

The Benefit and Blessing of Genealogies (Pt. 2)

Ezra 2:1

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Because we are not a society that is generally interested in our genealogical roots or tracing our heritage back through 10, 15, 20 or 30 generations, the Church of Christ in this society has a general disregard for generational faithfulness to Christ. A general lack of interest in a society for one's natural genealogy of ancestors is also likely to breed a general lack of interest for one's spiritual genealogy of ancestors. So often in evangelical circles, one's personal faith and religion has become so individualistic, that one has little concern and care to know the biblical faith of one's forefathers and ancestors and to understand how each Christian is within a genealogical list of people (who proceeded and who follow) with whom the Lord has covenanted to carry forth the torch of faithfulness to Christ and to His gospel to the succeeding generation, praying fervently that the generation of our children will pass that torch of covenant faithfulness to the next generation, and so on for a thousand generations. You see, dear ones, we are not only to be interested in our own individual salvation, but we are to be likewise deeply interested in a generational salvation (i.e. a covenantal salvation that brings to Jesus Christ one generation after another).

And I would add, dear ones, that a primary reason why there is so much schism and division within the Church of Christ (with the proliferation of new churches formed from new divisions within churches) is because we do not care that we are bound and obligated to preserve pure and entire the ecclesiastical genealogy of that faithful reformed church that fled the spiritual Babylonian captivity of Rome. Christ does not will that His Church be divided and shredded into thousands and thousands of ecclesiastical pieces (1 Corinthians 1:10). Rather the Lord Jesus wills that His Visible Church be one in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline (John 17:20-21; Ephesians 4:1-6). Dear Christian, there ought not to be "new" and distinct churches formed at all (for this is simply to multiply division within the body of Christ), but rather there ought to be one faithful reformed church within each nation that can clearly trace its ecclesiastical genealogy back to those faithful reformed churches of the 16th and 17th centuries, which formed faithful national churches at that time. And when it does become necessary to separate from a church that has become unfaithful to the biblical faith of our ancestors, the faithful ought not to form a "new" church, but ought to understand that they are simply returning to the genealogy and spiritual lineage of the faithful reformed church of the past. This is not multiplying schism and division, but rather it is continuing the genealogy of the faithful Church of Christ; for we are commanded to walk in the paths of the faithful who have preceded us ("That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" Hebrews 6:12). However, by today's standards, it is rather a bonus and a trophy that a church is "new" and has no ecclesiastical or genealogical ties with any church that has preceded it. What a downward spiral of spiritual and ecclesiastical destruction occurs when we fail to understand the benefit and blessing of genealogies.

This Lord's Day we shall continue (by God's grace) in our study of biblical genealogies from our text in Ezra 2. In the previous sermon, we considered the first main point: The Purpose and Use of Biblical Genealogies and Registries. Today, let us look more closely at our text in Ezra 2 as we move on to the second main point: Observations about a Specific Registry of Families (Ezra 2:1ff).

II. Observations about a Specific Registry of Families (Ezra 2:1ff).

A. Ezra 2:1 provides us with a historical marker, stating that those families (who are listed

throughout chapter 2) were those who had been taken captive by the Babylonian ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, primarily from the Kingdom of Judah, approximately 70 years earlier.

1. With the decree of Cyrus, King of Persia, to return to Judah to rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (cp. Ezra 1:1-4), these captives were set free in about 536 b.c. According to Ezra 2:64, the sum total of the whole congregation that returned from Babylonian captivity with Zerubbabel was 42,360 (in addition to this number, there were 7,337 servants). This included not only the strong young men, but also the elderly, the women, and the children. This journey was not like taking your family on a vacation. It was approximately a 900 mile trek on foot and in wagons (taking 4 long months to travel, cp. Ezra 7:9), wherein they would likely face many hardships along the way (from scorching sun to wind storms, from deadly creatures to hostile marauders, cp. Ezra 8:21-23). This journey to rebuild the temple was not comfortable and free of danger, but they undertook this trip because the Lord stirred up their hearts and moved them to take their families on this journey to rebuild the temple of the Lord.

