

# When Help Arrives

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Ezra 9:1-4  
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Well, we're gonna be back in Ezra this morning, so I ask you to turn with me in your Bibles to Ezra. We're gonna actually read a little bit in Ezra 7 but we're gonna be focusing on Ezra 9. The text is gonna be Ezra 9:1-4 and the subject is "When Help Arrives." When help arrives. I bring the title, the word "help" some of you may remember a ways back when I mentioned what Ezra's name means. Ezra is from the Hebrew word Ezer which means "to help; to aid; to support," and when you look at how this Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament, it is uniformly used of help from on high, when God helps. God sending help, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 20, "May the Lord send you help from the sanctuary. May He set you securely on high." So when you need help from God and it arrives, this is the kind, this is what his name is even picturing and I think it's in the providence of God a key part of what he wants us to understand, that Ezra was sent by God as a help to his people, a wonderful source of help, and he comes as a man with the word of God which is the essence of what helps. But the title of the message is "When Help Arrives," and when help arrives, it sometimes looks different than we expected. In fact, it really almost always looks different, if not always than what we were expecting when God really helps, when he really sends help to your life, there will be a surprising element about it because we tend to want help in a certain predefined way according to our own understanding of our problems and God is gracious and good to help us as we truly need, not as we merely think we need.

When help arrives. So the question to think about is what does it look like when God sends help and what will it look like when God sends help, what has it looked like in your life when God has really helped you by giving you the abundance of his grace in a circumstance where you desperately needed it, and what would that look like? How does God help his people? Think about your life, where you're struggling right now, where do you need help? Where are you discouraged, disheartened? Some of you feel that you're nearing the point of despair, hopelessness. You may be wondering today, "Is there hope?" The answer of the Gospel is yes, because there's hope because there's help. You may not be in that moment today but you may find yourself there soon, overwhelmed by the challenges of life. It's hard to live life in a fallen world. We experience all kinds of adversities and trials, as Job said, "A man is born to adversity as surely as sparks fly upward." And Jesus in his preaching ministry made clear that to be a Christian is not to be immune from adversity and suffering, in fact, we really should expect more of it. He

said, "In this world you shall have tribulation." He didn't say, "I'm gonna remove the tribulation," but he said, "Be of good cheer, I've overcome the world. I'm gonna make you an overcomer in the midst of tribulation by sending you help, by being your Helper, your Comforter."

In fact, that same passage, that's said in the context of the Upper Room discourse, the last night Jesus spent with his disciples before his crucifixion, and he's just pouring out his heart to them, giving them his last words, as it were, that he can speak to them in the flesh, in person, on this side of the cross, where he can really be with them and in those hours, he shares his burden for them. He knows they're gonna be going through great adversity and so he tells them, "This is going to be a normal part of your life to be in circumstances where you feel that you don't have the resources. But be of good cheer, I've overcome the world."

In fact, one of the really beautiful things there is he talks about the giving of the Holy Spirit. He says, "You're gonna encounter incredible difficulties but I'm going away," so he says, "I'm going away," which is, in itself, great source of discomfort, discouragement for them, they'd been with him for 3 ½ years and now he's going to be removed from them and he's not going to walk with them anymore, and he's telling them this, "I'm going away. Where I'm going you cannot follow." But essentially, "and it's gonna be hard." But essentially the message he gives them is, "It's good that I go away." He says those words exactly in the middle of that discourse, but why is it good? "Because I will send you another Comforter."

The word "comfort, comforter" in the New Testament, is the word paraclete, parakaleo is the verb from parakletos comes from, is the comforter is the one who comes to the side, is called to the side to bring help and aid. And I love the fact that he says, "another Comforter." There's a lot of rich truth in that adjective "another." He's saying, "I'm the first Comforter. I have come to your aid. I have come to see you in the midst of your suffering and your discouragement and your despair, and I have come. I am help from God sent to you. I'm a Comforter and I'm gonna send another Comforter to you so you will not be alone."

And we see in the story that we're gonna look at from Ezra 9, God unfolding for us, in a sense, the idea that he is a God who sends help to his people, and in this way Ezra is a type of Christ. He is help from God speaking the word of God. But what does help look like? When help arrives, what does it look like?

Now to really put this, understand this passage, I've got to spend some time putting us back in context. It's been a long time since we've talked about this. I know I tend to do this every week anyway. My wife says I overdo sometimes the background information, but today I have a good excuse. We haven't been in Ezra since the first week of December. That's like an eternity from preaching time, so I'm gonna put us back in context. So listen up and let's focus in again and put ourselves so we can really hear what God has to say to us this morning. Listen to where the people were to whom God spoke.

