

# It's Time to Go!

## Free to Build

Ezra 1:5-11; 2:1-2, 64-70

If you have your bibles, let's open to the Old Testament book of Ezra. If you missed last Sunday, we're in a new fall sermon series from the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah. We are going to be read verses 5-11 of chapter 1, then we will read verses 1-2 of chapter 2, and then verses 64-70 because chapter 2 is a long chapter that has a lot of numbers and names. We're not omitting the reading because of that but just because I normally don't have enough time to finish the sermon anyway, so we need to expedite the reading just a little bit.

### Scripture

***"Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem."* (1:5-11)**

***“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 Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of men of the people of Israel:” (2:1-2)*** It goes on to number the people and tell whether they are from a certain line, person, a certain region, or a certain town.

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

(Prayer)

Father, thank You for this awesome opportunity to gather for a second time this morning, and to be able to open our hearts and minds and worship You with song, and just to sense a brother or sister beside us, near us. What an awesome opportunity. Father, we know at Hardin this is the first day of a brand new week, and we believe this is so important to us to actually get together as the body of Christ to worship You. As we worship You, there is just a great benefit to us. It just keeps everything in perspective for us; it helps us keep the main thing, the main thing. It reminds us that our life is about You and not us, and because it's about You, it's about others. We are here to be growing disciples who make disciples. Father, we are so excited to look into this story and to know that as we shine the light of the New Testament on it, You are going to use this

in a practical way. Just as You used it in the life of Your Old Testament people, You are going to use it to challenge us, Your New Testament people, who don't live under law, but under grace, who are not under a conditional covenant, but an unconditional covenant. It wasn't sealed on a basis of the blood of a bull or a goat that could only cover sin, but wow, it was sealed with the blood of the Lamb of Yours, who once for all offered Himself on the cross so that we could truly be free. That is free to do what You have called us to do, which is free to build. Father, empower us now to speak and to listen. Do not let us be speaker and hearer only, but let us be doers of Your Word. It is in Your precious, precious, Son's name we pray, amen.

I would say you probably are like me, and from time to time, someone asks you that famous question: What time is it? No longer do we look at a watch on our wrist, we go to our pocket or purse and pull out a phone and tell somebody what time it is. If it's early in the morning, you may tell someone it is 7:33, 7:48, or 7:55. But have you ever been in that special relationship, like you have with your spouse and it is not a random question; it is a pointed question because you've been preparing to go somewhere? A little bit earlier, you had both started getting ready because you're going to leave at a certain time, and you're going somewhere specific because you both have something that you want to do. When that first "what time is it" comes in, you, the man, confidently let your wife know there is still plenty of time by saying, "It's just 5:30." As it gets closer to time to go and you can tell she's not going to be ready after about the fourth time she asks, do any of you husbands ever say, "It's time to go"? We don't just state the time; we state the fact that it's now time to go.

As we open up the book of Ezra this morning, if you were to ask me what time it is in our Free to Build series, here is what time it is...it's time to go. Israel has not been waiting for a few weeks or for a few days; they have been waiting seventy years. Can anybody imagine that? Now you hear the news that Cyrus has had your God stir his heart, and He wants Cyrus to build a house for Him in Jerusalem. To accomplish this, he is going to set you free. You realize the seventy years of captivity are over. God, through Cyrus, just opened the door and you're saying to your neighbor, to your

family, it's time to go. That's what we're going to be talking about this morning. It's finally time. We're going to try and cover a chapter and a half. You know we won't make it, so let me just make sure we get this picture. In the first chapter, it's written so that you and I understand that the focus in chapter 1 is God and His house. The focus in chapter 2 is not on God's house, it is not on God; the focus is on God's people. Please note that. That's why the chapters are written the way they are. Normally in this church, we stress identity to the point that we put identity before behavior. But in Ezra, behavior becomes before identity for this reason; the children of Israel know who they are. They're God's children, but they are not free. For seventy years, they've been in bondage. For seventy years, they've been in captivity. Now, they are getting ready to go home. God wants to make sure they fully understand why they are being set free, which is when they get home He wants them to build His house. Please tell me you get this.

Chapter 1 involves people, but the emphasis is not the people; the emphasis is God's house. As a matter fact, the emphasis is so on God's house that some people, when they hear this description of what happened, actually believes Ezra is using the language of a second exodus, so to speak. For see, once Cyrus sets God's people free, he gives them a mandate that if you don't go, you have to give to those who are going. He gets so excited about them going that he wants God to be with them, so he goes into the house of Nebuchadnezzar's God, which would have been Baal, and he takes out all of the articles and furniture that was in God's original house and brings it out and gives it to Israel so they can take it back with them. The Bible spends verse after verse talking about these different pieces of the temple. Why? So that you understand what the focus is. The focus is on why God is setting His people free. Why is He setting them free? So they will build God's house.

