

Ezra Was Ashamed, Would You Have Been

by James Jennings

This sermon focuses on the story of Ezra and his journey to Jerusalem, highlighting the importance of trusting in God's protection and not contradicting what we proclaim about God. Ezra's sensitivity to shame and his commitment to studying, obeying, and teaching the law of the Lord serve as examples for believers to follow. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to be sensitive to their actions, especially in areas where they may contradict their faith or fail to trust in God's care.

Scripture: Romans 6:21, Hebrews 12:2, Romans 10:11, Philippians 1:20, Hebrews 2:11

Topics: "Trusting in God's Protection", "Commitment to Obedience"

Description

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Transcript

Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Ezra. Chapter 8. The book of Ezra starts right where 2 Chronicles left off. So if you find 2 Chronicles, you will find Ezra right there.

The keen sires of Persia, the Lord stirred his heart, so he gave permission to the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. And then we have the book of Ezra. Ezra, who is he? He's a priest.

He's a direct descendant of Aaron. And he's being sent back to Jerusalem to really focus, you could say, on a spiritual reform. And at the time before the journey they're about to take, which is where we're going to start, we're going to look right before they go on this journey.

The temple's already been rebuilt. And this is before Nehemiah has been sent back and rebuilt the walls. And so all these characters, you even read in Ezra of Haggai and Zechariah, they were prophesying in the book of Ezra.

And so some of these Old Testament letters there at the end, they're happening right now in this 100-year period. And so we're going to be in Ezra 8 primarily, but we're going to look at a couple of verses in chapter 7. And we're going to pick up prior to Ezra taking off on this journey. So let me pray again as well.

Father, Lord, we thank You. Lord, we thank You for being our God. We thank You that we can praise the name of Jesus Christ this morning.

We thank You that we have all these promises. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You're seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Lord, we thank You that You're sovereign and You're in control, that we can look to You, we can trust in You, we can boast in You this morning.

And Lord, that is where our boast is at in Christ. But God forbid that we should boast, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul said, and so Lord, I just pray You'd help me to help these sheep this morning.

Lord, to exhort them, to encourage them, to challenge them at the same time. Lord, just in the end to point us all back to Christ. In Christ's name, Amen.

So, Ezra 7. We're going to read v. 7-10. It describes this journey. And there went up also to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites and the sinners and gatekeepers and the temple servants.

And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 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. For the good hand of his God was on him.

For Ezra had set his heart..." Ezra, look at this is what type of man he was. He had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach it, to teach His statutes and rules in Israel. So you can see here this journey that they're going to go on, it takes about four months.

It's a four month journey from Babylonia, and that's basically south of modern-day Baghdad, Iraq. And they no doubt probably didn't just go right through the desert, but they went up the Fertile Crescent by the Euphrates River, and this is about a 900 mile journey. So they're going right here from Baghdad, that area, they're going 900 miles around, taking four months to get to Jerusalem.

So now let's look at verse 14. Let's look a little more at what's happening here. For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors 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 counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel whose dwelling is in Jerusalem with all the silver and gold that you find in the whole province of Babylonia and with the free will offering.

So the point is, God has so worked on the king. I mean, they're going back with all manner of gold and silver here to Jerusalem. And the idea is this is millions and millions of dollars worth if you want to put it in American currency.

So, so far we got a four month journey, 900 miles, and they got millions of dollars. Okay, this is how this journey is forming up. And then we go to chapter, at the end of chapter seven, verse 27 is where you start having Ezra's memoirs, you could say.

This is actually Ezra speaking. And he's thanking the Lord in verse 27. 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 to extend it to me His steadfast love before the king and his counselors, 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. So he's preparing to go on this journey. Chapter eight, verses one to 14, it basically talks about who all's going.

We're not going to read all of that, but if you add all the numbers up, you get around 1700 people, not including women and children. So it's estimated there's about 5,000 people on this journey. Okay, four month journey, 900 miles, 5,000 people with millions of dollars.

Okay, that's the idea so far. Now, verse 15, I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priest, I found there was none of the sons of Levi.

So the Levites didn't even show up. So now you've got a delay on when they leave to go to Jerusalem to wait till the Levites get here. I don't know, were they afraid? It doesn't say why they weren't there.

But then the Levites show up after this delay in the trip. And if you read at this time when they're about to go on this journey, if you read extra-biblical sources, they point out there was unrest going on. Persia had taken over Egypt, but there was a revolt going on there.

It's not like things in the Persian Empire. There was all this stability that was happening right here. And now we're going to go to verse 21.