Ezra, the first six chapters recount the return of the people of Judah from the Babylonian captivity. Now what happened after the history of Israel, God begins the nation with Moses and then you have the kingdom later with Solomon, David and Solomon, and then you have the divided kingdom, and then eventually the people continue to rebel and God sends the Babylonians and they bring judgment to them because the people are unfaithful, and they're carried off into captivity in 606 BC. Kind of a three pronged exile. It starts in 606, a number of people taken off, and we're BC so we count down as we go forward in time. 597, there's a second exile, a group of exiles taken. 586, finally virtually all the rest are taken into captivity. A few stragglers are left behind. So the nation's deported to Babylon because God is judging them because they have been unfaithful to him. They have become just like the nations that he dispossessed before them. They're not holy unto the Lord. They're not living for his glory. They're not walking in purity. And so he sends this judgment upon them, they're taken 70 years into captivity. It started in 606, so that 70 years is up basically 536 BC.

That's where we pick up in the book of Ezra 1. 538-536. We begin with a decree from Cyrus the Persian because the Babylonians took them captive but now the Persians took over Babylon and now the Persians are the masters of the Jewish people. And so in 538, Cyrus issues an edict to the people of Israel to go back and rebuild the temple. The temple had been destroyed. The place where God met man in that Old Testament revelation of his glory was the temple in Jerusalem and it's razed to the ground.

So in 536, they get back and they begin to rebuild the temple. 42,000 Jews return in the first return. It's really interesting. I mentioned there was three parts of the exile, 606, 597, 586. There's three returns also and all three returns are in the books of Ezra/Nehemiah. There's a return in 536 under Zerubbabel, the first six chapters. We're gonna talk about the second return under Ezra in 458. And there's a third return under Nehemiah in 445. The Lord has a way of beautiful symmetry all over the Scriptures like that.

So this first return, though, to put us back in context, the first return happens in 536 and the temple is, the reconstruction is begun under Zerubbabel. So they basically had the mission on the first return from exile, "Build God's house. Rebuild God's house." They start the work and they experience opposition from the people around them and the work stops, and for more than 15 years the temple foundation alone is sitting there, no work on the temple for 15 years. God raises up Zechariah and Haggai, two prophets, and the work resumes. The Lord sends his word through the prophets and they complete the building of the temple in 516-515 BC.

They dedicate the temple and for nearly 60 years we have no account of what's happening until chapter 7, we pick up in 458 BC with Ezra, and what we're gonna see is that this is a second return decreed again by the Emperor, now a Persian, I believe it was a Persian before, Cyrus, of course, a second decree also by a Persian Emperor, Artaxerxes, and he says, "Go back and essentially rebuild Jerusalem and beautify the temple." The mission of this second return is to beautify the temple, literally adorn the house of God. It is part of how Ezra took what he was commanded to do. You see, that's in Ezra 7:26 or 27.

So Ezra is God's help to beautify the people of God, and what we've said is the way this applies for us is not that we, you know, we need somebody to come along and be a redecorator for this building, we need a new paint job, we need to put some rock work on the side of the building. That would really be nice, actually, some rock work. But that's not what this, this is not the application of this passage. It's not about a physical building project that needs to happen for us. No, God was teaching us through the physical dimension of the Old Testament temple something that applies to us differently. The temple of God today is not a building, it's not a cathedral, that has nothing to do with God's agenda. I mean, certainly buildings can be nice and all of that and you need them, I mean, to gather we need a building so if it was raining outside, it's cold outside, we're warm in here. That's good. But it's the building God is building is the people of God, the church, and each of you who belong to Jesus Christ are as Peter says in 1 Peter 2, living stones being built into a spiritual house for God. And so our calling is to beautify God's house. To build God's house and to beautify God's house, just like Ezra did to beautify God's house, we're called to do that, and we do it the same way he did, with the word of God.

So back to the picture, though, the Old Testament picture. So they need to actually do some work on the temple. It's been 60 years since they finished the rebuilding, roughly 60 years and the Lord raises up Ezra, puts in his heart to go to the Emperor and ask for permission to go back and to take more people back. He's apparently gotten some report that they need help in Jerusalem. We're not told about that, we're just told that Ezra goes to the Emperor and he asks for permission to take more Jews back and the Emperor gives the permission in an extraordinary way. It's recorded in chapter 7. And Ezra, then, has the commission from the Emperor to go back and to teach the word of God to God's people. Really amazing the way that Artaxerxes even, you may remember if you were here before, the wonder of that, and I encourage you to read, re-read the chapter, chapter 7:12-26 is actually the imperial decree where he says, "Ezra, you go back and you make sure that the people of God are living according to the law of God." Here's a pagan, ungodly king, emperor, telling a guy to go and preach the word.

