57] Maybe in Scalaric or in school, have you all got a teacher yet? Okay. And they tell you what to do? Yeah. Oh, big nods there. I won't ask who your teacher is. That was a big nod there, really. So, we've all got teachers.

Well, hopefully. How many of you get told what to do by them? Do you all get told to do something by your teachers? Yes, we do. And what about who does maybe a sport?

Does anyone do sports? Or Thailand dancing? Or music? Does anyone do any of these things? Yeah, well, jigs. Hands up if you do. Okay. And the person that's maybe conducting, it may be a choir.

It could be a football coach. It could be your teacher. They all tell us what to do. Now, I am a big fan of American sports. Does anyone watch American sports?

And if you all say yes, I know you're just saying it. Oh, you're just saying it now. So, I like American sports. And their coaches are always very enthusiastic. And it could be that your coach was telling you to pass the ball.

[12:56] Or a teacher was telling you to behave yourself. Or to listen to the lesson. We're always getting told what to do. It might even be a parent, a grandparent, or somebody in your family telling you to clean your room.

Who's got a dirty room? Good job. You all put your hands up there. So, you can fix that. I want that done by the time school's back. But I saw a video of this coach. Now, I think he was a baseball coach.

And he was speaking to the team. And it actually speaks a little bit to the message that we're going to share with the older ones today. And if it comes up, hopefully it does. If it doesn't, I've got it on my phone. But if you're able to listen to this, it's very short.

I just want you to hear what this coach says to his team. And then I'll speak to you a little bit about it. If a coach gives you an instruction and your response is, I know. Or, but I wasn't.

Or, I heard. Or, yeah, but then this happened. Just be coachable. Just take the instruction in. You know? This isn't about be perfect. This isn't about never be wrong.

[13:54] If you don't have enough toughness to be coachable to take some instruction in. I'm trying to win. With God's word and how we are coachable in that. Give it a wee second.

Yeah. That's fine.

And it's something maybe parents, if anyone wants it, I'm happy to WhatsApp it if you want to remind your children. If a coach gives you an instruction and your response is, I know. Or, but I wasn't. Or I heard.

Or, yeah, but then this happened. Just be coachable. Just take the instruction in. You know? This isn't about be perfect. This isn't about never be wrong. If you don't have enough toughness to be coachable to take some instruction in.

I'm trying to win. I'm trying to help be a part of the win and not the reason why we lost. So, very short. It's a very short video. But what he's saying there is, when we're given an instruction, so when a teacher or a coach or someone tells you what to do, especially a parent, we shouldn't be responding with, oh, yeah, but.

[15:06] But, so if, I'll pick on somebody. If I tell Anna, I would never do this, to take the bins out. It's a wee bit too small. And if her response is, oh, yeah, but it's Emily's turn or I'll do it tomorrow or I'm tired or I'm watching this program, we shouldn't be giving ourselves excuses when we're told what to do.

And it's the same when we're looking at God's word. God's word tells us so much that we are to do. But we often put an excuse in. Maybe it's, oh, I'm going to go to the prayer meeting.

Oh, but I've got this to finish off. Or I've got a pudding to make for Anna for next week. There could be any number of reasons. But that coach and what he says there, just take the instruction in.

And that's how we should deal with God's word. Now, I want to give you a quick example. It's God's, what God tells us to do. Does he want us to do it because he wants to harm us?

No, he doesn't. And it's the same with your coaches. So if you've got somebody telling you how to play football, it's because they want to help you win. If you have parents telling you to do something, no matter how much you think, it's because they're having a go at you just for that reason.

[16:12] It's not. It's because they want you to be better. They want you to be disciplined. And they want you to grow up and be a good human to society. So I want to give you one example. In the Bible, it says, love your neighbor as yourself.

So somebody that is coachable, somebody that listens to the instruction that the Bible tells us would say something like, yeah, somebody that's not coachable, sorry. So somebody that is not coachable would say, okay, but my neighbor's so mean to me.

Or, okay, no, I do. I need to try harder, but I'll do it next week. Or I'd really rather just be on my own and not have to be nice to my neighbor. So that's somebody that is not coachable.

But somebody that is coachable and listens to God's instruction and does what it tells us would say, okay, God, I hear what you're saying and I'm going to go and I'm going to be friendly to my neighbor.