And this is our main section that I'm going to spend. It's verse 21-23 of chapter 8. And one thing you notice, before we read the whole section, notice he says here, he's praying for a safe journey. Verse 21.

And then if you look at verse 31, he speaks about being delivered from the hand of the enemy from ambushes by the way. So Ezra obviously knew there could be all sorts of ambushes that would happen on the way. Okay, so all that to say this, we've got 5,000 people with millions of dollars.

There's women and children. The Levites showed up late. They're traveling for four months, 900 miles.

Who would want to be leading that expedition? They're going through territory in which there could be ambushes. Who would want to be the leader of that to have to make certain pivotal decisions that could affect the lives of those 5,000 people and the resources that the king had given? Leadership is difficult when you're in situations to make decisions like that. So, how would Ezra, verse 10, as we saw in chapter 7, a man studied of the law who knows God, how would Ezra lead in this situation? And ask this for yourself.

I ask as pastors, how do we lead? As fathers, how do you lead? As singles in your own life, how would you lead in some situation like this? We're going to make it practical in the end and think of things in our own lives. How would you lead? Ezra now faced a pivotal decision. A pivotal decision.

Let's read v. 21-23. Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from our God a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. Now look at v. 22.

For I was ashamed... Ezra's ashamed to do what? This is a good type of shame. It's a shame we actually need more of. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way.

So this leader, you're telling me this leader with 5,000 people, millions of dollars on a four-month journey where there's possible ambushes on the way and there's political unrest, you're telling me this leader is

determining to not ask for soldiers to protect the people. That could sound like a pretty gutsy decision. Look at his reason.

He's ashamed to ask why since we had told the king. Since he had, you could say, preached a sermon to the king, what did he say in this sermon? What did he say in this speech to the king? He told the king this. He said to the king at some point earlier on, he said to 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 in view of this, we fasted and we implored our God for this protection and He listened to our entreaty. So what I want to look at this morning is a good type of shame that we all need more of.

This feeling of being ashamed that Ezra had, it is incredibly commendable. It speaks of his deep walk with the Lord to where there was a sensitivity here that that shame came over him. He had two options here.

Do I ask the king for protection? Or do I ask the king of kings for protection? Which one do I do? And Ezra had a gift that helped him determine which one to do, and that precious gift was his ability to sense shame when he thought about going in a certain direction. Because you stick another leader in here who doesn't have the reality of studying the law of God and knowing the history of Israel, that leader probably would have made a different situation based on what his eyes might have seen with this journey. Ezra was ashamed.

So our sense of shame when rightly lined up with God's Word, that is an incredible blessing. But why? Why? Why was he ashamed? We don't want to miss this. He had told the king something.

He had proclaimed something earlier to the king about the hand of our God being for good. So you get the idea, right? Imagine if you're Ezra. Imagine just me today if I'm boasting to you guys about the hand of our God being for good.

Right? And then I leave. And then Wednesday night at prayer meeting, I totally contradict what I preached on Sunday. And I say, you know what? The idea of trusting the Lord and Him being for good here for us on this journey, forget that.

We're going to go and ask for all the soldiers. Ezra was ashamed at not living out what he had preached. Ezra was ashamed at contradicting the bold boast in the Lord he had made.

He was ashamed of being, you could say, a hypocrite in this situation. So he had preached, proclaimed to the king. So now he's rightly ashamed to go back on that which he had boasted upon.

Because in doing so, he'd be communicating to the king that he didn't really believe his claim on God. He'd communicate to that king that man didn't really believe what he said. So he emphasized to the king the power of God.

How could he not go live that out? This is a classic example of James 1.22. Be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only deceiving yourself. Ezra's just simply speaking to be a doer of the Word. In this case, the very word he had spoken to the king about God being for good.

And this shame he experienced, we need more of it. We need more shame when we might contradict that which we say with our words, with our lives, whatever it might be. You can think about this.

If Ezra did go before the king, he felt no shame, and he said to the king, you know what? We really need a whole lot of protection from you. The king could have looked at him and said as Jesus did to the Pharisees in Matthew 23, Jesus said this, so do and observe what they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but they do not practice.

You see, Ezra was preaching, and then he was tested as a leader to actually do that which he preached and practice it. And all of us face this reality every week in our Christian lives in whatever sphere you're in. You don't have to be Ezra leading 5,000 people.

You can be a mother going to the store leading 5 children. And are you going to practice what you just preached to the children that morning on not grumbling? Do you have that sense of shame come over you when you contradict the very things you've proclaimed to your children? That gift of shame is a beautiful thing that God has given us. So that's what we're looking at.