And Ezra is God's help and one of the things we see that helps us to get into the moment as we get to chapter 9, is that this idea of help is really powerfully unpacked for us in some key ways in chapters 7 and 8, and one of the ways is, well, the key phrase that you recall if you were here, "The hand of God or the hand of the Lord." We're told that the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra. Three times in chapter 7, the hand of the Lord is upon him or upon me, singular object, singular objective pronoun, me, him. You see it and let's read this together, Ezra 7:6-10.

6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him. 7 Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 For on the first of the

first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.

Twice, "the good hand of his God was upon him," verse 6 and verse 9. The hand of God, the power of God was upon this man and this is the man God is sending back to help his people. His people need help. They're discouraged, they're disheartened, they may be on the verge of despair and the Lord sends them help in the person of Ezra, and his help comes in a man who is mighty in the Scriptures, skilled in the law of Moses, verse 6 we just read. And then verse 10, the hand of God, his God was upon him because, verse 10,

10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

The greatest help, the source of God's help that is always the most relevant is going to come from his word. What you and I need is always the word of God. That's why Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." We need the word of God.

Let's stop for a moment and pray.

*Father, we come to You this morning knowing that we need Your word, we need Your help. Lord, You know our hearts. You know the struggles that are discouraging us, You know the circumstances that seem ready to overwhelm us. You know it all and You know how our hearts are responding to these things. Lord, we ask You to send us help, send us help from Your word, and may Your word lead us to Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.*

So when help arrives, what is it going to look like? Now what we see in chapter 7 and 8 is you have this building sense of excitement. I mean, it's an optimistic feel as you read through these two chapters. The Lord has set aside a man, Ezra, who is uniquely qualified to be the helper God needs. He's a priest. He's in the right line. He's in the tribe of Levi. He's not just a priest, he's a scribe who is skilled in the law of Moses. He's a man and that word "skilled" means he's quick, he's fast, he can move around the word of God with great ease; he understands how it all fits together. He's a man who has set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it. He's not just a teacher, he's one who lives the truth. He's a doer of the word. He studies it, he practices it, and he teaches it, and he's a man in whom the hand of God is at work. Three times in the passage, we read two, in verse 28 he says, "The hand of the Lord was upon me." Then in chapter 8 we see three different times, what happens in chapter 8 is, the plan is laid out in chapter 7, oh, and one of the most, I mentioned the, you know, this building sense of excitement. Those first two times the hand of God is upon him, actually the first three, are really about how God's hand was upon him to motivate him to go to the Emperor and to make a request for this opportunity to go back to Jerusalem, and the hand of God was upon him because the Emperor gives him this amazing decree. He writes out and he basically says, "Look, I'm giving you all this money, take it, be careful with it, make sure you deliver it to Jerusalem, and I'm giving you this letter to take to all the people over there," you know,

this is before the internet so he can't blast an email to say, "Okay, everybody help Ezra." He gives them a bunch of copies of this decree to take to all these different governors and satraps and little local rulers which says essentially this, "Anything this guy needs, give it to him. Nobody get in his way. He's commissioned by me, the Emperor, the most powerful man in the world, to do my bidding and my bidding is to beautify the house of God and to straighten things up among the people of God." He's got these, I mean, it's like the ultimate. You know, it's like gonna give this guy, he gets a speeding ticket on the way. Their oxcart is going a little fast, "Hey, officer you might want to look at this." I don't know if that would work or not, but anyway.

And we read in chapter 7 not only he has this edict but he tells us how much money he's bringing with him, chapter 7 and chapter 8. Do you remember this? He is bringing 30 tons of silver and gold. That's how much money he got, silver and gold, to bring to the temple. That's a conservative estimate. I used the low numbers for what a talent was. So he's bringing like 20-25 wagon loads. It's like Brinks trucks lined up behind him as they go from Babylon to Jerusalem with all of this money, 175 million, that's a low estimate, dollars.