And I'm going to go and invite them to play or do something like that. Or how can I love the person that's next door to me? Or how can I love this person in school that is a little bit annoying and doesn't really give me a break?

[17:17] It could be a sibling as well. But as long as we're saying, I will try to follow your instructions, it's important that we become coachable. And there's two things I want to leave you with. And we're going to touch on this a little bit with the adults.

Two things to be coachable. First, we need to listen. We need to listen to the instruction. And then we need to act. It's all good. It's all well and good that we sit and read God's word and we hear what he tells us to do.

But if we don't then turn that into action, we're not really doing what God's word tells us. So when we are told what to do from the Bible, whether it's through your readings, whether it's through Sunday school, we need to go and we need to do what it tells us.

We don't say, give us excuses why we're not going to do it. We need to be praying that God would help us. And when we read the Bible, let's stop saying like that video, oh, I know, or yeah, but I'll do it another time.

We need to say, yes, God, I will do it. And we focus on everything that he tells us. So we need to be coachable. And the older ones are going to be told to be coachable as well. But we'll say a wee word of prayer just before we sing.

[18:23] And then you go to Sunday school. So let's close our eyes, hands together. Heavenly Father, Lord, we give you thanks that we are able to speak to the young ones today. We thank you that we've got so many out today.

And we pray, Lord, that as they hear your word, whether through Sunday school, whether at home, that they take that instruction in. That like the coach on the video said that we would not put excuses in the way, but that we would take the instruction and then we would do the instruction as God has told us to.

All because God wants us to be a blessing to others, to be fruitful in our lives, and to be able to point people to the cross, Lord.

So we pray that as we read today and as we expound on your word, that we are reminded of our role in not just listening to the word, but actually doing what the word tells us, Lord. So be with the young ones just now.

Go before them in everything. We give you thanks for Kiki and Anna as they teach them this morning as well, Lord. So be with them in their time in Sunday school. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[19:24] Now just before you guys go through next door, we're going to sing Mission Praise 473. And the main bit I want to think about is the chorus there. We're not relying on anything that we do.

And when we come to the passage that we're going to read in Ezra, this chorus is perfect. On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.

For the good hand of his God was on him. 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. This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe.

A man learned in matters of 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.

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.

[25 : 21] For you are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand.

And also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem. With all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia.

And with freewill offering of the people and the priests vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem.

With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs with their grain offerings and their drink offerings. And you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem.

Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem.

[26 : 26] And whatever else is required of the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury. 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. Up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cores of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil and salt without prescribing how much.

Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons.

We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any one of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or the servants of the house of God.

And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province beyond the river, all such as know the laws of your God.

[27 : 37] And those who do not know them, you shall teach. 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.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty officers.

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. Amen, and may the Lord bless the reading of his own holy word.

Well, just before we come back to that passage, we'll sing Psalm 119 in Gaelic, the first two stanzas of Psalm 119. Blessed are they that undefiled and straight are in the way, who in the Lord's most holy law do walk and do not stray.

Blessed are they who to observe his statutes are inclined, and who do seek the living God with their whole heart and mind. We'll sing the first two verses of Psalm 119 in Gaelic, and we'll remain seated to sing.

[illegible]

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[32:14] Amen. Just before we turn back to God's word, we'll say a short word of prayer and ask a blessing on it.

Our gracious and ever-blessed Father, Lord, we give you thanks for your word. We thank you that we have it so readily available to us. We pray, Lord, that you would speak to us as we explore this passage and the chapter that we read in Ezra.

We pray, Lord, as well for our neighbouring congregations where Christ crucified is preached, Lord. We ask that you would indeed bless their respective fellowships across our islands and beyond.

And we pray, Lord, that we would not be forgetful of how blessed we are to be able to turn to your word without the fear of persecution. We bring before you those who are around the world in difficult corners of your vineyard.

Find struggles, even on this your day, where persecution and oppression are such that it can be weary and it can be emotional for them, Lord.

[33:27] So we pray for those who are maybe struggling this very day. And we ask, Lord, that we would be remembering them in our prayers and that we would indeed be bringing them before you in all things, Lord. So bless our time together, Lord.

Speak to us afresh this day, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you could turn back in your Bibles to Ezra chapter 7, our focus is really just coming from one verse in the passage and it's verse 10.

Verse 10, and I'll just read it just now. 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.

Now, we're obviously just parachuting here into chapter 7 of the book of Ezra. So I'll just do a very quick run-through of the first six chapters as to kind of where we're at, what kind of context are we looking at here when we consider this verse.