I've got five points here, five observations I want to make about these verses. And don't forget this too. Ezra, he was tested to practice his faith in the Lord for four months.

I mean, this was not a five-hour journey. Four months. Four months.

And he knows the history. He knows about the Israelites who grumbled with Moses. If you're trying to lead these people in faith, you know you might get kicked back.

And the Levites didn't even show up. They were delayed to get there for a departure. Ezra is an example of a man who's totally dependent on God and does not want to contradict what he has said.

That is very commendable. So five points. Number one is this, Ezra felt ashamed to contradict what he had proclaimed to the king.

And this leadership decision was made in light of what reality being true in his life. Meaning this, if you want to make a decision like Ezra, what reality needs to be true in your life? As fathers, as pastors, as singles, if I'm going to make such a decision in faith, if I'm going to be able to have a sensitivity to feel ashamed at contradicting what I've said, what reality is true in my life? And what reality was true in Ezra's life? And let's look again at chapter 7, verse 10. He had just said in v. 9, the good hand of his God was on him.

Look at v. 10. It's too easy to read this over and not catch some of the nuances. This is Ezra.

Ezra had set his heart. What's that mean? The idea is the whole person. Ezra had set his whole person to do three things.

To study the law of the Lord. Does that say to read the Bible? It doesn't. It says to study it.

Jeff kind of pointed this out in the first hour. Nicodemus could read the Old Testament Scriptures, but did he understand it? So Ezra was a man who actually studied the law of God. That's the first thing.

He studied it so well that in Nehemiah 8, it says this, Ezra read from the book from the law of God with the others, and they gave the sense of what it meant so the people could understand the reading. So Ezra was able not just to read a verse, but to bring out the meaning of the verse to the people. And ultimately, the meaning of it to his own heart.

So Ezra studied, he meditated on the law of the Lord. For us, that's the whole Bible. And then what was the second thing? And he did it.

So Ezra was not a man who just read, but he sought to obey what he was reading. And then the third thing is he sought to proclaim what he had read. He went and actually taught it to others.

It's amazing what kind of position you put yourself in when you teach to others. It rightly makes you feel more accountable to live out what you were teaching. If you don't try to go teach to anyone else, you don't feel as much pressure maybe.

But when you try to tell someone else, mothers, when you try to teach your children, you guys need to do this, it makes you more accountable to live it out yourself. So what type of man was Ezra? His whole heart was about knowing who God is in the Bible and obeying it and proclaiming these glorious truths to others. In other words, you could say Ezra's life was about knowing God.

That's why he did what he did, right? He didn't just want to know the Bible. He wanted to know the God of the Bible. So Ezra was a man who knew God.

And when you know God, and you're walking with the Lord in an intimate way, there's a sensitivity here like Ezra had to be ashamed at the thought of going back to the king who you proclaimed God is going to protect you to and now you're going in asking him for protection. The man who's in the book, he has that sensitivity there by the Lord. He knew about the miracles God did for Israel.

He knew about the wrath that came upon Israel when they did not trust the Lord. And so often, leaders fell in decisions they make when their faith is not informed by the Scriptures and stirred up by the God of the Bible. The more we read the Scriptures, the more it stirs up our heart to trust the Lord.

So we could assume if Ezra was not in the Word as he was, he would not have led in the way that he led. And think about this, as he's studying, he's also hearing about recent events, right? He's probably stuff that's not even yet recorded. You know what happened 15 years earlier? What happened about 15 years before they left on this journey? The whole book of Esther happened.

You think he heard about that? Esther asking her servants to pray and fast for three days without food or water. Esther going before the king. And here, Ezra no doubt hears of how the Lord worked in King Ahasuerus' heart where He extended that scepter and she was granted her plea and God kept the Jews from being killed.

If you're Ezra and you know of that recent history, that affects your faith where it encourages you to say, yes, we can lay hold of the Lord here that He will protect us in this four-month journey with our millions of dollars and all these ambushes and 5,000 people including women and children. It encourages your faith. So history stirs us up.

So point number one, Ezra was sensitive enough to feel ashamed to not ask the king for help because Ezra was a man of the book and he knew God. He had set his feet on higher ground as he was studying the Scriptures to know who God is. So second point that we see here.

Trusting God does not mean you sit around and do nothing. Did Ezra just assume and presume that we're going to be protected on this journey? No, what did they do? What did he lead the people to do? Pray and fast. God's sovereignty does not neglect man's responsibility.

And that's what he does there. Verse 21, I proclaimed a fast there at the river that we might humble ourselves before our God. See, he's got a big view of God.