The hand of God is upon this guy. Help is coming. Man, this is exciting and this is a sense of building, and then in chapter 8 as it progresses on, you come to verse 31, he sums up the journey. Now remember they didn't have Levites and he's a man of action, he gets Levites, they had to have people that were from the tribe of Levi to do the work in the temple according to God's prescription, and he sends out for them. He's a man of real wisdom, practical wisdom, a man of action. He's getting things done because the hand of God is upon him, and they make this journey in less than four months, 3 ½ months. They go a thousand miles and remember they have no armed escort. It's one thing if you have Brinks trucks, they're at least secure. They've got armed guards. He's got wagon loads with basically guys with, I guess if they have pocketknives, you know. They don't have like their swords. They're not trained military guys with him. He's basically going, it's like, you know, all of us get together and let's go on a journey, a wagon journey of a thousand miles and just bring what you've got with you. Some of you guys may have a weapon. I think we probably have people that are carrying, and praise God for that actually in case we have any problems. But he wasn't. They didn't have that kind of thing. He just has knives, maybe some small swords. There's no armed escort. There's no real armed protection. He makes this journey, leads these people and that's why they fasted and prayed because he knew, "I'm carrying \$175 million, if word gets out, all this thousand mile journey, there's all kinds of places bandits can attack us, kill us, and take this incredibly valuable resources that need to be given to the work of God and the worship of God."

They fast and they pray, and so then this is with all of that, then come to verse 31 of chapter 8, "Then we journeyed from the river Ahava on the twelfth of the first month to go to Jerusalem," it's taken 11 days, the first of the first month is when he started the work. Now they're not leaving until the 12<sup>th</sup> of the first month. They're gonna get there on the first of the fifth month. So from halfway through the first month, it'd be like, the Jewish calendar is different, but it would be like January 15, January 12, and they get

there on May 1 roughly. And this thousand mile journey, so this is what he's saying, "we journeyed from the river Ahava on the twelfth of the first month to go to Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was over us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the ambushes by the way. Then we came to Jerusalem and remained there three days." We know they got there on the first of the fifth month because of chapter 7 told us that, and they're there for three days. "On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the utensils were weighed out in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. Everything was numbered and weighed, and all the weight was recorded at that time." All of that 30 tons is accounted for. Everything is delivered.

Then they worshiped God. "The exiles who had come from the captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: 12 bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, 77 lambs, 12 male goats for a sin offering, all as a burnt offering to the LORD." So an extravagant offering. The significance of four of those numbers being multiples of 12. 12, 12, 96. They were offering it for, they were unifying themselves in a formal way saying all of Israel, the 12 tribes, we are connected with the promises that came to the 12 tribes. 77 lambs, we don't know for sure but probably just because 7 is a perfect number, that was the number they used.

So they worshiped God. This is exactly what the Lord would want. Help is here. Now think about if you're the people you didn't know was coming, I mean, like I said you didn't get an email ahead of time telling you they're on the way. Here they show up. It's roughly 5,000 more Jews, Levites, priests, this charismatic leader, Ezra, who's a scribe skilled in the Scriptures, a priest, and they bring \$175 million for the temple refurbishment and the ministry of worship in the temple. They have a great celebration of worship to the Lord and look how it ends, verse 36, "Then they delivered the king's edicts to the king's satraps and to the governors in the provinces beyond the River," so they go out and they take all those copies to everybody. You know, it's like the mayor of this town, and the mayor of that town, and county commissioners, and basically. "Here's our instructions. You're to leave us alone and you're actually to help us. We need some more resources." That's what the king said, "Give them up to this amount." That seems like a blank check. And think how encouraging that would be as you're an Israelite who's already been there for years, this help comes in.

So they take those, verse 36, "they delivered the king's edicts to the king's satraps and to the governors in the provinces beyond the River, and they supported the people and the house of God." That word "supported" means "to lift up; to bear up." They lifted the people's spirits and they lifted up the work of the temple, and this is where the book might have ended. This is like in a Hollywood movie this would be where you would start hearing the music and now the credits go. Help has arrived. The work is continuing. The kingdom of God is advancing.

So now we come to that context to actually our passage this morning. So what does it look like when help arrives? What does that help look like? And the author as he puts this

together means for this to hit us with an abruptness and a sense of shock. Let's read verses 1 to 4.

1 Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." 3 When I heard about this matter [Ezra is still speaking autobiographically here, this section], When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.

