UPC Family Devotional

April – Week 4

Memory Verse of the Week

“The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.”

-Ezra 8:22b

April 18 Monday Ezra 8:1-20

Much like Moses did during the Exodus, Ezra works with the heads of families to coordinate the return effort. Most of the clans listed here represent families who are reuniting with members who had returned from Babylon decades prior. As much as the Jews long for their homeland and old way of life, many of them opt to remain in exile due to a number of concerns like safety, finances, and the sheer scale of the rebuilding project. Those families who return courageously give Israel an opportunity to not just rebuild Jerusalem but also regain its cultural identity and commitment to worshipping God. Praise God for courageous pioneers who pave the way for the rest of His people to contribute to His work!

Who are some pioneers of faith that have paved the way for God’s work in your life?

Before fully embarking on the journey, Ezra wisely checks to make sure everything is in order. He discovers that there is not a single Levite in the group. This is a serious problem, for the Levites are responsible for conducting temple worship. So Ezra chooses influential and educated men to recruit Levites to join them on their journey and help reestablish the true worship of God in Jerusalem. God graciously provides for Ezra and his group by sending a capable leader, dozens of priests, and over two hundred temple servants. As we step out to be faithful in the things God has called us to do, He will provide for our every need along the way.

How is God calling you to step out in faith? What are some things you need Him to provide in order to be successful?

April 19 Tuesday Ezra 8:21-36

Ezra’s first act of leadership is to bring the people together for a time of fasting and prayer to seek God’s favor for their journey. While he is concerned about the people’s safety, Ezra is committed to trusting in God’s protection rather than requesting the king for an armed escort. Interestingly, Nehemiah would later accept a military escort when leading his cohort of exiles back to Jerusalem, as an acknowledgment of God’s provision (Neh. 2:9). Both are acts of faith in their own right, and in both cases God provides the much needed protection over His people.

How has God provided for your needs this past month? What are some difficult or even potentially dangerous situations He has brought you through?

God hears the prayers of Ezra and his companions, grants them favor in their journey, and protects them from all harm. Now that they are finally in Jerusalem they can begin the work of restoring worship in the holy city. Both the priests and the precious items to be used in the temple are consecrated for God’s purpose before the work begins. Here we see a portrait for what a life of worship is meant to look like: we dedicate ourselves and all our possessions to God with the intent of bringing honor to Him.

What does it mean for you to dedicate your life to God? What are some things God is calling you to surrender over to Him?

April 20 Wednesday Ezra 9:1-15

­It is ironic that not long after Ezra consecrates that Levites and the items of the temple, he is forced to confront the issue of intermarriage. God had given the Israelites strict instructions to keep themselves separate from the surrounding nations in order to remain wholly devoted to Him. By marrying into other communities, His people would inevitably adopt their practices and begin worshipping false gods – a form of compromise proved to have disastrous effects throughout Israel’s history. Ezra is absolutely devastated by the news of intermarriage. The problem has nothing to do with racial discrimination but with spiritual pollution within Israel. God intends to return His people back to their inheritance, reestablish them as a nation, and rekindle their passion for proper worship. A commitment that is divided between the Lord and foreign gods would deeply hinder God’s plans for them. Ezra acknowledges that the judgment that came upon Israel in the form of exile was less than they deserved. Likewise, God shows His love and patience toward us in that while we were sinful enemies of God, Christ died for us.

What are some ways you are tempted to compromise in your convictions?

How have you experienced the underserved grace of God? Who is someone you can extend this type of grace to this week?

April 21 Thursday Ezra 10:1-15

What are we to make of the dismissal of the foreign wives and their children? We must understand that the returning exiles were compelled to strictly obey old covenant commands in light of the judgment God had brought upon them as a nation. Having intermarried with neighboring peoples, the Israelites – including priests and Levites – had begun to adopt their idolatrous practices. By mingling with the surrounding nations, they risked losing their identity as God’s chosen people. For believers today this passage exhorts us to be watchful of things in our lives that compromise our commitment to the Lord and make us indistinguishable from the world.

What things in your life hinder your faithful commitment to God’s kingdom? What have you separated yourself from in order to faithfully follow Jesus?

Desperate times call for desperate measures. The intermarriage of Jewish men with women who worship other gods is a threat to the faithfulness of God’s people. The assembly recognizes that this is no small matter. They also acknowledge, however, that this issue cannot be solved overnight, so they make plans to properly deal with their compromise with repentance and resolve. This shows the importance of community in addressing sin. Some of our compromises

Are so deeply entrenched that we need the patient accountability of God’s people to truly overcome them. As we seek to live a life set apart for the Lord, let us not neglect the help that He provides through His church and other believers around the world.

Why is it important for God’s people to work together as we seek to walk in holiness?

April 22 Friday Ezra 10:16-44

It takes three months to investigate and address the cases of the Jewish men who had married foreign women. Information has to be carefully considered and ascertained; decisions over this difficult matter cannot be rushed. The priests lead the way in confessing their sin and presenting a guilt offering to the Lord. Likewise, those called by God to teach and guide His people must be willing to lead by example and humble themselves, even if that means publicly confessing and making restitution for sin where necessary. This demonstration of humility teaches the way of Jesus to God’s people, for Christ Himself led by example. It also equips leaders to better serve the church with a clean heart and a purified conscience. While not every situation requires a confession of sin in the presence of the entire congregation, spiritual leaders need the support of a group of believers that spurts them on to walk in the light.

When have you been edified and encouraged by the humility demonstrated by other followers of Christ? How has confessing your sins to other believers helped you?

April 23 Saturday Malachi 1:1-5

To understand the opening words of Malachi’s prophecies, we must understand the cneturies of animosity between Israel and Edom. The twin grandsons of Abraham, Jacob and Esau, become two very different nations in which Edom is a constant threat and a thorn in Israel’s side. Although both nations are eventually conquered by the Babylonians, God’s covenantal love results in the restoration of His chosen people, Israel, after their exile. Wicked Edom, on the other hand, has no such promise of restoration. As with Israel, God’s love for us as His people is not measured by our present circumstances; it is seen in His overarching faithfulness all the days of our lives as He holds us through both the good and bad times.

When have difficult circumstances caused you to question God’s love? Take some time to remember all the ways He has shown His faithfulness to you.