

3 Priorities Of A Faithful Disciple

Do you ever have trouble with priorities? It's OK, you can be honest. I think we all do. None of us are good at keeping the main thing the main thing.

You see, priorities are the things that make us. The the things that we make priority in life are the things, over the trajectory of our life, that shape us, our priorities are like six seeds that we plant every single day in over the course of our life the priorities the season we've planted determine the fruit that comes back to us that shows what our life was about.

If you want to be healthy... weightlifting, eating right. You need to set your priorities not for a moment, but for months and years.

You want to raise godly kids... spend time with your kids, invest in them, not for a moment, but for years.

You don't just wake up one day and realize that you are in great shape... it doesn't just happen. Neither do you just wake one day and your kids are awesome... that doesn't just happen either.

The same is true with us as we seek to be faithful disciples, faithful Christians. We want to stand before God on Judgment Day in here well done my good and faithful servant. We want our lives to leave a legacy, we want our lives to make an impact on this world, we don't want to waste our time here on this earth, we want to make the most of every single day, not just for this life but for a turn it he. We need help.

The Israelites also had a problem with spiritual priorities, they needed someone to set them straight, to help them put God and make God center of their lives and community.

We open up with "after this", there has been a nearly 60 year period elapsed after chapter 6. If you are new to the story, what is this after this? God had established his people in the promised land, they disobeyed, were disciplined by being exiled, then a wave of people were brought back to the land, and with the building of the temple, worship and community was beginning to once again take place in Jerusalem. Now 60 years later, there are still many Jews living in exile. This morning we meet one of them, Ezra, who God is raising up to set the Israelites straight, three priorities of a faithful disciple. Love God's Word, Redeem God's World, Trust in God's Power.

Let's pray.

Let's read. 7:1 Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, 2 son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, 3 son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, 4 son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, 5 son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest— 6 this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

Our chapter opens up with a genealogy that points directly to him. We don't really put a lot of stock in genealogies in our day, but for the Jews, and in Scriptures, when you see genealogies usually you know something important is going on.

This list of 14 names that goes all the way back to Aaron, who is the first priest, brother to Moses, is a big deal. As one bible scholar has said this is an introduction with true "fanfare and establishes him as "the most prominent individual in the book." and "signaling that something momentous is to come and Ezra is at the center of it." I think I hear the Rocky Theme music right here.

We are told in v.6 (read 1-6)

This is where I'm taking my outline from

To give you the overview of this chapter, just so you can have an idea of what's happening. v. 6 summarizes the chapter. 7-10 gives more details of Ezra, his return, and the people that come with him. 11-26 is a letter that the King gave to Ezra, and 27-28 is Ezra's conclusion. So it's really not flowing chronologically, it's flowing in terms of more detail. The event is v.6.

1. The first priority of a disciple is to love God's Word.

This is clearly Ezra's passion.

look at v. 6. this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him."

So Ezra is still in exile, under a foreign king, but he has not lost his devotion to Yahweh. He's a scribe... scribes were those that had devoted themselves to the Word of God. and it says he was skilled, meaning he was quick in the Scriptures, able to easily to navigate the Scriptures and applying them to life. Ezra was a baller....

But it wasn't so much just that he was just skilled, like naturally gifted, this was Ezra's passion. The Word of God had so gripped Ezra that made God's Word the center of his life.

7-10"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, the singers 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 to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."

Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. You can't miss that at the heart of this text and book is Ezra, and in the heart of Ezra is the Word.

v. 6, skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given

v.10 Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel

v.11 the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel.

v.12 Ezra, the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven.

v.14 going "According to the Law of your God, which is in your hand"

v.21 the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven.

v.25 according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand

v.25 appoint judges so all will know the law, those that do not know them, you will teach

v.26 judgement for those who do not obey the law

He's being set up here as this New Moses, as the Law was given to Moses who first gave it to the people, so here Ezra is picking back up that mantel and is going to be placing God's Word at the center of the faith community. "Ezra, more than any other man, stamped Israel with its lasting character as the people of a book."

Studying the word, doing the word, and teaching the word.

Let's take each one of these in turn, each is vital and the sequence is crucial.

1. Study God's Word

To study God's Word, is to seek to know God's Word, to learn it, learn what it says. I kind of like seek better, some translations use that word. I just don't want us to think study as in you're putting God under the microscope. When you come to the Bible you're not putting God under the microscope you can't be put under the microscope. It's rather we're putting it it's rather we're getting a telescope trying to make him become viewable. Study also just has this dry connotation, which I don't want us to see year, as are his pursuit his study is expiration is seeking his diligence in the word of God, was not a dry pursuit. It had every bit of realness and relationship and emotion involved in it .

