

Pilgrims Have Names

Ezra 2 - NCBC, April 24, 2016

Main Point: **Every person is significant to God's eternal purposes.**

- **God knows your name.**
 - God keeps detailed records.
 - God knows and loves you.
- **God's love reveals His glory.**
 - God's love for you is rooted in His love for Himself.
 - God's sovereign grace demonstrates His glory.
- **Choose a good name.**
 - God accepts whoever comes by faith in His Name.
 - God's grace transforms your legacy.

Application: **Prioritize sacrificial worship as your pilgrim legacy.**

- Recall God's faithfulness to you personally.
- Reject the deceptive lies of pride and superiority.
- Influence others by modeling voluntary sacrifice.

Opening Announcements:

- *Church-wide Grad Party – Weds May 18th*
- *Next Week: Prepare for Earthquake Relief Collection for our Gospel partners in Ecuador*

<<He Knows My Name>>



God knows your name. And He hears you when you call.

This morning we continue our study of God's restoring grace from the historical books of Ezra + Nehemiah. Please prepare for the reading of God's Word from **Ezra 2**.

If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

In chapter 1 we learned that God sets captives free for the purpose of worshipping Him. Today we open our Bibles to chapter 2 and find a long list of names. Over 120 names in 70 verses – that's quite a mouthful! Any volunteers to read our text aloud for us this morning? 😊

But even though it may be tempting to skip over a chapter like **Ezra 2**, I believe God's inspired Word has much to teach us this morning about His restoring grace.

You will find **Ezra 2** on page **389** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand in honor God's Word, as I read from **Ezra 2** in the English Standard translation. Verse 1:

Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. ² They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

Let's skip down to verse 64:

⁶⁴ The whole assembly together was 42,360, ⁶⁵ besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers.

⁶⁶ Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, ⁶⁷ their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720.

⁶⁸ Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site.

⁶⁹ According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments.

⁷⁰ Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.

So reads the Word of the Lord.

You may be seated. **Let's Pray.**

I know some of you wondered whether or not I would read every name in this chapter this morning. And truly I would have preferred to, except for our time constraints and my general tendency to butcher the pronunciation of anything longer than 3 syllables.

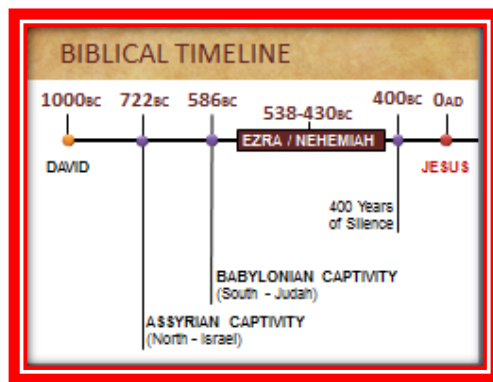
But long lists of names are usually important. Especially in the Scriptures.

In a few weeks most of us will attend a graduation ceremony of some kind. And crowds of people will listen carefully as someone reads hundreds of names aloud in rapid succession. And every person will listen carefully for the name of the person they know... or even your own name... for the reading of that name represents an accomplishment, a recognition, and a privilege of inclusion in the graduating class.

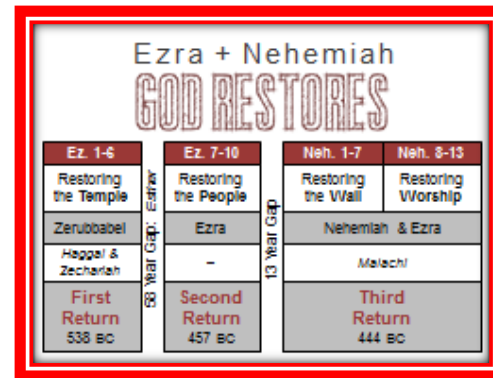
The truth of the matter is, whenever we are exposed to a long list of names – we are most quickly drawn to the names of people that we know best. For a name is just a few letters put together to represent a person. Names represent individuals, and thereby invite relationship.

This by the way, is why larger churches must become more intentional about helping people learn each other's names... for without knowing one another's names our relationships will be kept "surprisingly superficial" no matter how much time transpires.

So why such a list of names in **Ezra 2**? Well the context helps answer this question.



Remember the book of Ezra/Nehemiah gives a historical account of God restoring His people back into the promised land after 70 years of judgment in Babylon. Because of His people's refusal to heed the persistent warnings of His prophets... God's patience eventually gave way to judgment, and the promised land was emptied of God's chosen people. The beautiful temple that Solomon had built was completely destroyed, and the people were taken away as slaves to Babylon some 900 miles away.