So the first six chapters kind of cover a period from 538 BC to 516 BC and it follows a decree from Cyrus who was the king of Persia at the time and the first group of exiled people returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel.

[34 : 45] So that covers really chapters 1 and 2. There's that first wave of return from Babylon to Jerusalem. And their immediate goal, as you go into kind of chapters 3, was to rebuild the temple.

Now, there had been opposition from surrounding people which halted the work, as you'll see in chapter 4. But it recommenced again. So that desire to build the temple recommenced again later through the prophetic urgings of Haggai and Zechariah, which you'll find in chapter 5.

Then King Darius. So you'll find if you read Ezra jumps, it's quite a significant amount of time passed by in each chapter.

So you're not just going nice and neatly sequentially. It can be quite a jump at times. But King Darius had searched the archives. You'll read this in chapter 5, sorry, to look at the original decree that had been given by Cyrus.

And then he ordered that work to proceed, to start building the temple again. And he even provided royal funds to help. And then the second temple was finally completed.

[35 : 51] And then they had the Passover at the end of chapter 6. So if you're feeling like you want to go and read the first six chapters this afternoon, feel free to do that. But at the end of chapter 6, they've started, the building's complete, they've just celebrated Passover.

And that's really the setting of the stage for the arrival here of Ezra in chapter 7, which was many years later. It wasn't immediately after.

There was a number of years that had passed. But Ezra, he knows that ultimately God's people are being called back to the promised land. So he finds himself here in Persia. He's grown up and he's devoted his life to studying the law of God.

And he ends up having this great heart to return to Jerusalem and to be able to teach the law of God and to help refocus the life of God's people in God's place according to God's word.

And he knows that God's people are in God's place. They're in Jerusalem, the land that had been promised. He knows that the temple has been built. But what his burden is, is to actually go and almost reorder the lives and the way in which the people worship God and ensuring that it's according to his word.

[37 : 02] So similar to the way we spoke to the young ones, it's about seeing God's work in action. So this kind of in one sense is the next great return that you see in the book.

There are really three. Ezra and Nehemiah, I think historically they were together. They've been separated in Bibles recently. But as you read into Nehemiah, there's then a third great return in the book.

So today here, as we approach this word on 18th of October in our own world, we very much find ourselves in a profound cultural and spiritual crisis. You don't have to look far in the news to see that that is true.

There is indeed a desperate need for men and women upon whom the hand of the Lord rests. And it's in that divine favour which really stands in stark contrast to the terrifying judgment that awaits those that do not have the Lord's hand upon them and what he can enact upon his people.

And what he will do is he will give them over to their own desires. You just have to look at the Apostle Paul when he outlines this in the first chapter of the letter to the Romans.

[38 : 12] When a society rejects God, he may respond not with immediate fire, but with a more chilling verdict. He simply lets go, removing his restraining hand and allowing a culture to reap the disastrous consequences of its own rebellion.

And it's true to say that we live in such a similar time, a moment in history that cries out for individuals who by God's grace can stand in the gap.

And it's in these moments that we must turn our attention to figures like Ezra. For in his life, we find a timeless blueprint. And even just in this passage or this verse alone, we see a timeless blueprint for how God prepares and uses a person to bring about revival and restoration.

So Ezra the scribe arises really from these pages in scripture as a true giant, I would say, whom God raised up to guide the Jewish exiles back to the promised land and to reestablish them as a nation after 70 years in Babylon.

Now Ezra was a man whose success was rooted in one simple reality. Just in verse 6 there, the hand of the Lord God, Lord his God, was on him.

[39 : 24] That's not just a throwaway comment, but it's one with real power that behind it enabled him to do great things for God and just importantly to expect great things from God.

And the societal upheaval that defined Ezra's world finds a very similar echo in our own time. We even, again, don't have to look long into the news or to your newspapers.

You find there's mass movements of people across our globe and it really is on a global scale. And in such an era, the people of God must ask one fundamental question.

Who are we going to be? Who are the Christians among us here? Who are we going to be in this world of chaos? The answer is not found in a political agenda.

It's not found on the right or the left's cultural position, but it's about dusting ourselves off and getting busy with the work that God has called us to at a local level for his glory.