Ezra is the great reformer, but as it has been said before, before you can reform the world, you must reform yourself. That reformation of self begins with God's word. There's nothing else in all the universe that can reform you except for God's word, it is the word that gives life and breath do all things.

This necessarily plunges us into a conversation of God's word and it's authority for our lives. Here's the question, is God's word mans thoughts about God or is gods word Gods thoughts about God. This is the major rub in culture and it's the major rub in our hearts, we don't in our flash want an authoritative voice outside of ourselves, we want to be our own authority. For Ezra, bGod's Word was God's word.

Notice however the Divine origin, but human instrumentation the law of God given to Moses.

The main thing however that I want us to graphs about the Scriptures, this morning is yes their authority, which is our objective basis for all of life, reality, doctrine, and morality. But the end of the Scriptures is not that we have a manual for life. The end of the Scriptures is that we may know Christ. The Scriptures are about us knowing Christ. We are not seeking the Scriptures because we just need a proverb to get us through the day and live a better life, as much is the Scriptures are designed to help us live a better life, we seek the Scriptures because we want to know Christ because we want more of Christ and that is where he is found. The Scriptures are a God's self revelation to man, his clear salvific revelation to man, it's Jesus revealed to me and in the Scriptures. God reveals his power and his moral law through creation and conscience, but nowhere in the universe is Jesus revealed except in the Scriptures.

Is it possible to read the Scriptures without fellowshiping with Christ? Absolutely. This is what the scribal tradition that Ezra was laying out would later turn into. By Jesus' time the Scriptures were not about knowing God, they were about making man feel better about himself.

As Jesus would say, "You have the scriptures, but you do not have the one that the Scriptures testify about."

So you have to apply faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to commune with Christ. And this is the intended purpose. It's one big story, a true story, about the gospel, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord of the Universe, living and dying for sinners, to give them new life and new purpose, and ultimately to give them Himself.

My wife says to me, I wish you would seek me like you have been seeking the strawberries. That's a knife that cuts but it heals and straightened me out. And I think the same way God would say to us to many of us I wish you would seek me like like you seek your favorite sports team, like you seek Pinterest or Facebook, like you seek your reputation fashion, like you seek your job and your hobbies.

Church, the best way to measure your relationship with the Lord is to think about your relationship with his word. How diligent are you to seek the Lord in the Scriptures, and even more, how affectionate is your heart towards the Scriptures.

“It’s not exciting, it’s boring.”

“It’s too hard to understand.”

That’s okay. That’s a fine place to start. We need grace to have our affections stirred for God’s Word. The enemy would scheme to make us more satisfied

2. Do God’s Word

The doing of God’s word is critical for our faithfulness. As James says, “We are not to be hearers of the Word only, but doers. The evidence of our knowing the Scriptures is really obedience. The devil and all his demons know the scriptures, so knowing it is not enough, we must obey it, we must live it out.

God has called us to obedience. Obedience is not a drag for the christian. Only the non-believer feels that way. Maybe you are a christian and you don’t like obeying, I’d say the enemy has twisted your mind and deceived you. When God told Adam and Eve did not eat the fruit in the garden, he wasn’t holding out on them. What did Satan do, he tempted them to doubt God’s goodness.

Obedience to the Word of God is refreshing and satisfying of the Christian because we are walking in who we are. It’s experiencing the unity of nature. The discord of sin is in part because we are not walking in accordance with who we are. That’s the war within that we feel.

True freedom is walking in righteousness. Freedom is not the ability to sin and be forgiven. Freedom is the ability to not sin and walk in righteousness. Where soon abounds grace abounds all the more, but we do not send the grace may abound by no means, unthinkable. I’ve had friends no kidding that would celebrate the freedom, and make sure that they still had freedom by getting together in

Are you submitted to God’s law in obedience? To all of his word. We could summit up is this, love the Lord your God with all your heart mind and strength and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. Where are you not loving God with all your heart mind and strength and soul? Where are you being selfish, or to put a positively how could you demonstrate greater love to the Lord, how could you demonstrate more sacrifice and love toward someone else? What Sin do you need to repent of?

2. Redeem God’s world

a. to redeem God’s world, we must teach God’s word.

This is where it begins. When we talk about influence, and influence for the good. What’s that measured against? How do you define good? According to God’s word. It is laying the word of God against the world. We seek to bring God’s word to bear on the world. The word is the agent of change. Just as the word is what is most important for you personally, so the word is what is needed by every individual in the world.