So Ezra focuses on the *spiritual* restoration of the people with a first priority of restoring their worship as they rebuild the temple. God always delivers captives so they might worship Him! Nehemiah then focuses on the *national* restoration of God's people back in the land as they rebuild the wall.

So before getting into the rebuilding of the temple in chapter 3, Ezra 2 records the names of the returning families. These were ordinary heroes. According to Ezra 1:5, God's Spirit had stirred in the hearts of these exiles so they would leave behind their old life in Babylon and live for a promise of future glory back in Jerusalem.

Now observe that God's Spirit working through Ezra the scribe doesn't just start with verse 64 – because to God each individual and family is significant. It didn't matter that some of the families were small or weak, they were an essential part of God's preservation of His chosen people. Individual members of God's covenant community were stirred by God's Spirit – and moved to return to Jerusalem. And it was from these families that

God would eventually raise up the Messiah to fulfill His covenant promises.

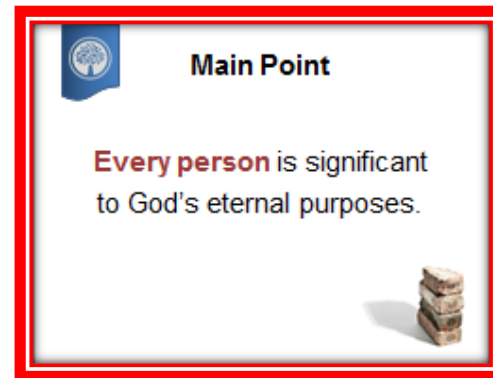
So do you want to meet the returnees? Let's give a quick overview of the names that are preserved for all time here.

After listing the leaders of the people in verse 2, verses 3-35 provide a list of common Israelites who were part of the return back to Jerusalem. In verses 3-20 (18) different family groups are accounted for. Then in verses 21-35 (15) more groups of Jews are listed according to their geographic location.

Verse 36 recorded the return of 4 families of priests. Verse 40 tells us how few Levites were willing to return. Then the temple singers and gatekeepers are listed in verses 41-42. The rest of the temple support staff and the descendants from Solomon's servants who are part of the return are recorded in verses 43-58.

Verses 59-63 demonstrate how serious the returning Jews were about preserving their racial and religious purity. Obviously this chapter demonstrates God's faithful preservation of His people even though they've been in exile for several decades. The returning exiles were legitimate Jews from the original 12 tribes. The returning priests were legitimate priests with the right pedigree. And where this couldn't be validated with certainty, it was better to wait for clarity from God rather than move forward in registering people of unknown descent among God's chosen.

So this morning as we consider this important historical record, I want to draw our attention to the personal work of God's restoration. Here as God is restoring a nation and legitimizing His people according to their Jewish genealogies...we find a record of individual families who would have otherwise been unknown. Ezra 2 stands as a testimony of the fact that:



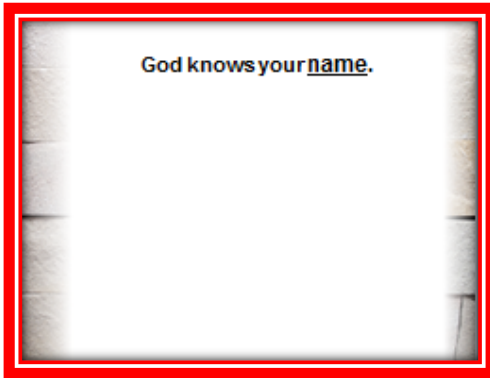
Every person is significant to God's eternal purposes.

God accomplishes His grand purposes for nations and churches through His Spirit's work within individuals. His eternal purposes have personal implications for each of us this morning.

It doesn't matter who you are this morning... God created you. There's no one here whom God did not create. It doesn't matter if you were born premature with significant handicaps or right on time perfectly healthy. God created you. God created you regardless of whether you were abused or adopted. It makes no difference if you were born in a car, or a hospital, or a different country. No

matter who you are – God created you. You are a true miracle of God's creative power. So when you read a passage like Ezra 2, remember that

God knows your name.



God knows who you are. Just like God knew who His people were. He didn't lose track of David's kingly family just because they were carried away in exile. Just as God didn't lose track of Zerubbabel from whose line Jesus Christ would be born¹... neither has God lost track of you. God knows your name. And God keeps detailed records.