He realizes we're very insignificant and tiny and God is massive and He's powerful. So we humbled ourselves before our God to seek Him a safe journey for ourselves and our children and all our goods. He led the people to seek the Lord in prayer.

If you want a good verse on why before you go on a trip to pray for a safe journey, this is a good verse to quote. You realize I'm weak. I'm a weak driver.

There's weak drivers out there. There's people who could fall asleep at the wheel. We could die on this journey.

Lord, we need Your protection. We're trusting You. We need Your help.

And people might say, well, I prayed and I fasted and there's been no response. Well, you can go through the motions of praying and fasting, but it not really be laying hold of the Lord. Here's something else.

Think of this. Can you rephrase it and say this? Not I prayed and I fasted, but I humbled myself before God. Because that's the heart of it.

It's humbly saying, Lord, we are helpless without You. We have no power. We have no strength.

That's what it's doing. Because you don't eat food and you go and you pray five minutes. Is that humbling yourself before God? What's your motive? So obviously, Ezra here, there's a pure motive.

And amazingly, as we read here, God heard them. And that's not amazing. That's expected.

Verse 23, We fasted and implored our God for this and He listened to our entreaty. And then look at verse 31. Then we departed from the river of Ah on the twelfth day of the first month to go to Jerusalem.

And the hand of our God was on us. And He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. God heard them.

God actually heard them. Like the living God actually protected them and heard them. We don't want to read that over.

God is a God who hears prayer. And He heard their prayers for the four-month period. It wasn't like they got a month into it and they thought good, we're there.

God clearly answered. They had to maintain faith and endure to the end of that journey trusting the Lord. And it doesn't record what happened on the way.

It says here, delivered us from the hand of the enemy. How close did the enemy get to them? Was there an enemy on the hill out there that could have attacked and something supernatural happened that kept them from attacking? We don't know. I mean, that would be an amazing book if we had it.

The four-month journey of Ezra leading those people all the way to Jerusalem. Who knows what specifics happened during that time. But God heard them.

Here's another example in our Bibles of people seeking the Lord and God answering them. So, that was point number two. Ezra leadership didn't just assume God would protect, but they humbly casted themselves on the Lord in prayer and fasting for protection.

So we have to do the same. So third thing to think about here. Ezra was not just gripped by the positive blessing, God being for good, but Ezra was gripped by the negative warning, the power of His wrath is against all who forsake Him.

What do I mean? Look at that verse 22. He was ashamed, and then he gives the reason. What did they tell the king? The hand of our God is for good on all who seek Him.

Okay, so that's the positive thing. God's for good for all who seek Him. But what did Ezra also acknowledge? The power of His wrath is against all who forsake Him.

So Ezra, he wasn't just motivated by the fact that if we trust the Lord, there's good. He was rightly fearful of the warning. If I lead these people to not trust the Lord, like some leaders of old in the Old Testament did, great power and wrath from God might come upon us to judge us.

You see, in the same way in the Christian life, the warnings are in the Bible for the believer. They rightly put fear in us to make us cling all the more to the Lord. Not to ignore the warning and say it does not apply for us.

And one example of this is Asa. Asa, near the end of his life, he foolishly took gold and silver from the house of the Lord to hire Syria for his protection. He didn't rely on the Lord.

And 2 Chronicles says this, at that time, Hananiah the seer came to Asa, the king of Judah. And he said to him, because you've relied on the king of Syria and you did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. Were not the Ethiopians and Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen, yet because you relied on the Lord, He gave them into your hand? He's talking about a past victory.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless towards God. You have done foolishly in relying on man. For from now on, you will have wars.

So what did Asa face? Asa faced the actual judgment of God for his decision of not relying on the Lord. So my point is simple. Ezra was affected not just by the fact that there's a positive blessing of protection, but he knew if I lead the people for us to go back to the king and I ignore this sense of shame of doing that decision, I'm actually leading the people to possibly have the second half of what I said to the king happen.

And that be that wrath and judgment come upon us on the way. What we need is not superior numbers or visible protection. What we need is am I honoring and pleasing the Lord in this decision? Ask yourself this.

Was Ezra's decision to not get soldiers, was that a risky decision? What had more risk? Not getting soldiers or getting soldiers. What was more risky for the Israelites? For their protection? Getting the soldiers. The greater risk Ezra would have made as a leader was if he said let's go get the soldiers.

Because now, that boast he's made to the king about the Lord's going to protect us and His wrath will be upon us if we forsake Him, now Ezra's going in the direction of I'm not going to trust the Lord. Now the

people are at greater risk even though they have greater numbers. Because again, God does not deal with the visible.