The sequence here is important, that we know Christ and we follow Christ and then we teach Christ. It’s important because, really the natural sequence, if you get Christ it will lead to Christ likeness and it will lead to mission. You can have as the apostle Paul says mission without Christ, then you are a legalist and hypocrite.

I take this to mean this, the faithful disciple is not content with only personal holiness. He faithful disciple must see holiness in the world. Or from Gods perspective personal salvation is not enough, the faithful Christian desires the salvation of the whole world.

That thought might scare you, and you might be saying, I'm not a teacher. Yes you are. Just because you are not behind a pulpit or have a class, does not mean that you are not a teacher.

A teacher is simply someone who imparts knowledge to another.

Think about it this way, worship what? everyone is a teacher, the question is, what are you teaching?

Every one of you is a teacher in some capacity, in your family, your neighborhood, in your workplace, where you play and exercise. In every conversation, and in indeed, every action, you are doing what, you are imparting information to another. You are teaching by your lips and by your lives what is important and what is valuable, and what should be worshiped and how.

You say, worship, what are you talking about? Where ship is giving value to something. When we are on our smart phones for hours and hours, we are describing value to them, we are saying that my time and energy in mind and heart is devoted to this thing and worth it. that sounds ridiculous, but that's what we do, that's an idol. What do our children see, mommy and daddy believe that the phone is more important than I am. It grieves me that I can't go out to dinner and not see a family with kids on phones or parents on phones. you can have your own rules, I'm just saying. What do we communicate about what's valuable when we change our schedules and wrap our calendars around certain things?

Let the watching world see in us that we prize Christ! Let our kids grow up seeing that their mommies and daddies love Jesus. How? You have to talk about him. We wonder why our kids grow up and go astray, when we took the kids to church, the kids never heard Jesus mentioned in the house. What's important obviously was not Jesus

Teaching can be both formal and informal.

b. to redeem the world, we must see a need and step out in faith

There's a little phrase that is easy to miss, that I want you to see. V. 6 "and the king granted to him all that he asked."

Ezra has been busy asking the king for things.

The letter contains five stipulations: (1) it authorizes Ezra (and others with him) to go to Jerusalem to see that God's law was observed (vv. 14, 25); (2) it provides a grant to buy sacrifices and temple vessels (vv. 15–19); (3) it commands the treasurers in the provinces to give supplies to Ezra (vv. 21–23); (4) it frees all temple officials from taxation (v. 24); and (5) it authorizes Ezra to set up a judicial system to see that the Jews obeyed these laws (it included teaching the content of the laws, vv. 25–26).

What we can gather from this is, Ezra had some understanding that Israel had fallen away, although he didn't know how much as we will see an upcoming chapters he will be shocked at there sin. This drove him to desire to teach the law of God to them, Which was to go stand before the king and ask for these things. This was no small thing, you don't just go up to the king and ask for stuff like this. As a reminder had some clout he might've been a sort of secretary, maybe even religious secretary to the king, but this is still not something you just waltz into the king and ask for. People have been killed for such things.

We see what this situation might have looked like... 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, 28 and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers.

The picture is the little guy Ezra, getting this burden for God's people, and going before the mighty King and his counselors and all his officers. That takes some faith.

So the sequence is Ezra, knowing God and God's Word, living it out, and becoming burdened for God's people.

So where and who might you seek to bring God's word to bear on? Where is there disrepair? Where is the Lord not worshiped? Where are His laws not obeyed?

For Ezra, God led him to Israel. Where might God be leading you?

How's your family? Husbands and fathers, it's your job to bring your family under the Lordship of Christ. It's your job to ensure that your spouse and your children are hearing, learning, and tasting the things of God.

Wives and Mothers, are you supporting your husband and doing all you can to help cultivate faithfulness in your home?

Maybe the field is your community group. I know you see needs in your community group. Community forces us to see needs in each other. The question is what are we going to do about it? Are we going to criticize and complain, perhaps try to get out of group, or are we going to be an agent of change, doing all we can to bring the word of God to bear on the group.

Now, I'm not saying you stand up and tell everyone what they are doing wrong. Teaching the word of God must be done with the word of God in your heart and with you as an example. In other words, you can swing the sword and do damage if you do not swing it in the Spirit. Teaching the word in the power of the Spirit, yes, involves boldness, but it also involves absolute patience, perseverance, tenderness, and compassion.