[40 : 23] And Ezra provides this model for this work and the secret to this impact is explicitly stated in that single powerful verse, Ezra chapter 7 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 this verse is not just a biographical detail where we find something that Ezra has done.

It's an inspired blueprint for us to take note of both personally and as well corporately as a congregation. We should take heed of these words. Now this model itself really helps us because it gives us a process that remains as relevant today in our time as it did in 5th century BC.

So there's really four points I want us to focus on and it's very self-explanatory. It just jumps off from the page. So the first thing we ought to do is to set your heart. The second thing we do is study God's word.

The third thing is do God's word. And the fourth thing is teach God's word. And this is a pattern of study, application and instruction that God still uses to raise up leaders and put his hand upon them today.

[41 : 40] So where do we start? This first point to set your heart. The entire blueprint that Ezra gives us begins not with a grand public announcement of what he's going to do but with a quiet internal and intentional act of setting his own heart.

And the Christian life should be a life of intention. It's a conscious and continuous response to the glorious grace of God. And this attitude is captured perfectly in the opening words of our text today.

For Ezra had set his heart. This was not an exercise in willpower or him setting aside a time to have a spiritual commitment within.

Rather it was a decisive response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. God had poured out his grace stirring Ezra's soul and impressing upon him the urgency of the hour.

And in response to that encouragement Ezra made a plan. He resolved to stop wasting time to cease treading water in this cultural chaos that he was in and to get busy with the specific calling God had placed upon his life.

[42 : 51] to set one's heart is to declare that today matters for eternity. To reject the drift of a lazy faith of a kind of passive life and to align one's entire being with the purpose of God and of God alone.

And the great danger of our age is living that passive life just coasting along and it's often what the world wants us to do. It could be a life lived by default rather than by design.

I've got this book I think it's like six it's either 6,000 or 10,000 illustrations and I managed to come across this story which I think helpfully explains what it can often look like in life which is something that we ought to be mindful of and it says the story is about a prince who becomes a master archer.

The prince excels to such a point that he believes he's the finest archer in the world. On his journey homeward the prince stops in a small town to get something to drink. Across from the tavern the prince sees a building with painted targets on it along the side of the building and there is a single arrow dead centre on every single target on the barn.

How could such a master archer be living in this small town? Finally the prince sees this young boy and asks him it was me says the boy show me demands the prince.

[44 : 17] They stand the boy takes aim the boy hits the side of the barn far away from any of the targets and he runs into the barn comes out with a brush and a can of paint and he paints a circle around and another couple of circles around the arrow again and he said that's how I do it first I shoot the arrow and then I draw the target and in many ways it is a tragic and accurate picture of how many people live today.

Our actions often are random they're undisciplined we just let the wind carry us let the world carry us where it may and then we paint our priorities around what's going on in our lives and we see that as justifying the life that we're living but the hard truth remains if you aim at nothing you will hit it every time to set one's heart as Ezra did is to reject this life is to draw the target first and then aim every action towards the bullseye before you how then does one practically set their heart how do we do this there's three very quick ones and they are very quick ways that we can set our heart and we've sung one of them already so it's to set our heart on a solid rock a determined heart requires an unshakable foundation it's pointless to set your heart on the shifting sands of your emotions your circumstances or even the approval of the world around us the heart must be fixed upon that which is firm and eternal as we sang there on Christ the solid rock

I stand all other ground is sinking sand not some other ground or most other ground but all other ground is sinking sand to set your heart is first and foremost to set it upon the person and the work of Jesus Christ he is that immovable object the cornerstone upon which a life of purpose can be built anything not grounded in him will ultimately fail second way we can set our hearts is in our routines and the patterns that we have in our life our well intentioned aspirations disappear or vanish without the structure of routine to set one's heart means to develop those daily weekly and even yearly patterns that reinforce our spiritual priorities it means scheduling time for prayer whether that's quiet time whether that's family time it means scheduling time to study God's word committing to come to corporate worship to be here in the building to hear God's word coming around the means of grace critically it cannot be a solo endeavour though you don't want to be packing it in after a few weeks we need to surround ourselves with fellow travellers on the journey of faith those trusted brothers and sisters who will provide the accountability necessary to persevere when our motivation begins to falter it can be difficult sometimes the pressures of the world can seep in and maybe even just that morning prayer can just get saturated with so many different distractions so surround yourself with those who will keep us accountable and a heart set within a routine is guarded against distraction and discouragement and then the third very quick thing when we set our heart is to set our heart in faith and that's got two distinct outworkings the first is with repentance acknowledging our sin and affirming that Christ is the undisputed king of all the earth and it's to be done with humility and to be submissive and the second thing is to step forward each day in faithful expectation anticipating that