When help arrives, what does it look like? I want us to consider three questions. Where does God begin to help? Where does God start when he sends help? You and I need help from God, we feel overwhelmed, we feel discouraged, we are despairing, we have circumstances that are too much for us, a broken relationship, a diagnosis of someone we love or ourselves, it's too much, where does God begin when he sends you help from on high? Where he begins is he begins with your sin. When he sends help to us, when he sends help to you, when he sends help to me, he begins with our sin. The thing that happens as Ezra begins to minister is that sin is made known. The people who needed help, and I don't think they were thinking they needed help in this way, that's not how we think, is it? I mean, sometimes we think that if our sin is really overwhelming us, maybe it's messing up our life, we can see that that's our problem but so often we think the problem is outside of us, "The problem is my circumstances. I need help. The problem is the people around me. I need help. I'm despairing. It is this relationship, it's broken, can it be fixed? I need help. Lord, deal with the other person." And this is what we see the Bible is clear, when God really sends help to you, if you really want help from on high the first thing God does when he shows up is he deals with you and your sin. He deals with me and my sin. The people, it's not that they started sinning, they were already sinning in this way but as Ezra comes and he brings the word of God, the first thing it does is exposes the ugliness of the sin that has been going on.

There is a suddenness about this and it's told in such a way to make it feel even more sudden because you don't see this until you read on into chapter 10, 9 and 10 are basically one continuous narrative, but there's a gap between chapter 8 and chapter 9, and how long is it? It doesn't appear to be a gap, though, but when you read through chapter 10, you find out that Ezra, what happens in Ezra 9:1-4 happens in the ninth month, around the middle of the ninth month. Remember when they got there? The first of the fifth month. So, again, I'm not saying that this is, it's not our months but it just helps us to think in terms of if you got there May 1, now he's talking about September 12. Ezra's been there



for four months but we're not told that. Why? Why aren't we told he began preaching or he started ministering and this is what happened? We're not told that so that we can feel the suddenness and the change between verse 36 and verse 1 of chapter 9. Verse 36, they supported the people in the house of God, and then in verse 1 of the next chapter, the next verse, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands according to their abominations. So we feel the jarring effect, the suddenness. Where God begins to help is with our sin, and so often it is the case that it becomes suddenly apparent. When the Lord really deals with you, there's a sense in which you see something with a suddenness that you had not seen before.

Two subpoints I want to talk about under where God begins to help, our first point is where God begins to help and it's with our sin. The first is the focus. God's focus is upon sin. It's upon our hearts. When God shows up, when you really draw near to God and God really draws near to you, the thing that you are going to see is your sin with greater clarity than ever before, and if you want to see God, there's no choice but to experience that. This is something that's clear throughout the Scriptures. A great passage to look at and to meditate on this week would be Isaiah 6 where Isaiah goes to the temple. He probably had cares on his heart. We're not told about it. He might have been praying for things in his life, for the state of the nation, we don't know. We know that he tells us it was in the year King Uzziah died. There was probably a lot of uncertainty whenever there was a king, like Uzziah had a long reign and he dies, there's uncertainty, "What's this next king gonna be like? Is righteousness gonna be exalted by the king?" We don't know what the things were, we're just told, "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." He sees the Lord high and lofty with the train of his robe filling the temple and the seraphim, these beasts with six wings, two they cover their eyes, two they cover their feet, and two they fly, and they're saying back and forth to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." Isaiah sees this, he sees God, he sees the train of his robe, he sees these amazing creatures that are so great and so glorious and so powerful, and he sees his smallness. But what does he see with the greatest clarity? What does he say? "Woe is me, for I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." He says, "Woe is me, I'm undone," literally, "I'm coming apart at the seams. As I have drawn near to God, I am being totally, my soul is being exposed and I am being undone in the presence of God and I see with such clarity that my greatest problem is not what's going on around me, my greatest problem is my own lips." He's not talking about the fact that he had a problem with swearing, he's saying everything he said about God was so filthy and wicked because it was so far from what was true of God, and here's a man who was a priest. He wasn't like a sailor. He was a guy who loved God, but when he saw God, the first thing he saw was the depth of his sin and depravity.

We saw this in James, actually, when we went to James. You might turn over to James 4:8, he says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." That's probably a verse you may have memorized. I know I memorized that years ago. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." It's a good one to be able to say to people, "Listen, if you'll draw near to God, God will draw near to you."

Look what he says next, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom." When you draw near to God and he draws near to you, be prepared to see your need to cleanse your sins and to mourn over your wickedness. That's not in any way a happy thought, is it? These are things that are painful. We don't want to see our sin but the most wonderful place in the world and the greatest blessing that you can have is to see your sin and to turn from it and to cling to Christ, and that's what it means to be poor in spirit. We read the Scriptures earlier, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." How do you get poor in spirit? You see yourself as you are in the presence of God, that you have nothing to offer him. "Nothing in my hands I bring, only to Your cross I cling."