I'd even go so far to say, don't try to teach someone until you have compassion for them. That's back to the order of this thing... know the word, do the word, then teach the word.

Maybe for you, there's a special burden you have for your workplace. Your co-workers use filthy language, and talk about things that repulse you, you notice your boss is not above reproach in how he manages the company. Maybe this is the sphere God has called you to. You are there as light in the darkness. Don't minimize that. You might not be up on a pulpit, and instead you're in a cubicle, but don't minimize the fact that you are teaching others and living out your witness. It might be that you can start a little bible study, or find another christian that you can partner with to pray for your co-workers, it might mean you begin befriending others with the hope of being able to share the gospel.

Or maybe, it's an unreached people group, or it's something more social in nature—poverty, orphans, widows, sex trafficking.

3. Trust in God's Character (His Power and His Love)

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 counselors, 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.

Chapter 7 closes down with Ezra bursting into this celebration and praise of God's power and love. You see both at play. Ezra turns now ultimately to give praise where praise is due. And it's not with himself. Ezra does not point to himself. He points to God.

He uses this phrase, for “the hand of the Lord my God was on me,” which basically means God was rigging the whole system. Behind all Ezra’s upbringing, even as we trace back his genealogy, all Ezra’s studying and learning, and patience in Babylon, inside this corrupt land, behind Ezra’s wisdom, and his timing, and all his requests, was God.

In fact, the Scripture here does not want us to miss this. “The hand of the Lord” is like a refrain. You may have never sat down to write a song before, but the most important thing you want to say you put where, in the chorus. Not in the verses. The repeating chorus alerts you to what’s most important.

We see in v. 6, 9, 28, and through chapter 8, and Nehemiah, this phrase. Ezra is not ultimately about Ezra, Ezra is about what God is doing.

Ezra’s name is short for **Azariah - “The Lord has helped”**

Both of these divine attributes are critical for us to get. God is both all powerful and all loving. It just changes everything when we see that omnipotence is released to fulfill perfect love.

A God that’s all loving and not all powerful, is a God that is to be pitied. He’s a God whose plans are constantly frustrated and thwarted. He’s got great intentions, but He’s handcuffed.

A God that’s all powerful and not all loving, is a God that is to be feared. He’s a god that you could never trust, and never be sure had your best interest in mind. He would destroy you without a second thought.

The God of the Bible, however, is both all powerful and all loving. Perfect power is actively fulfilling what perfect love desires. Romans, All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose. If God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will he not also with him, graciously give us all things. The earth is the Lord’s.

Look at how Ezra puts this together in terms of his mission. Because of God’s power and love, I took courage and gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me. He’s locating His source of courage outside himself.

Church, do you need some courage? It’s not found in yourself. It’s found in who God is.

Here’s the beautiful thing about the mission of God... it is rigged. God is sovereign, He’s already defeated Satan on the cross. All God’s resources are allocated provide you with everything you need. You can’t fail. Risk involves the potential for loss. We can’t lose in the gospel. Every investment is guaranteed 100 fold.

When you look at your spouse and you wonder if you can love her or him,

When you open your mouth to a unbelieving neighbor or co-worker, you remind yourself that God’s word will not return void.

When you get overwhelmed with lostness of others, you remember that God has already elected them before the foundations of the earth.

You want some fuel for mission, you realize that God has peoples names written in the Lambs book of life who don’t yet know it.

Ultimately guys, chapter 7 is not about a model disciple. The truth is, Ezra is only a foreshadow of the one to come. The New and Better Ezra that we look to is Jesus. Jesus came to bring reform to a sinful people, not by

bringing a book, but by bringing Himself. He didn't come to teach only, but He came to live and die. There was no teaching that could bring us back to God, only His blood would do.

Ezra walked in the favor of God, Jesus was God.

We will fail to study God's word, we will not do it well, we will misinterpret and misapply, and we certainly won't obey God's word perfectly. Praise God that Jesus has done this for His. He is the Word made flesh, so He knows it, through and through, it's Him. He perfectly obeyed the law at every turn and under the greatest temptation possible, to the point of shedding His own blood. Jesus perfectly loves the Word, obeys the Word, and teaches the Word.

Ezra's exodus to the promise land to a place that would still crumble. Jesus is the one who leads us to the Promise Land that is eternal.

The sacrifices and worship that Ezra would lead the people to perform in the Temple, Jesus would become the ultimate sacrifice, shedding His own blood for the forgiveness of sin.

Ezra was chosen by God to bring the Word of God to the people and make it central to their community. Jesus was chosen by God to give Himself to the people as the center of the faith community.