He's defeated armies of hundreds of thousands with very few people. The Lord is powerful. Our thing is I want to make a right decision right here in faith.

Lord, what is it that I should do? So, point number three was that the warning of wrath that comes in not trusting the Lord was a motivator in Ezra's decision. He didn't dismiss the warning passages. Point number four, trusting in the Lord does not mean God cannot use soldiers as a means to protect you.

We've got to balance this out because you could take it and run with it in an incorrect direction. In Ezra's situation, having the means of protection by the soldiers would have been wrong. That doesn't mean the means of protection in every situation is wrong.

We don't dismiss that. Years later when Nehemiah went, Nehemiah 2 says this. This is Nehemiah's journey.

Now the king had sent with me the officers of the army and horsemen. Okay, is Ezra more spiritual because he didn't have soldiers? And Nehemiah did have soldiers and horsemen? Which one of them had the more spiritual journey? I would say neither. Both of them were in the middle of the will of God.

It just so happened Ezra had made a bold claim to the king, and so he realized, I put God's name out there. I can't go back on it. I need to now trust that the Lord will come through, even though it's going to take four months to see that fulfillment.

So, you think about Paul. Acts 21, Paul's getting beaten. And guess who saved Paul's life? The soldiers came in.

Right? It's not that Paul needed the Lord's protection. The Lord protected Paul with the soldiers. You see? A classic example of someone who's imbalancedly thinking about this was from John G. Patton's biography.

He was a missionary on cannibal-infested islands. Listen to this. This is Patton speaking.

This is his co-laborer. He says, Poor dear Mr. Madison, apparently unhinged, he locked himself all alone into what has been his study, telling his wife and me to go, for he has resolved to remain on the island and die. We tried to show him this is inconsistent.

We prayed to God to protect us and grant us a means of escape. And a boat came. And now he's refusing to accept the rescue sent to us at our last extremity.

We argued that it was surely better to live and work for Jesus than die as a self-made martyr who in God's sight was guilty of self-murder. You see, so Patton had a friend who wasn't thinking right. They were praying for protection and a boat came and the guy refused to hop on the boat.

That's a hyper-spirituality that's wrong, that's imbalanced. That's not what Ezra was doing. Why was Ezra not a self-made martyr? For one, no one died.

So he wasn't a self-made martyr because he survived, obviously. But there's no indication in the text that the king offered Ezra protection. You see, it'd be one thing if the king offered protection and he rejected it.

But there's no reason to believe the king offered it, so now it's on Ezra to go to the king and offer protection. And he felt ashamed at the thought of doing that. And look, you know what all this teaches? Our ultimate protection is from God.

Even if you have soldiers to protect you like Nehemiah, or you don't have them like Ezra, think of it like this. Someone has to protect the soldiers in order for the soldiers to be able to protect you. Right? So Nehemiah had soldiers, but they're only good protection if someone protects the soldiers from dying.

And who's going to protect the soldiers from getting killed? Goddess. So at the end of the day, you're ultimately relying on the Lord anyway to protect the soldiers so they can stay alive to protect you. We're cast on the Lord.

I thought about A.E. Glover. He was a missionary to China in the 1900s during the Boxer Rebellion. Many missionaries were martyred from the China Inland Mission.

And there's a book that Glover wrote called A Thousand Miles of Miracle. So Ezra had 900 miles. Glover had 1,000 miles.

1,000 miles to get out of China while people were trying to kill him and were killing other missionaries. He had a wife and children. They traveled 67 days in the hottest summer in 30 years in China.

And he says the Lord turned their 1,000 miles of peril into the Lord's 1,000 miles of miracle. But this is what happened. Initially, when they were leaving, guess what the Chinese government did? The Chinese government gave them protection.

How long do you think that lasted? A very, very short amount of time. And Glover had even said to his wife, he said, we're under official protection. And when the government has undertaken to safeguard us, what have we to fear? And then someone says, that goes for nothing in these circumstances.

The escort itself has betrayed us. They can easily excuse themselves to their superiors by saying they were overpowered or make some story up. And then Glover says this, sore anguish came upon me and soul distress.

The news must be kept at any cost for my dear wife. That would unduly alarm her. But you know what happened? Do you know who did protect them for 1,000 miles? Do you know who protected them from getting their heads cut off? Do you know who protected them at times when they were taken to be executed? The Lord did.

The Lord protected them. So even they who put their confidence in the government's protection, it ultimately failed them. They were delivered and made it out.