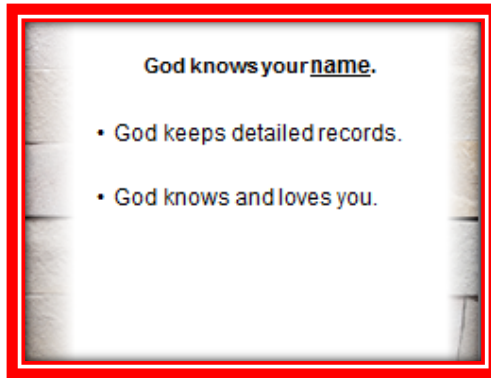


Do you ever feel forgotten or insignificant? In a world where everyone clamors after their 15-minutes of social media fame ... are you ever tempted to believe that your ordinary life doesn't really make that much of a difference in God's eternal plan?

What if I told you that the King of Kings knows your name? That He sees and knows everything about you. And that He will always do right in the end. You can trust Him. He's a good good Father.

For God doesn't just keep detailed records...but God knows and loves you.

¹ Matthew 1



You are loved by the King. Your perfect heavenly Father loves you. You may not have been loved and accepted by your earthly father. Your life so far might be a long trail of rejection, abuse, and tears...just like these families who had been enslaved in Babylon. But God knows your name. And according to His own words, He loves you!

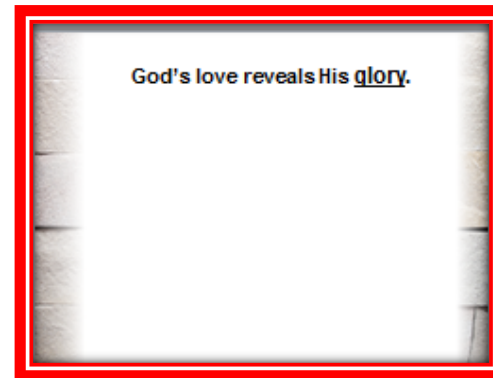
That means He cares for you personally. He draws near to the brokenhearted. He delights in spending time with you. He never breaks any promises that He's made to you. And He gives Himself to you sacrificially and for your good.

Where there is no sacrifice, there is no love. That's why John 3:16 describes God's love for you in terms of His sacrifice,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

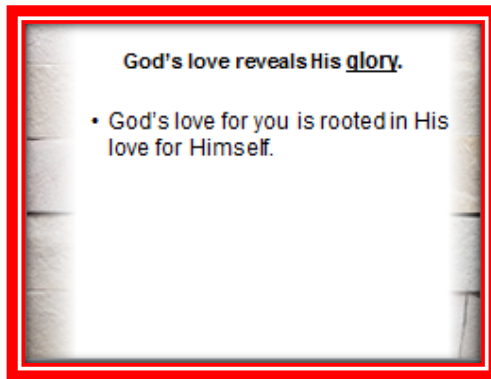
God loves you. Do you believe that this morning? Have you lived the last week of your life consistent with this truth? God doesn't just know your name – He loves you. By grace He offers to adopt you, give you His inheritance, and bless you with lasting joy and peace.

If you believe God loves you like this just because you are so lovely... you are failing to understand the wondrous depth of God's love for His people. You see, we must understand that **God's love reveals His glory.**



The glory of God is demonstrated most through the love of God for sinners like you and me. He doesn't love us because we are somehow lovely to Him. God didn't bring the people back because they had finally paid for their sins, or somehow earned God's favor back. Just like you and me, these people had sinned and committed treason against God's perfect holiness. 70 years away from the promised land was not sufficient to erase their sins. God's restoring love wasn't ultimately for their sake...but for His.

So please understand the awesome truth of God's love for you. It has nothing to do with you. This is really good news. **God's love for you is rooted in His love for Himself.**



We could say it this way – God's love for you is a result of His self-love. The only reason God loves sinners like me, is because He loves Himself more than anything else.

Now some people might get offended when they hear that God loves them for his own sake. As if somehow this cheapens God's love when it is for His own praise and glory, rather than for our ultimate glory.

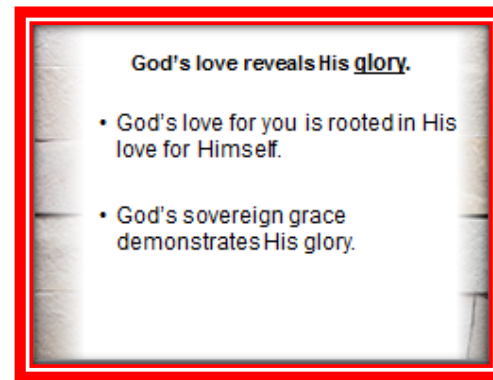
But Ephesians 1:5-6 is clear on this point,

In love he predestined us to adoption ...to the praise of the glory of His grace...