2. Dear ones, the Lord has not promised us an easy path in rebuilding the wasted temple of the Lord (which is the fragmented Church of Christ, broken into so many pieces by corrupt doctrine, impure worship, and false church government). The road to seeing the Church of Christ rebuilt (which shall be realized in the millennium) is long, dangerous, and costly (especially when all those who seek by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone to travel this road are so scattered from one another in various locations).

a. We are not told in the Ezra account how many suffered afflictions, trials, or deaths in their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple. However, such a journey could hardly have been envisioned without many hardships and trials along the way.

b. Dear ones, the love of many for the truth of Christ has grown cold, many have fallen away and have chosen an easier path to walk rather than the narrow path of truth and righteousness where so few are graced and blessed to walk in the steps of faithful witnesses and martyrs for the cause of Christ. Family members and friends with whom we once held hands in beginning our journey together have turned back and walk no longer with us. We as parents (and our young people) wonder whether our children will find faithful Covenanters to marry. We know not what persecution we may face from the civil government for our testimony against a nation that tolerates (and therefore promotes) religious polytheism. We have no guarantees that we will not face stiff opposition from public leaders to educating our children at home under our loving oversight. The times are perilous politically, financially, ecclesiastically, and spiritually to us, to our families, and to our covenanted groups and societies. How we need the grace of courage from Christ and the grace of encouragement from one another that we not fall away due to the many temptations, sins, hardships, trials, and unfaithfulness of family and friends.

c. Beloved, having begun this journey together, may the God of all grace cause us to persevere in holding to the free gospel of Jesus Christ, in holding to even those truths found in Scripture that are most despised by the world and by other professing Christians, and in holding to the power of godliness (and not the mere outward form of godliness). I submit to you that the greatest enemies that we face are not those without, but are rather those within us like pride, self-righteousness, unbelief, hopelessness, cowardice, vacillation and wavering in our total commitment to Christ and His truth, lust of the flesh, discontentment, the love of this world and its comforts in this life, trusting in those people and things that we can see with our eyes rather than trusting in Christ and His promises which can only be seen with the eye of faith. Dear ones, this journey that we have begun in seeking by God's grace to rebuild the splintered and wasted Church of Christ will require that we be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ with courage and perseverance. Look with me at two examples that have come to my attention when considering how we are not to follow Christ and how we are to follow Christ in this journey to rebuild His broken and fractured Church.

(1) The first example of how we are not to follow Christ is that of the pope (who is "that man of sin" identified in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). The pope is scheduled to make a journey to

Mexico and Cuba at the end of March (just as he has traveled to many countries in the past, like the United States in 2008 and Great Britain in 2010) supposedly to build up the Church of Christ upon earth. He travels as a wealthy potentate with his vast political and ecclesiastical delegation in all his vain pomp and glory in order to make alliances that benefit the Church of Rome in the nations of this world. I submit that this is simply a contemporary illustration of the great whore (the Church of Rome) with its pope riding upon the civil beast as we see in Revelation 17:3. However, when the curtain of his hypocrisy is stripped away, in reality, he travels to give to the nations to drink from the cup which is filled with his heretical abominations (like the praying to saints, the dispensing of merit [for a price] from saints who have allegedly done more than the Law of God requires, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ, the re-sacrificing of Christ for the forgiveness of sins in the mass, the celebration of Rome's holy days [like Christmas and Easter], the usurpation of Christ's title as Head of the Church, and the list of idolatry and heresy goes on and on). The visit of the pope is not a rebuilding, but a destruction of the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of Christ, no matter how far he travels on his journeys, or no matter how many countries he visits in his itinerary. What does it cost him, by way of sacrifice? Nothing but a little time which he uses to gather his satanic forces against the pure gospel of Jesus Christ and those faithful witnesses who will not bow the knee nor compromise the truth of Christ whatever they may face.