Now, there's many missionaries who did die and it was not a failure of God's protection. Obviously, it was their purpose to die for the glory of Christ in some way like we see throughout our Bibles. So, that was point number four.

Point number four was trusting in the Lord does not mean you cannot use soldiers as a means to protect you. But your ultimate trust is in the Lord. Then my fifth point.

Fifth point is this, our decisions as pastors, fathers, singles, they don't just have an effect upon ourselves as individuals in either a positive or negative way. Your decisions, my decisions that I make as a father,

they affect my four children and my wife either in a good way or a bad way. The decisions we make as pastors, the decisions we make as a church at the financial meeting next week, the decisions you make, they affect other people.

What do I mean? Who are two parties here that were affected by Ezra's decision? Verse 21, a safe journey for ourselves and our children. Our children. Think of this.

If Ezra was ashamed and asked for protection, the kids are witnessing that decision by the leader, right? And then whatever happened on the four months, those children, they're witnessing that decision that leader made. Okay? And on the flip side, guess what those children did witness? They witnessed four months of God miraculously preserving them from being ambushed and killed. Who wouldn't want to take this caravan out of weak people and take their millions of dollars? And those kids saw God preserve them.

Is that a positive or a negative thing that the children witnessed that? Positive. You know, say if they went the route of they did get the soldiers and say at that point the Lord did not judge them for that decision and they made it safely there. Let's say that happened hypothetically.

Or they made it there without soldiers. What more encourages the children that God is the living God? Having the soldiers or not having the soldiers? Obviously not having the soldiers because their eyes saw protection that was not visible. Say again? Yeah, and above all, they saw He was consistently living out what He had spoken.

And that's the thing. Ezra was ashamed at the thought of going back on a bold statement about God that he had made. He didn't want to be a hypocrite.

He didn't want to be boasting in the Lord and then just switch days later. But you think about the others who this affected. The lost people, right? The king.

Is it more evangelistic and helpful for the king for Ezra to not ask for protection and keep to his word? Or to go back on his word and go to the king and ask for protection? What's going to be more used to win the king to Christ? Yeah, not asking for protection. I mean, if you're the king and if your lost co-worker hears you boasting in the Lord, and you've got genuine trust in the Lord, and then you flip on that three days later, that doesn't help prove to that lost co-worker that you really believe what you said three days earlier. So your decisions, they're going to affect the lost? This king? They're going to affect lost children or even children who are saved.

Is it going to encourage their faith? And again, to make this practical for everyone, on mothers, how do you react when on a journey where you could be ambushed by sudden trials at the grocery store, and you just preached a sermon to your children about not grumbling and not being anxious? Or you just preached a sermon to your children about the important need to hand out Gospel tracts, and you have an opportunity, and you're too afraid. I'm not trying to beat you over the head, but that's how it practically goes down. Our kids are watching right there.

And if we've done something that we feel a sense of shame that I did not honor the Lord, we should turn to our kids and tell them that. Have humility and acknowledge our faults and failures that they realize we recognize what we did was not consistent with what we had spoken. So, point number five, Ezra's leadership decisions had a positive evangelistic effect on the lost king.

The king saw the power of the living God. That king might have been... who knows how much is on his radar, but he might have been wondering are they going to make it safe or not. And it had a positive effect on the children.

They witnessed God's protection firsthand. So, we see here, brethren, Ezra. We see something in Ezra to imitate.

A man who walked with God, lived in the Word of God, and thus he was ashamed at the thought of not trusting the Lord. He was ashamed at the thought of doing something that would contradict a previous boast he had made in the Lord. So, ask ourselves this, what actions have you or I done in which we were not ashamed, but we should have been? How sensitive are we to our sense of shame? And that will only be calibrated with how much we know who God is.

Because the more we know who God is from the Word, the more we know what pleases and honors Him. And we're able to discern in specific situations what is the right thing to do. Shame is a gift from God, like the conscience, like grieving the Holy Spirit.

It's a gift. But we need to be more sensitive. You see, Ezra shows us a degree of sensitivity from his closeness with the Lord that we need more of.

At least I feel I need more of that. Think about this, Jeremiah said this in 6.15, Were they ashamed when they committed the abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush.

When you think about being ashamed, you think about blushing. Your cheeks turning red. And you're embarrassed.

You're embarrassed. Jeremiah says they didn't know how to blush. What are things that we as individuals in a church don't know how to blush about that we should be blushing about? Ask yourself that question.

What are things in which I lack a degree of sensitivity of what is pleasing to God and I'm doing things that I should be ashamed of? There should be a sense of this isn't right. And yet, I don't even know how to blush. Well, it might be some areas.