God's saving love is rooted in the praise of the glory of His grace. It's all about demonstrating His own

goodness. God's love for you and me is never motivated by our own deserving of it...but by the very unchanging nature of grace and mercy. By the very attributes of God Himself.

You see, this is the big picture of what we see recorded in Ezra 2. **God's sovereign grace demonstrates His glory.**



Ezra 1 made the point clear for us. It was not natural for these exiles to want to return back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. But God's Spirit sovereignly stirred in their hearts to make it possible for them to be set free from Babylon's captivity. And in all of this restoring work of God's sovereign grace... God was working for the sake of His own Name.

These were God's chosen people. The deliverance of these individual families was necessary for the fulfillment of the promises He had made to Abraham, David, and the prophets about land, blessing, and a name for His chosen people.

So fundamentally speaking, God's loving actions towards these exiled pilgrims was not ultimately for their sake...but for His. God's love for sinners like us is rooted in His love for His own Name. Our rescue is ultimately for His sake – even more than it is for ours.

The prophet Ezekiel drives this point home in chapter 36. Listen to how the prophet describes the Babylonian exile starting in verse 19,

¹⁹ I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. ... ²¹ But I had concern for my holy name, ... ²² "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name,

Ezekiel 36:19-22

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This should cause our hearts to swell with thanksgiving today. Humble thanksgiving. We don't deserve salvation. We don't deserve God's love. But by His

amazing grace – in order that the praise of His glory and grace might fill eternity – God knows your Name. And He truly loves you. Behold – what manner of love is this, that we should be called children of God?²

So repent of your self-reliance and independent self-love...and humbly open your heart to receive God's love for you, for when you are loved with such love as this, you will be made alive by God's grace – all to His greater glory and praise.

So this morning, no matter who you are or where you've come from, God's grace makes it possible for you to **Choose a good name.**

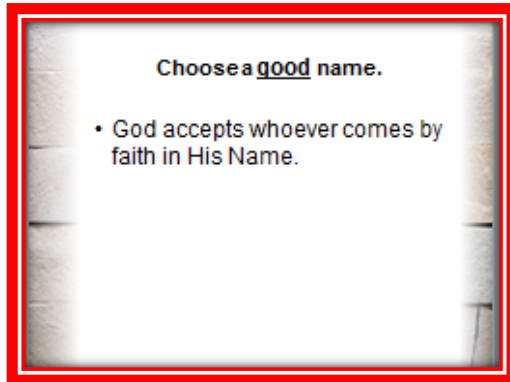
Choose a good name.

By God's grace, you have the power to choose between living for your own name, or living for the Name above all other Names! Everyone here today is invited by the Scriptures to personally participate in God's eternal plan for His ultimate glory. And there is no greater joy that

² 1 John 3:1

anyone could ever experience than bringing glory and praise to our Almighty God of wisdom and grace!

Listen carefully now to this good news. **God accepts whoever comes by faith in His Name.**

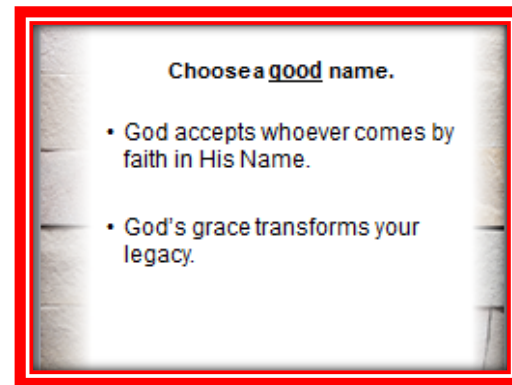


If you cry out to God from your lost and desperate condition, and believe on the finished work of Jesus Christ on behalf of your own sins – God promises to make you alive again by His grace. Your name will be found in the Lamb's book of life – and you will be granted an inheritance in the New Jerusalem.

Observe the carefulness of the Jewish pilgrims in verses 59-63. There were some people and priests among the returnees who were not able to prove their Jewish descent, whether or not they belonged to Israel. Carefulness is required in this matter of discerning God's saving work. Make your calling and election sure. Just because you think you're a Christian doesn't mean that you are. God's salvation is by grace alone through faith alone – by which God changes our very nature, and

produces spiritual fruit of love, joy, and obedience from our lives. So it doesn't matter how often you attend church, or what ministries you do – if you are not born again by God's Spirit you cannot inherit eternal life.³

Well perhaps you say, But I didn't grow up having biblical Christianity taught and modeled to me. Dear believer in Jesus Christ remember, **God's grace transforms your legacy.**