Now, the Bible didn't call it God's house; the Bible calls it the house of the LORD. I'm sure most of you read an English version of the Bible, and I'm sure your Bible is like mine. When you look at the word, Lord, it is LORD. Why all caps? There are times when you're reading the Old Testament and the word, Lord, has a capital L and a little o-r-d, and other times, like in

this passage, it is all caps. This is the famous Hebrew Tetragrammaton, four Hebrew consonants. These four consonants reveal the personal name of God to His people. Lord is the title of God, but His personal name is not Jehovah, it is YHWH (Yahveh); I am who I am, the ever-present one, the one who always is. It is His house they are going to go home and build. Cyrus says He is not just the God who lives in Jerusalem; He's the God of the heavens, and he chose me, stirred my spirit to build a house for Him in Jerusalem. So I am setting you free so that you know what you're supposed to do for Him, so that I can do what I'm supposed to do for Him, and that is to build His house. Wow!

I want to be totally honest with you. I understand scholars and exegetical pastors believing maybe this is a second exodus, but can I just remind you of this? When they see Cyrus giving all these vessels to the treasurer and see the people aiding them in going, they remember that story of when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. When they came out of Egypt, the people gave them just about everything they had. They gave them more than they could carry, but the motivation wasn't the same. If you go back and read Exodus chapter 12, when God got ready to lead Israel out of Egypt for the first time, Egypt had just experienced ten plagues, and the last plague had taken the life of the firstborn of every family because Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let God's people go. Every time Moses went and said 'let God's people go,' he refused. Now God just passed through the land and took the life of every firstborn. So here is a mother holding her baby who died, and she says to Israel, 'Get out of here! Get out of here! I don't ever want to see you again! If you don't get out of here, God just might kill all of us!' Egypt couldn't stand the sight of God's people anymore. So when it came down to what belonged to them versus their very life, they didn't worry about their economy, their laborers leaving, or their living; they worried about their lives. That is not happening in this passage. The southern kingdom has been in captivity. They've been in bondage, but they were not made into slaves. As a matter of fact, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were quite humane compared to the Assyrians. God, through Jeremiah, told the children of Israel you're going to be there for seventy years, build you a house, plant your garden, invest in the community, and run businesses because as it

goes with the city, so it goes with you. Guess what? Babylon got used to Israel and they began to realize that these people who serve a different God than us are actually good for our community. They are nice to have around. So when the Babylonian kingdom fell and the people came under Cyrus and God moved upon Cyrus' heart to set them free, as they got ready to leave, not only the other exiles, but you get the sense that other people in the community also wanted them to do what God called them to do, and that was build Him a house that they gave offerings, so that when they got back, they could build God's house. Does that make sense? Are you with me? Chapter 1 is about doing, and what we're supposed to be doing is building God's house. We're going to talk about doing before we talk about being, but doing doesn't cause being; doing flows from being. What are they supposed to do? They are supposed to build God's house. They are supposed to build the house of YHWH. Cyrus was so concerned about them building God's house that he wanted to make sure that everybody that left had God with him because it was going to be a nine hundred mile journey. It was going to take over four months, and these people were going to start over from scratch. They were going to go back to a community that had been decimated. They were going to go back to a city where the walls were broken down. They were going to go back to a city where there was no house of God. So he wanted God to be with them. I think even this pagan king knew that what God was asking them to do would be impossible unless He was with them.

So this really doesn't remind me of a second Exodus out of Egypt. It reminds me of when the children of Israel were standing on Mount Sinai and Moses went upon that mountain for a second time. Yes, God led the children of Israel out of Egypt with w miracle of the Red Sea crossing, but He didn't constitute them as His people until they came to Mount Sinai. When they got to Mount Sinai, He constituted them as His people, put them under His law, and gave them the blueprints to build a house for Him. Do you remember when Moses was on top of the mountain, and God reminds him again that it's time to go? Moses looks at God and says, are you sure? He says I'm sure. God says don't worry I'll be with you. Moses said, (in Dexter language) you better be. He says God, if you're not going to be with me, tell me right now because I'm not stepping foot off this

mountain if your presence is not going to be with me. Then he says something amazing. He says is not your presence the way people are going to know I have your favor; and is it not your favor that makes us distinct from every other people on the face of the earth? Whoa! Tell me you heard that. It's the presence of God with His people that make us distinct, that separates us, sets us apart, from every other people group on the face of the earth. Why? It is because God wants every people group on the earth to see His face, and the way He shows most people His face is through the face of His people. That's why God is going to be with us. That's why God is with us. That's why we build God's house with His blessing because He wants to use us to reveal to other people who He ultimately is. But listen, it's not our house; it's His house.