And I'm just going to list some of these that came to my mind trying to think not of the things that are obvious. There's some things that are obvious and maybe some of these are obvious. But other ones of these, I think, they can be more subtle.

And the first is this, look, I keep hearing about people who use certain words that are profane to some degree and they're not ashamed and they think it's okay. You should learn how to blush for saying something that is corrupting if you're bearing the name of Christ. We need a higher degree of sensitivity.

The second thing, I've seen people too dogmatically boast where the Bible doesn't give a clear word. They tell others about it. Maybe they say we know for certain this is going to happen and it doesn't come to pass.

And since they were so dogmatic on it being from God, it appears like God had failed. We should be ashamed to speak too confidently beyond what is written. And that's what James 4 says.

If you say you'll go to this town and do such and such, if you say for certain you'll go and marry someone, all such boasting is arrogant, for you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life?

It's but a vapor. The third thing, when it comes to the workplace, you've told your co-worker, for example, of the peace of God in your life.

And you might even do it flippantly because it's just Christian speech and you should say it, right? But then a week later, you're grumbling and moaning at work and don't have any peace. We should be ashamed. And we should tell that co-worker, I'm ashamed how I represented the Lord.

That was not faithful to Him. The Lord has been faithful to me. The problem was me failing to trust the Lord at that moment.

Please, don't let that offend, get you a wrong view of who my God is, please. I'm sorry I misrepresented Him to you. Another thing, we should blush more in shame when we're so focused on ourselves and we're not about serving others.

And I realize this happens in so many different ways. You know what? As you're saved and a Christian, it's amazing you look back and you say, wow, I can't believe how self-focused I was five years ago. But then you think, well, what am I not seeing now about little things I'm doing that are all about serving me? We learn to blush more and more and be ashamed more and more of certain ways we serve self that we do not even recognize at the moment.

You know, it comes to an envious thoughts in your heart. As you compare yourself to another, you should blush. You should have shame come over you and think, no, this does not honor the Lord.

You know, you can kind of think of all the respectable sins, the so-called respectable sins, and Tim dealt with, what was the one he dealt with weeks ago? Covetousness, yeah. All of these respectable sins, we should actually look at them and say, we need more shame when we commit these things. And the only way we're going to get that is the more we know God.

Slandorous thoughts against another person. We should blush when we let those thoughts take hold and poison our mind against the person. It should be unacceptable.

I fear they should be ashamed of their immodesty in the way they dress. But they don't blush. At the stumbling block, their sensual clothing is to brothers in Christ.

They might not even be aware of what it's doing to their brothers. And they should blush at the thought when that garment is put on and there's a motivation of outward appearance. God loves a pure heart.

And as our world rapidly decays into perversion and the world's standards drop and all this certain type of clothing becomes acceptable, God forbid that enter into this church and our standards just drop right along with the church. We're trying to make it to heaven. And stumbling blocks from lust and opportunities to do that in this building, God forbid, we should blush at that.

When it comes to not working hard, to being idle, that's not respectable. That's something to be ashamed about. Paul even says that in 2 Thessalonians 3. He says to put a person out who won't work.

What's the reason he gives? That that person might be what? Ashamed. We actually put people out of the church who don't work so they will feel ashamed. Paul's basically saying this, that guy's lazy in his work and he doesn't know how to blush, so put him out so he can start having his cheeks turn red and blush and be embarrassed at the laziness.

That's what Paul's saying there in 2 Corinthians 3. And we've put maybe three or four people out of this church for not working and providing for their families, and sadly, some of them, they have not learned how to blush. They are not ashamed. Look, we could expand on this list.

The bigger thing is this. The bigger thing is not you expanding on a list of possible things. The bigger thing is you expanding your knowledge of the Lord.

Because as you expand your knowledge of the Lord, then a list of things will form which you will start to blush about and will personally be corrected on by the Lord. You see? So the focus isn't so much on what things should I be ashamed of in my life right now that I am not. If there's something that pricks my conscience and I'm pushing that away, I need to examine that.

The bigger thing is I need to know God more. The holy, holy, holy God of the Bible. I need to know more about what Christ has done.

Because as that happens, I will then be like Ezra as I study the law and teach the law and proclaim the law. I will then want to go and be ashamed at smaller things like going and asking for protection. Because I'm going back on something I said to someone.

I want that degree of sensitivity. I want all of us to have that degree of sensitivity. It's a mark of spirituality and knowing of God that Ezra had in his life.