So the focus of God when he sends help to us is to deal with our sin, not my circumstances, not first the people in my life, the first thing when he comes and he draws near to you, Jesus comes and says to you, "Follow Me and here are the areas you're not following Me." And we want to say like Martha, "Hey, what about Mary?" Or like Peter, "Hey, what about John?" And Jesus comes and he's such a wonderful Savior that he loves us too much to be distracted. He knows the biggest issue in my life is my sin and my wickedness, and he comes and he puts his finger right on that. The hand of God, when the hand of God is working, the hand of God and the finger of God he places it right on the issue in your life and my life.

That's his focus. We're still talking about where he begins to help, the focus is our sin. Secondly in this passage back in Ezra 9, we feel the force, the second subpoint, the force. Where does he begin? Not the focus only but the force of his dealing with us. The exposure of their sin is great and the language that he uses is really magnified, the ugliness of it. In verse 1 he speaks about they've not separated themselves from the peoples of the land according to their abominations. The word "abomination" means, this Hebrew word means "a disgusting thing; something detestable; something that God abhors and loathes." It's something that is horrifying to look at. He says the people, "Your problems, your sin is so great that God finds it horrifying to look at you in your sin."

And he expounds upon this, it's really interesting how he, the fact that, now if you look at the text carefully, the people came to him, the princes came to him. Ezra it apparently like he's just sitting there and the princes come. I think what's happened actually is Ezra's been preaching the law of the Lord. I'll show you this in a moment more clearly. He's been preaching the law of the Lord, he's been preaching through Exodus, Leviticus and the people as they've come under the word of God have become convicted and they're coming and confessing their sin. But you look at the quotation marks, it's the princes that come and they say, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations." They're realizing it's abomination is what's going on among us and we're just like, and he picks these eight people groups, "the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites." These eight groups.

That was a particularly for the readers who were familiar with the law of God, this was a particularly heinous way of describing it and for us it's not that way. I mean, we read those words, I know when I'm going Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, mosquito bites. You know, you just, you don't know the words. You don't know what they mean. But for them, they understood that particularly that five of these eight names were peoples that were in the land of Canaan when they conquered the land. The Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Amorites were five of the people groups that were in the land of Canaan and there were associations with them, each of them, they were known to be people who did detestable things, that the Jews found detestable even. And he brings this up to say, I mean, I don't think that the Jewish people were yet doing these things themselves, what he's saying is, though, the seeds of this are in their hearts because they have intermarried with these people who live in this direction and they're moving that way and their hearts are moving toward detestable wickedness and ugly sin.

The word "abomination, detestable," the word "unfaithfulness" repeated twice in verse 2 and verse 4, that word pictures treachery. It's a word not used of people who don't know the Lord at all, this word "unfaithfulness" means people who are in the covenant apparently and yet who were living as absolute traitors to the covenant. It designates the breaking or violation of religious law as a conscious act of treachery, one of the word study books says. So they know better.

So when God comes to help you and me, when we find ourselves needing help what this is saying to us is when he comes to us, his first order of business is to deal with our hearts because he knows that's the biggest problem. The biggest problem for me is not what this other person is not doing. They legitimately, I may be seeing correctly sin, there's some big issues over here. It's like, "Lord, there's a lot. Why are you not dealing with this?" And when the Lord comes it's like we say we're calling out to God, "Come deal with these people around me that are such a mess," and sometimes we're pretty good at diagnosing a lot of that, but when the Lord arrives and he looks you in the eye, he doesn't say, "I'm here and I'm gonna take care of them." He says, "I'm here and I want to deal with you." And we need to understand that. We need to see that's the way God is. If you want to walk with this God of the Bible, this is the way he is, he will always deal with you and he will always call you to follow him, and that's his first agenda at every moment of every day of your life is he's saying, "Will you follow Me?"

So that's where he begins to help. Secondly, how does he bring help? Second point, how does God bring help? He brings us help through his word. Let me show you how I see this. It's really between the lines but I think it's definitely between the lines. I mentioned that he doesn't tell us what happened for four months because he wants us to feel the suddenness of how sin, the ugliness of sin and the jarring effect of everything's good and then, bam, no, it's not.