(2) On the other hand, I note as an example of how we are to follow Christ one who hasn't traveled many miles to build the Kingdom of Christ, but who has counted the world and all its comforts as dung in order to be faithful to his testimony for Jesus Christ. I refer to a poor Iranian pastor (Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani) who has been sentenced to death by the Islamic Supreme Court in Iran. Pastor Youcef has pastored a network of house churches and is a member of the Protestant Evangelical Church of Iran (which, as far as I have been able to learn, is a sound church in regard to the foundational truth of the faith). He is 34 years old, and married with two children. He was arrested in 2009 for questioning the compulsory Islamic education of his children and for seeking to register a home-based church. He was sentenced to death in 2010 for apostasy from the religion of Islam. The Iranian authorities have used various methods to try to convert him back to Islam, including giving him drugs, apparently in an attempt to claim that he was insane. Because Pastor Youcef would not renounce his faith in Jesus Christ, the Islamic authorities in Iran decided to arrest his wife in order to place more pressure on him. On June 18th, 2010 his wife was arrested, charged with apostasy and placed in prison in Lakan. During this time, their boys went to live with a relative. Both Youcef and his wife Fatemah were threatened by authorities that their children would be taken away and given to a Muslim family. Youcef was not swayed to turn back to Islam, so his wife was put on trial without an attorney, and sentenced to life in prison. An attorney was later hired and the sentence appealed. The sentence and conviction were overturned, and she was released. During one hearing Youcef was told to recant, and he responded, "You ask me to recant. Recant means to return. What do you wish me to return to? The blasphemy that I was in before Christ?" The judges responded, "To the religion of your ancestors, Islam." Youcef replied, "I cannot" (<http://presenttruthmn.com/the-ministry/youcef-nadarkhani/>).

d. Dear ones, what are we willing to sacrifice in our journey to rebuild the Church of Jesus Christ? It is costly. We must deny ourselves, take up our cross and die daily to our sins, and even to our lawful comforts (like our family, if necessary) if we would see our journey blessed to some degree in rebuilding the wasted Church of Christ in these perilous times. We travel not that journey alone, for the Lord is with us as He was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in that fiery furnace. Dear ones, it is the Lord Jesus that must build the Church (Matthew 16:18), but I ask you, dear Christian, do you consider yourself and see yourself on that road to be used in whatever way the Lord would choose to use you in rebuilding His Church with your family and friends, with your fellow employees, and with your neighbors? Those of Judah, who were set free by the grace of God from Babylon, set out to face whatever the hardship in order to see the temple (or church) of the living God rebuilt with sound doctrine, pure worship, and faithful church government. What

are you willing to sacrifice (what am I willing to sacrifice) in order to see the blessed temple and Church of Christ rebuilt and reformed by the grace and power of Almighty God in using weak vessels like you and me?

B. In the time remaining this Lord's Day, let us briefly review in a very general way those who made the dangerous and costly journey to Jerusalem to be used of the Lord in rebuilding the temple and kingdom of God upon the earth. Now although Ezra 2 is not (strictly speaking) a genealogy (but rather a registry of families), nevertheless, this registry is clearly based upon genealogical lineages. For example, in Ezra 2:3 we find that the children (or descendants) of Parosh, who returned from Babylonian captivity with Zerubbabel, were 2,172. Now how many generations would it take to have a family of that size, that were all related from a common ancestor. A few generations for sure, and so my point is simply that there is a genealogy implied in the listing of families within this registry. And we see in this genealogical registry a merging of familial, legal/political, and ecclesiastical purposes in it (as we discussed in the previous sermon). In the registry listed in Ezra 2, let us now summarize those who took up their cross and followed Zerubbabel (who was an ancestor and type of Christ, cp. Matthew 1:13 and Luke 3:27) to face a perilous journey in re-establishing the pure doctrine, worship, and government of the Church.