See, Ezra moved far beyond that list of things that I just gave. His issue is being ashamed to contradict something he preached. For by doing so, he would not be trusting the Lord in faith.

We need that degree of sensitivity. Paul says in Romans 6.21 that we got no fruit from practicing sin. And listen to what he calls our sins.

He says, the things of which you are now ashamed. The things of which you are now ashamed. You see, Adam and Eve were in the garden, and it says they were not ashamed when they were naked because sin had not entered the world.

But when sin entered the world, you know what happened to Adam and Eve? They were afraid. They were ashamed and they hid from God. And here Paul says when we're saved, the things of which we are now ashamed, meaning the things we used to not be ashamed of, we are now ashamed of those things.

And I'm trying to add one to your list this morning. Be ashamed if you proclaim something about the Lord to then go back and contradict it. Because that's exactly what Ezra did not do.

Or he did do. He was ashamed. And therefore, he did not contradict what he had preached.

Think about that. Think, where in my life am I boasting of something in God and then I'm actually going back and asking for protection from the King? And the children and the lost world, they're witnessing that contradiction. Is there any area, Lord, in my life where that's happening right now? So, what are things that I've stressed and emphasized to the church, to my family? Am I living those out? Who have I spoken so much to about God's care? And then have they seen me not trusting in God's care? I want to think a moment about Christ.

And I gave away the answer right there, but the answer's pretty obvious. Who's the one person who was never ashamed for one decision they ever made? The Lord Jesus Christ. He never was ashamed of one

thought that He had.

He was never ashamed of failing to love someone in a perfect way. He was never ashamed of anything. And yet, Jesus amazingly is the person who's most mocked by the world and shamed the most by the world and by the religious leaders of His day.

Yet, Hebrews 12 says Jesus despised the shame. See, it's a shameful thing to go to a cross and be hung naked, paining there. There wasn't clothing on Christ.

Talk about the shame of that. Talk about someone being embarrassed. Their Christ is up there.

And then He's identified with criminals and with sinners. He didn't even have His own grave. He got put in someone else's grave.

He was forsaken by His friends. Think of what Christ bore for us. And Romans 10 and 11 says, everyone who believes in Jesus will not be put to shame.

You see, that's the greatest thing. The greatest thing you don't want to be ashamed about is dying in this life and not truly trusting Christ. Because there will be an eternity in hell of shame there, of missing out on the one treasure that matters, on the Word of Life.

And Jesus says if you desire, if you drink, come and drink. It's free. It's free.

Leave the things you're right now not ashamed of and trust Christ. He will change your heart and you will be ashamed of the things you once trusted in and boasted in and looked to. And think of this, believer.

This is an encouragement for you. Some believers dishonor the Lord by being ashamed for past sin that's already been confessed and dealt with. You should be ashamed of that.

Not get ashamed of that and fall into self-pity. But there should be a sense of no, I will believe Christ. Christ said that sin has been covered.

Christ said that sin is under the blood that has been put as far as the east is from the west. I'm not going to go on like the little flower, does He love me? Does He love me not? And peeling the petals off, I'm going to believe that the Lord does love me, that He has put away my sin, that it's real. We should be ashamed when we doubt the Lord, when we don't rest in His many, many, many, many promises.

And the great protection that we have, it's not from an ambush from physical men, but we have a devil who's a roaring lion and he's seeking about in this world to devour us. And we're on this journey to heaven and the Lord who began the good work, He's going to bring it to completion. He's protected us thus far.

He's going to keep protecting us. Like Charles Spurgeon said, we're like a bird flying through the air and thousands of arrows are being shot at it. And it's supernatural that not one of the arrows hits us.

It's supernatural that we actually make it to the end. And that's because God controls all the arrows and God is able to keep that from hitting us. So, if you were leading as Ezra was, would you too have been ashamed to ask protection in view of the boast you had just made about our God being for good for all those who seek Him? Let's pray.

Father, we think about Paul's words. Philippians 1.20 It's my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death, for me to live as Christ and to die as gain. Lord, that is our eager expectation.

We don't want to be at all ashamed. And Lord, we're so thankful it says in Hebrews that You're not ashamed to call us Your brothers. Despite all of our failings, despite all of our weaknesses, Lord, here we are this morning.

We want to set our feet on higher ground. Lord, we're not content with where we're at, Lord. And we're thankful for Your incredible patience with us.

Lord, thank You for Your long-suffering with us. Lord, thank You that You'll never leave us nor forsake us. And so we've set our eyes on You for protection.

Lord, as we continue on in this journey to heaven, Lord, protect us from ambushes this week. Give us a safe journey to heaven. We pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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