The language that the people use when they come and speak to Ezra and they say, "They've not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites," they're

using language that is right out of the book of Exodus, right out of the book of Deuteronomy. They have heard Ezra preach these messages, they have heard Ezra talk about these people, and the reason we know that is because five of those eight people groups are not in existence anymore at the time Ezra is preaching and these people are talking. Scholars believe that there was really no identifiable Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Amorites around anymore. They had been pretty much dispersed because of Israel's conquest of the land and then the Assyrian invasion and the Babylonian invasion. They were not distinct peoples anymore. So when they came, you would have expected them to say, "Hey, we're being just like the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Egyptians." Those three groups were still around. But he picks these other five which are key people groups that were in the preaching of Moses in Exodus.

Turn with me to chapter 34, Exodus 34:11, right after the Lord shows his glory to Moses and puts him in the cleft of the rock, passes by him. He then says this, we'll start at verse 10, "Then God said, 'Behold, I am going,'" this is Exodus 34:10, "Then God said, 'Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you. Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst.'" He's saying, "Don't make covenants with these people, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Amorites. Don't make covenants with them, But rather, you are to tear down their altars," verse 13, "and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim--for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God-- otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods. You shall make for yourself no molten gods."

This is why the intermarriage thing was such a big deal. It wasn't really about a racial distinction. It's clearly not. I'm gonna show you that in a moment. It does not have anything to do with the race and the blood of the Amorites or the Canaanites or the Perizzites or even the Moabites, any of them. It is about the spiritual disposition of these people and to marry them and to intermarry with people who are locked into a godless way of life, a way of idolatry, is to share in their idolatry and to ensnare themselves into a spiritual disposition that will bring destruction on their lives. This is why the New Testament even teaches us we're not to be intermarried with unbelievers. There's no biblical sanction for any issue about race in intermarriage. We're all one race. There's only one race, the human race, and so you marry another human of the opposite sex too, the Bible is clear about that. But you are to marry, if you're a Christian you are to marry another person who loves Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 7, "What fellowship has light with darkness?" If you want to follow Jesus, you don't yoke yourself in covenant with

someone who doesn't want to follow Jesus, and this is what's going on in Ezra's day, they have yoked themselves, they went after the women in the area who were not godly. They married with the men who were not godly and they're now being, they may not yet be fully given over to idolatry but they're heading that way and their hearts have abandoned the Lord. They've been unfaithful to God.

Well, so Ezra has been preaching the word and they have heard this and now they're convicted. The word of God has been preached and the word of God has exposed sin. And so these guys come up and they say, "Look, we understand you were just talking about these people groups that surrounded the nation of Israel. We have intermarried with them. We've committed the same sins and we are committing the same abominations, the detestable things. We're heading in that direction."

One of the things you need to understand about that, let's turn to Leviticus 18. This shows why they were not to have anything to do with these people in the land. You find the word "abomination" I mentioned from our text in Ezra 9:1. You find it four times in Leviticus 18:22-30. And he's talking about the people in the land, he's talking about the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Amorites in these verses and he's saying, "You're not to live like them. You're to be different." And he tells us then essentially what they do. This is what these other people groups were doing. I mean, the land of Canaan was a godless wasteland. I mean, there was a lot of people there but it was completely godless when God sent his people in. How do you know that? Well, one of the ways we know that is the Lord said something to Abraham in Genesis 15 that's very interesting. He tells Abraham, "I'm gonna give you the land of Canaan." Remember, this is now hundreds and hundreds of years before they even come in under Moses. "I'm gonna give you the land of Canaan for an inheritance but it's gonna be a while. In fact, your descendants are gonna be slaves in Egypt for 400 years." Why for 400 years? "Because the wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete," Genesis 15 around verse 20 or so. The wickedness of the Amorite is not yet complete. He's saying, The wickedness and sinful ungodliness of the Amorite has not reached its full measure. They're running away from Me and I'm not gonna judge them until they're really worthy of judgment where they become completely given over to everything evil all the time."

Leviticus, then, is describing what that looked like and what the people of Israel are to stay away from these people and not intermarry with them because of this, verse 21, Leviticus 18, "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD." One of the things, one of the gods of the people was Molech and they would offer their babies as living sacrifices and have them killed as a sacrifice to Molech. This was a very common practice in the land of Canaan.

Verse 22, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." Same word as Ezra 9:1.

"Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion." Bestiality was a common occurrence in Canaan.

Verse 24, "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants." He's saying the land of Canaan has vomited out its inhabitants because they've become so ungodly.

Verse 26, "But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you." So don't do the same things or it will spew you out.