Most of you know I have four grandchildren. That means Memish does too. We've got three boys, and then a little girl came along and changed everything. I'll see Evie Kate out in the yard, and I will either stop in the truck or pull my Mule (motorized Mule, not the other kind) into the yard. Just as soon as I pull into the yard, every time, Evie Kate says, "I want to go to Memish's house." So I get permission, load her in the Mule, and we go down Redbud Road. By the time we're turning into the driveway, I'm trying to get Evie Kate to understand that it's not just Memish's house; it's Papaw and Memish's house. She will have nothing to do with that. So by the time we get halfway down the driveway, she is not ever going to say it is Papaw and Memish's house; it's just Memish's house. By the time we make the turn and actually see the house and I stop, she gets out and looks at Papaw, and the next words out of her mouth are, "Where is Memish?" "Where is Memish?" "Where is Memish?" We start to the house or to the barn looking for Memish. I can't tell you what a joy it is to have four grandkids that when they look at our property believe it is Memish's house. But do you know what I love most about them having a house they call Memish's house? As grandparents, they don't come to our house because of all the things we have at our house that they don't at their house. It's not about them coming to our house to get to do things they wouldn't get to do at their house. Do you know what being at Memish's house is all about for our kids? It's all about being with Memish. Every one

of them want to do at our house, but not unless they're doing it with Memish.

I hope you understand why I told that. God wants us to create a desire in this community for people to desire to go to God's house. But no one will want to come to God's house if God wasn't with us. Does that make sense? It's not about just doing; it's about doing what we do because we do it with God. God lets us in on what He's doing in the world, and what He's doing in the world is building a house. But if you're in bondage, if you're captivated by something, you're not free to build. See, this book isn't written to people who were in Egypt getting ready to come out; a story of what it's like to be in sin, a slave to sin, and then getting saved and being set free to build God's house. This is a story about people who were free, and now they're captivated again. They're in exile, so to speak. You know what exile is. An exile is a person who knows who they are, they're just not where they want to be; they're not home. There is a reason; there's something keeping them from being home. Therefore, they are in exile. I wanted to subtitle this sermon: Exiled or Home. I believe as your pastor, I'm preaching to a bunch of people this morning and many in this bunch aren't home. You're not free to build because you're in bondage. Something is holding you. Something has captivated you; therefore, your mind is on you, and it's not on the house of YHWH. It's not on God's house.

I want to make sure you understand what I'm talking about here. We've all been led to believe that home is where your family is, right. I want to spiritually take an exception to that this morning. I have a daughter who is single. She moved out of our house many, many years ago. She's lived in Paducah, Nashville, Cincinnati, and she's getting ready to move to Malawi, Africa, hopefully. I can't tell you how many times I've seen her get ready to leave our house and she will make the statement, "Hey Mom and Dad, I'm going home." Celisa will say, "You are not going home." When she lived in Paducah, it was not her home to Celisa. When she lived in Nashville, it was not her home. When she lived in Cincinnati, that was not her home. Celisa thinks Kiki's home is where her mom and daddy are. Can I just say this to you? I don't know where you think home is, but let me to you where home



is spiritually. It is not where your family is; it's where your Father is. He is the ever-present one, so He will always be with you. My question is will you always be with Him? I believe some of you are sitting here this morning and He is with you, but you are not with Him. You're not home; you're in exile. You're held captive by habit, hobby, career, maybe a sickness and it consumes you; it's your focus. You're like the other people in this story. You have the opportunity to walk out the door and go home, but you choose to stay where you are. Please don't stay where you are. God moved in the life of Cyrus to set His Old Testament covenant free so they could build His house, but what God did for us He didn't do through a president or a king, He did it through His Son. He sent His Son to a cross so that you and I could be free to be at home with Him, living in His will, doing what He's called us to do, and that's build His house.

If you've got anything this morning that's holding you, I want to mention some key thoughts to you. See, we started in verse 5 this morning with this statement: "Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem." The king's proclamation was to whoever among you of all His people, whoever among God's people, whoever! We Baptists love that word. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever (whosoever KJV)..." But God knew, and Cyrus knew, that not all of them would go, so if you didn't go you had to give. Get this picture. Of all these people of God who hear the good news that God is building His house and they're free to go build, amongst those exiles a group rose up. In English in American society, we don't speak this way. Only Yoda puts the action before the subject, right. You Star Wars people caught that, right. We would say, "then the heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, rose up. We would give the people and then we would give the action. In chapter 1, it's reversed; action before people. Why? Because here is the thought...they know who they are. They don't have a problem with identity; they have a problem with what they're supposed to be doing. What they are supposed to do is now that the door is open for them to go home they're supposed to rise up. Listen to this...everyone rose up who's spirit God stirred to go up. I