1. First, there were civil and religious leaders (Ezra 2:2-3).
2. Second, there were the common people (Ezra 2:3-35).
3. Third, there were the ministers within the temple (the **priests** in Ezra 2:36-39, 62; the **Levites** to assist the priests in Ezra 2:40; the **singers** within the temple in Ezra 2:41; and the **porters** or door keepers within the temple in Ezra 2:42).
4. Fourth, there were the Nethinim (Ezra 2:43-54). The Nethinim were common laborers, who did the manual work needed for the temple. These were proselytes to the true religion of Jehovah through their ancestors, the Gibeonites, who were spared destruction in Joshua 9.
5. Fifth, there were proselytes who became common laborers to do work associated with the residence of the governor (Ezra 2:55-57).
6. Sixth, there were servants and maids to those who were wealthy enough to have them (Ezra 2:65).
7. Dear ones, do you see here that the Holy Spirit would have us see from the variety of people of various classes of society and of many different occupations that are listed here in Ezra 2, that each of you (regardless of your gifts and abilities) has a place of service in rebuilding the Church of Christ. None of you can excuse yourself by considering that you have little money, little education, little gifts and talents (at least according to the standards of the world). Dear ones, it is the Lord who allots to each of us the wealth that we have, the education we have, the gifts and talents that we have; and whether we have much or little, we are not judged on how much we have, but rather shall be judged on how we used what God has given to us to rebuild and reform the kingdom of Christ (cp. The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30). Each of you has been given at least one talent by the Lord, some have been given two talents, and others have been given five talents. Are you daily offering yourself as a living sacrifice to Christ to be used by the Lord in bringing salvation to the lost and reformation to Christ's Church (Romans 12:1-2)?

C. Remember that in that list of families whose hearts God stirred to make the dangerous journey to rebuild the temple (in Ezra 2), there were not simply the royal governor and elders of the people, the prophets, and the ministers, but there were servants, common laborers, fathers, mothers, singles, young people, and small children.

1. Dear fathers and mothers, you are building and reforming the Church by means of the time you spend in loving, teaching, training, catechizing, praying for, working with, and worshipping with your children. There is not a more important work in building and reforming the Church of Christ than the work of godly parents in the home.

2. Dear children, you are building and reforming the Church by means of receiving by faith alone the promise of your salvation made to you in the gospel and in your baptism. You children and young people cannot simply be those who hear week in and week out the gospel preached and do nothing about it. You cannot be like one who has a table filled with the most delightful food, and simply admires the feast set before you without eating. You will perish if you do not eat by faith alone of that blessed feast of salvation that is set before you in the promise made to you in your baptism and in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Dear young adults and singles, you are building and reforming the Church by means of waiting for the right man or woman who embraces Christ by faith alone, who is on the same journey as you in rebuilding and reforming the Church of Christ, and who evidences the power of godliness (and not the mere pretense of godliness). There are so many temptations that Satan uses to appeal to your lusts and desires, but Christ and His death and resurrection, Christ and His endless supply of grace is more than sufficient for every need that you have of loneliness and desire for companionship. If you have Christ, you have all the resources within the grasp of faith to become an overcomer, rather than being steamrolled by the devil and by those enemies within you.

4. Even the elderly, the afflicted, and the bedridden, are mightily used by the Lord to rebuild and reform the Church by their fervent and unceasing prayers, and by their faithful example in suffering without complaint, but rather with praise to God for His tender mercies and everlasting life. Dear ones, not only apostles, prophets, and ministers are charged to rebuild the fallen and wasted temple and church of the Lord Jesus Christ—all are charged to do so in their various callings (from the youngest to the oldest, from men to women, from the most menial callings in the eyes of the world to the most exalted callings in the eyes of the world, from the poorest to the richest). Dear ones, what are you doing with the talents, with the abilities, and with the earthly resources with which God has blessed you in rebuilding the temple and Church of Christ here upon earth? Will you be like the servant who hid his talent, or will you be like the servant that multiplied his talents in using what the Lord had given to him to increase the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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