God is going to do great and mighty things in his kingdom in and through his people and this is done by continually believing God's promises we ought to shudder at his warnings and live our lives according to his commands taking the instructions we spoke to the young ones about from God's word and setting your heart is a non-negotiable it's that first step it's the reason that Ezra says that at the beginning of this verse it's non-negotiable it's the act of kind of clearing the ground in our lives and pouring that solid foundation of Christ upon which our purpose can be built once that heart is set it's then prepared for the next crucial stage I want us to look at our second point to study God's word after setting his heart the text tells us Ezra focused his intention to study the law of the Lord and it's important to understand there is a stark difference between just a casual reading of God's word and that deep studious engagement that characterised

Ezra's life now we live I don't need to remind you but we all very much live in a very shallow culture one that values little soundbites soundbites over substance a quick scroll here a quick read of a headline it's not what we see here a word for the day it could be in your bible it might just be a verse of the day not actually sitting and focusing on God's word and I read a study in 2004 attention spans of any adult the kind of average attention span of an adult was two and a half minutes and in 2025 it's 47 seconds so you're seeing it's plummeting so our attention spans are so low and in such an environment it can feel sometimes like an act of warfare to get our minds and our affections to go deep down into God's word and I speak to myself first I was very much preaching this to myself throughout the week this is not about a quick 10 or 20 minute devotional it's about rigorous disciplined and determined work of study it's a process by which we allow the truth of

[50:01] God to penetrate every aspect of our being this study is a discipline that involves personal and corporate effort for us to emulate Ezra's example it requires a sincere approach to absorbing and understanding God's law and the first way we do that is asking how how do we do this how might we study there are many ways but I'll touch on two very quickly the primary means God is appointed for the instruction of his people is the public hearing of his word therefore studying God's word ought to begin with the diligent attendance to the preaching with the congregation here or if you're visiting with the congregation that you're visiting us from and this is not just an act of just passive listening coming in hearing what's being said it's a it's an active readiness to engage with the text that's being expounded and maybe a question and again I speak to myself first do you come ready to hear God's word do you prepare your heart for the

Lord's day do you prayerfully come ready to study the word along with David as he preaches here and the rest of the congregation do you take the truths in do you remember them do you ponder them throughout the week we sang psalm 1 at the beginning and we see in psalm 1 it says upon God's law he meditates this is a blessed man upon God's law he meditates on his law day and night and that word meditate it's not just quickly reading it it's I think the translation is almost like chewing the word like a cow would chew the cud we would chew on that word we don't just gloss over it but we're actually digesting that word and do you go away each Sunday morning and evening or in the Wednesday evening prayer meeting do you go away and read that word again chew on that word that you've heard or do you just sit there do you look do you watch do you think of your to-do list for the week which is getting longer and longer the call from Ezra is to reject this approach and to embrace a student mindset that comes eager to learn and to be transformed and the second way that we can do it so we focus there on coming to hear

God's word the second way is in a personal and a corporate Bible study so personal Bible study is essential for spiritual growth it provides that direct encounter with God's inspired truth which serves as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path consistent reading and meditation transforms the heart and mind and it helps a believer to discern God's will and apply it to our daily lives and this discipline equips you to resist temptation to grow in faith and to develop a mature understanding of God without this personal engagement our spiritual growth stagnates and it makes it difficult to maintain obedience and to have a close relationship with the Lord it is the primary means of us nourishing our soul to be in the word a deep faith cannot be refined in isolation it must be forged in a context of community and a thriving church should be a place that creates opportunities for this to happen opportunities to dig into the scripture so it may be the ladies fellowship on a

Monday it could be the men's bible study it's definitely our prayer meetings so those opportunities to come together and to study God's word are vital and this diversity ensures that the entire congregation at every stage of life and spiritual maturity has a place to study to grow and apply God's word in fellowship with others this devotion to study the law of the Lord is not merely an academic exercise it's intrinsically linked to God's promise of blessing you just have to look at our nation a nation that was once well acquainted with the word is not the case anymore and we're witnessing that decay before our eyes whether that be policies that we see from Holyrood from Westminster and it may be that in such moments we groan we recognise that the moral foundations have been abandoned Ezra sets his heart to study God's law because he understood that it was the only source of truth justice and stability in a world where people vied for his loyalty