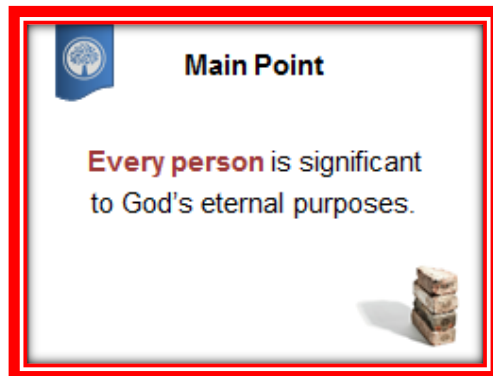
Do you want your legacy to be one of grace, peace, joy, and spiritual fruitfulness? Surrender to God's grace!

Think of Ezra 2 from this angle. There are over 120 family groups mentioned... these are the sons of the heads of these families... well consider this for a moment. Ezra 1 recounts how the heads of these families were stirred up to pursue sacrificial worship by God's grace...and their sons were all affected.

³ John 3

No matter your family background, your relationship with Christ today can change your family's legacy tomorrow. God's grace transforms your legacy. Today is a day of salvation. Today is a day of repentance. Everything can change starting today.

God knows you personally. And He loves you with an eternal love... personally. He's calling you to believe on Him today and fully surrender your future to His good grace. Will you choose to answer His call for your heart today?



Every person is significant to God's eternal purposes. God desires to bring His name greater glory by the work of His undeserved grace in your life today.

So how will you respond? Will you be like the exiles who found it best to stay comfortable in their Babylonian slavery...and not have their names recorded forever in Ezra 2? Or will you respond to the stirring of God's Spirit and **Prioritize sacrificial worship as your pilgrim legacy?**



As you consider the reality of these 50,000 pilgrims finally coming to the site of the broken down altar in verse 68... what was their response?

Some of the heads of the families, when they came to the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. According to their ability they gave...

Not all, but some of these family leaders.... After traveling months to finally arrive at the site of the decimated temple... responded with the worship of sacrificial giving. Freewill offerings.

Everyone one of them had different abilities. They weren't all the same. And neither are we here today. But worship doesn't compare ourselves with others...but responds voluntarily with personal sacrifice out of our own thankful heart.

So ask yourself this morning, is my worship of God the highest priority in my life?

So then for those of us who have been born again by God's grace...how must we prioritize sacrificial worship as our pilgrim legacy in this world?

First, we must **recall God's faithfulness to us personally.**



Take some time this week to list all the ways God has shown His love to you personally. Think about how God has faithfully worked behind the scenes to bless you, deliver you, or strengthen you in some way for His greater praise and glory.

In other words – preach God's love to yourself. Remind yourself that God loves you. He really does. And it's a real, sacrificial, transforming love.

But make sure you delight in the deeper joys of a God-centered love. For a love that is centered on man's supposed worthiness cannot sustain itself through unfaithfulness and sin.

So if worship is going to be your pilgrim legacy, you must **reject the deceptive lies of pride and superiority.**

God doesn't love you because of who you are, or where you've been, or what you've done or haven't done. God loves you for the sake of His own Name. For the praise of the glory of His grace.

And finally, if the worship of God is going to be your pilgrim legacy, then you must be intentionally seeking to **influence others by modeling voluntary sacrifice.**

This is true for all of us here today... but in view of Ezra 2 it seems most appropriate to talk directly to dads here for a moment. Because God's love for a father is designed to influence his entire family.

Dads – how are you seeking to influence your wife and your children for greater worship of Christ? This is more than just preaching at your family. This is truly influencing your family by modeling voluntary sacrifice of worship.

You can't lead others where you haven't gone yourself. So ask yourself honestly based on the testimony of your life... if you were living back in 500 BC...would your name have been listed in Ezra 2?

Are you asking God to press you deeper into His love so that you are more eager and willing to follow His every call?

How are you following the Spirit's call to lead your family into greater joy in Christ? Greater understanding of His love? Greater submission to His call?

Church – consider the joy of how God would restore our entire church family if every family leader here today moved deeper into a vibrant and transforming worship of Christ personally in the coming weeks together. Don't leave this morning without quietly praying for God to strengthen your practice of worship and your influence of worship in your own home.

*Now, may we go forth and bless the Lord our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with His unfaithful people from everlasting to everlasting.
Nehemiah 9:5, 32*



Names are so important. For names provide an invitation to a relationship. And Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose on the 3rd day, and has now ascended back to the Father in order to restore our worship of the one and true God.

Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**

<<Be Unto Your Name>>