Verse 29, "For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God." Same word "abomination" is used in Deuteronomy 18:9-14. There it talks about mediums and spiritists, people talking to the dead to find, there were all kinds of ungodly practices going on and the Lord is saying to his people, "Do not be involved in that kind of wickedness and ungodliness." But it's the word of God that exposes the sin. What they've come to see, "Listen, we are on the road to that kind of stuff. Our hearts are moving in the direction of this kind of thing. We need a Savior."

Now we're gonna have to wrap up with quickly the third point and we'll come back into this more thoroughly next week. The third question is who God helps. How God brings help, he brings it through his word. His word will expose your sin, it will reveal my sin, and that's the most wonderful thing because even though it's ugly and it's painful to see our sin, it drives us to Christ. So who God helps, the question is who does God help? God helps the humble person who stays under his word even though it hurts until the word drives him to Christ for forgiveness. You see, God doesn't expose your sin to condemn you, he exposes your sin to save you from it and Jesus is a Savior, a glorious Savior, and what does he do? He's a Savior, why is his name Jesus? We're told he will save his people from their sins. So it's God's way to expose our sin and to lead us to Christ, and so the most helpful thing I can have in any circumstance is for the Lord to come into my life and to expose my sin, and then to point me to Christ, and then I have strength and comfort and joy in the midst of the circumstance, and then I can be an instrument to help the people around me that may really probably really do need help. I mean, often we're way out of balance. We think it's a lot worse over there than it is, but we're often right, there's something over there. We start with ourselves.

Now to show you that this thing is not racial, it's not about really the race of the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, it's not about that at all. How do we know that? Well, the Bible tells us that. Where does it tell us that? One place, this is where I like to ask the question and see who can pass the pop test. I preached a message that should have helped you know this.

Turn to Matthew 1, the first message where we departed from Exodus, I mean Ezra in December and preached a couple of messages on the genealogy in Matthew 1. The amazing thing about who does God help? God helps those who humble themselves and come to him in brokenness. Anyone who will humble themselves no matter how much you've defiled yourself, no matter how wicked you have been, if you will humble yourself and run to God and look to him to do what only he can do. You can't clean yourself up. I can't clean myself up. You come to him and you acknowledge your poverty before him and you look to the one he has given who saves, Jesus, and he will deal with you. He will clean you up. He will bring you to himself.

But in the genealogy of Jesus, we noted that there are in addition to Mary, of course, the mother of Jesus, there are four women mentioned in the genealogy which was really unusual that four women would be mentioned in a genealogy. It was very uncustomary for Jews to mention them but four women are mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Tamar, do you know what her nationality was? She was a Canaanite. Rahab was an Amorite. Ruth was a Moabite. Bathsheba, the text doesn't have her name, they add it in to make it clear, it literally says in verse 6, "Jesse was the father of David the king, David was the father of Solomon by the one who had been the wife of Uriah." The emphasis is not upon her name, Bathsheba, it's upon Uriah. Why is that? Uriah was what? He was a Hittite. Bathsheba was a Hittite. Four of those five nationalities that they are not to intermarry with are in the line of Jesus Christ. The blood of an Amorite, a Canaanite, a Hittite and a Moabite are in Christ. Jesus is a testimony to the fact that God invites all people to come to him, so if the people around you will turn from their sins and you're to offer the Gospel to them but you're not to yoke yourself to them and become like them. You're to be separate, to follow Jesus, but then he saves any who come to him.

Our God is a God of great mercy and grace. He exposes sin not to lead you in your condemnation, he uncovers our sin so that we can run to Christ, and if you will run to Christ, if you will see that Jesus experienced the wrath of God against your sin, that he in himself absorbed the punishment for everything that you have ever done or ever could do he has paid for, and you will place your trust in him and trust in his resurrection as proof that he is God's Savior, then he will save you. But help comes from God. When help arrives, it arrives differently than we expected because God knows that the greatest need that you and I have is to deal with our sin. The greatest problem in every moment is my sin for me. It's your sin for you. And God is so good that he doesn't get distracted. He deals with what needs to be dealt with.

Let's go the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank You for Your goodness and we confess, Lord, we are truly sinful in the core of our beings. Your word tells us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it. We were conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity as David himself testified. Our only hope is that Jesus saves people from their sins. Our only hope is to run to You, O God, who exposes our sin so that we can see our need of Christ and that He brings a freedom from condemnation and guilt, and also an increasing freedom from the power of sin so we can walk in holiness and righteousness increasingly day by day. Father, help us, help us to be willing to draw near to You and as You draw near to us, to stay there under Your word, under the convicting power of Your Spirit, and do Your surgery on us. Make us like Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.*