Ezra knew that a nation filled with people who followed the one true God was a nation that could withstand any external pressure or even internal decay that commitment to study is really not the final goal as you see in the passage knowledge that is not applied becomes a source of pride and judgement deep study of the word of God is never an end in itself it must like we spoke to the young ones listening moves into action it must inevitably and urgently lead to personal application and action and that takes us to our third point which we see in this verse and that's that Ezra set his heart not only to study the law but also to do it to do God's word and this is again a critical non-negotiable extension from knowing to doing in our world that elevates feelings subjective feelings above all else the Bible constantly presses us beyond our emotions into a world of doing and it's

[55 : 34] God's word that should do God's work this stage in Ezra's sequence challenges us to remain to examine whether the truth we claim to believe has actually taken root in our lives we're to examine ourselves we may know all the right answers articulating sound theology in our Bible studies or a Sunday school class but the arena of our daily life if we fail to do these things it is noted by those who watch on Tim Keller said our time money and emotional energy are offered at the altars of comfort approval or pleasure if they are this is a betrayal of the gospel that must be relentlessly rooted out confronting this in our own lives is absolutely essential to spiritual growth I think it's Colossians 3 Paul says I don't know what verse it is but he says put to death therefore what is earthly in you and the call to action is a summons for every believer to examine their own life one of the clearest indicators of our true priorities is how we spend our time to step up and doing what God's word tells us means an honest audit of our diaries how much time in the day are we giving over to the

Lord how much time in the weekend do we give to the Lord we must ask ourselves how we have been spending the many many hours that we have each and every day are we wasting them on trivial pursuits are we intentionally investing our time in matters of eternal significance and again I speak to myself first pride is also a formidable barrier to doing God's word we cannot grow if we do not first acknowledge our need to grow stepping up and doing God's word requires humility to admit that we need to mature in our faith it means being open to correction open to instruction and to reproof from God's word and from his people we must be willing to see the areas of disobedience in our lives and repent of them rather than defending or justifying them just like that video when we spoke to the young ones we need to be coachable we need to take the instruction and not give up an excuse not say I'm not going to go to this Bible study or the prayer meeting because

I've not had my dinner or I'm not really feeling up for it today we need to be coachable take the instruction on without grumbling ultimately doing God's word is a matter of submission we must ask ourselves we ask ourselves today and ask myself do I willingly yield to the authority of God not the world not to myself not even to the church but to God those those that humbly submit do not argue with scripture do not negotiate its terms or ignore its commands instead they take on that instruction allowing it to convict correct and instruct them in every way of righteousness a life transformed by this obedience of doing God's word is the most powerful qualification that we can have in moving in to our next step in Ezra's model when our actions align with our convictions our lives gain a power that cannot be faked this is the essential foundation for the final step we've seen a set heart we've seen studying

God's word we've seen doing God's word and now I want us to end with teaching God's word I don't think because you're not a minister or a minister in training Scott that you can switch off at this point this is something for all of us to listen to in terms of teaching God's word the first three stages setting the heart studying the word and doing the word were all personal and effectively internal steps that we can take on our own they were private they were preparatory work that God was doing in Ezra's heart and his priorities and it's only after that deep internal work did God teaching the sequence reveals a profound truth teaching is not a separate activity for a select few specialists but it's the inevitable overflow of a set heart that has been saturated with God's word just think of the words of apostle

Paul where he speaks to the Romans again Romans 10 13 to 15 says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved how then will they call on him to believe in him of whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching and how are they to preach unless they are sent as it is written how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news the world around us in Harris and beyond is to be transformed it's because it learns a Christian understanding of everything and this requires believers not just ministers ministers in their relationships to be serious about teaching God's word it means praying for opportunities to share this word with those who God has placed in our lives one commentator said we must adopt a posture of faith adding one simple word to our observations my neighbour next door doesn't know

[61 : 14] Jesus yet my husband or wife doesn't know Jesus yet my colleague or my boss or my friends at work don't know Jesus yet the method for this effective teaching is modelled perfectly by Ezra the Christians walk and their life itself must be the primary illustration of God's work the world the UK and Scotland are tired of hypocrisy it's starving for authenticity and to the Christian among us your personal holiness your ongoing transformation into the image of Christ is the most compelling and powerful tool you possess for influencing others when people see that the word of God has changed you they will be more willing to believe that it can change them we're called to move from that internal preparation to external proclamation from being students of the word to becoming teachers of the word in whatever sphere of influence

God has placed you as we begin to close I want us to remember this example set before us by Ezra it's a clear and important pattern for a life of impact to firstly set our hearts to study God's word to do God's word and to teach God's word and this is God's methodology for raising up men and women upon whom his hand can rest individuals who can bring order out of chaos light into darkness and hope to the desperate it brings with the intentional decision to set a heart that matures through the deep discipline of study and meditation of his word and finds its fruits in allowing God's word to do God's work in us and concludes with the teaching of God's word with both our mouths and our lives the challenge again now becomes personal are you like Ezra are you studying God's word in such a way that you can draw blessing from it and then instruct and teach others around you not just from a pool pit but from your office from the shop from a fishing boat from a football pitch have you been trained for the kingdom of heaven

I want to close with a question what about those of us that are not yet believers well we must take heed of the warning found here perhaps you recognise the lost eternity that is before you you recognise that danger in your life maybe it's a life lived by default rather than by design and again that hard truth that we mentioned earlier if you aim at nothing you will hit it every time you cannot find stability if you set your life on the shifting sands and not on the solid rock of Jesus Christ like we looked at near the beginning the model of Ezra demands that we begin with a fundamental question that we will all go away with today who are you going to be who are we going to be if you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour I want you to think about that question as I was preparing at this point it led me back to Pilate in Matthew 27 22 and before

Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified he asked a very important question that is still before us here today and especially those that are not yet believers Pilate said to the crowd that were wanting to crucify Jesus after he found no fault in all he was doing he said then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ that's a question you will all be answering today what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ as we leave the doors here we will be answering that question either we will be trusting forward in a passive life what's your answer to this question you must first and foremost set your heart upon the person and work of Jesus Christ he is the solid rock upon which you can stand all other ground is sinking sand and as we saw earlier it begins with repentance acknowledging your sin and affirming that Christ is the undisputed king of all the earth you'll need humility you'll need to submit you must abandon the world's illusion of living your own life carving out your own identity in this world and that only you and you only can impact on the things in your life do not be content with a status quo that leads to a lost eternity where you're apart from

God therefore take the first steps of this divine blueprint that we see here to set your heart on Jesus Christ he's not merely a foundation he's the only foundation he's not merely an escape from eternal death and judgment he's the only escape of judgment in a culture that would have us stay silent within our walls here may we boldly speak of Jesus Christ as he truly is let us therefore commit ourselves to this helpful pattern Ezra lays before us with conviction may we set our hearts study God's word do God's word and teach God's word knowing that it's in his strength that we can do this we must declare this truth for he is king of kings and lord of lords amen and may the lord bless these very short reflections on his word we'll conclude by singing another hymn hymn 624 in mission praise 624 in mission praise take my life and let it be consecrated lord to thee take my moments and my days let them flow in ceaseless praise take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee take my voice and let me sing always only for my king take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee take my silver and my gold not a might would I withhold take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose take my will and make it thine it shall be no longer mine take my heart it is thine own it shall be thy royal throne take my love my lord

[67 : 45] I pour at thy feet its treasure store this whole hymn take my life and let it be and we'll stand to sing to God's praise take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee take my moments and my days let them blow in ceaseless name take my hands and let them move at the irl thoughts of thy love take my feet and let them be!

search a beautiful for thee take my voice and let me sing always only for my King take my lips and let them!

fill me fill with messages from thee Take my silver and gold gold what would I withhold Take my intellect and use every power of choose!

for us shall choose Take my will and make it thine It shall be no longer mine!

Take my heart it is thy own It shall be thy royal throne Take my love my Lord I own At thy feet its precious stone Take myself and I will be ever only long for thee Let's close in prayer Lord we give you thanks that we again can open your word Lord and as we see with that blueprint through Ezra Lord we pray as we sang that you would use us mightily as you used Ezra that you would take my life take my moments take my hands take my feet take my voice take my lips take my silver and my gold take my intellect take my will take my heart take my love take myself and I will be ever only all for thee and we close with these words now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our saviour through

[71 : 36] Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time now and forever Amen holy!

! holy! holy! holy! holy holy