want to subtitle this lesson from 'whoever' to 'everyone.' Guess what? Not everyone rose up. The only 'whosoever' that rose up were the ones God's spirit stirred. Did you hear that? This is important because in Ezra and Nehemiah we are going to start seeing the doctrine of a remnant. When we get to the New Testament in Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he is going to tell us that there always has been a remnant that's been chosen by grace and not of works so that all the glory goes to God, and none of the glory goes to man. So get this picture; this group rises up because they've been stirred. This word, stir, literally means 'to arouse or to awaken' in the Hebrew. So here is a group among all the exiles that is rising up. The reason they're rising up is because they've been stirred by God. Everyone who got stirred rises up. No one rejected God's stirring. No one said no to God's stirring. It was an effectual stirring. It accomplished God's intention, and they're all now wide-awake. Wow!

Can I tell you what captivity does? Can I tell you what happens when you get captivated to your career, or a person, or captured by a hobby or a habit? It lulls you to sleep to what's really going on around you. With this word picture here, it's the picture of the children of Israel in captivity for seventy years, and they're just snoring. They're sleeping, and God comes along and gives them a good shake. He wakes them up! Have any of you ever had something really bad happen through the night like a big, bad storm, you woke up the next morning and your spouse tells you how bad it was, and you didn't hear a thing? You slept through the whole thing! Can I tell you what's really sad? Some of us are so focused on us that we don't have a clue what is going on in the life of those around us with your spouse, your children, your family, your friends, your neighbor, and your church.

Wednesday night we're going to talk about this in our Romans study, but Paul had to write to the New Testament church in Rome and say, "Wake up!" The image there is when you wake up, take your pajamas off, and put your clothes on. I don't know how it is in your household, but in ours we do everything we're supposed to do with our clothes on, and when it gets past a certain time, Celisa and I put the pj's on and that's a signal to the other one not to ask me to do anything else. When I get the pj's on, it's

not about anyone else in the household; it's now all about me. The same is true with Celisa. I hate it when I have to take my pj's off and put my clothes back on knowing I will have to put my pj's back on. Some of you live with your pj's on all the time, spiritually. It's all about you. You've been free, and have been set free to build God's house, but instead of building God's house, you're building your own house.

Do you remember last week I told you the first six chapters take place over a twenty-two year period? It took twenty-two years to build the temple and it only took fifty-two days to build the wall around the whole city. Do you know why? Haggai tells us that when the people got back home, they were so focused on their house that they neglected God's house. Wouldn't it be a shame for God to set you and I free from what He set us free from, and all our focus is us rather than His house? Wow. I want you to note these words. The Lord stirred up, those that got stirred up rose up, and the Bible says in chapter 2:1 that they came up out of the captivity of the exiles. They didn't just come out of captivity; they came out of the other exiles who chose to stay in the captivity. They didn't just rise up; they rose up so they could get out. But any time the Bible talks about getting out; it is always up. There's a change of elevation. Please understand that where you are may look up to you, but it's not up. Where you really are is down when you're captured by habit, by career, by hobby, by sin or whatever that keeps you from building God's house.

I want you to see this. If you look back at verse 11, the Bible says when these vessels were taken out of the house of Nebuchadnezzar's gods and was given to Sheshbazzar, and "All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem." Please don't overlook this. We're going to have a transition from chapter 1 to talking about the temple and building God's house to the people who are going to build the house, but at the end of chapter 1, it says Sheshbazzar did bring up all the vessels. In other words, he's coming out with 5400 vessels. He's responsible for getting them to Jerusalem. My question is with this past tense verb that is passive, who brought the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem? It doesn't tell us, but you know who it was. It was God. Don't ever take credit for what only God can do, and that's ultimately wake you

up to set you free so that you can do what He's called you to do. So he brings them up, they are coming up and out. Then the Bible says they return to Jerusalem, and the last verse says each one went to his own town and they started living, except it is past tense; they lived. This whole account is in the past tense. Now listen to me. They finally got home, and home is where the Father is. Home is where you do what He's freed you to do, and that's build His house. My question is where is home to you? Is it Murray, Benton, Hardin, in Kentucky, Arizona, Texas, Nicaragua, Brazil, Malawi, or Thailand? You and I are supposed to be building God's house while we build our house. That's why He set you free, and that's why He set me free. He didn't just want His house to be built in Jerusalem; He wanted a house in Hardin. May nobody ever believe this is Bro Ricky's house, or your house. I'm willing to give all the glory to my wife for our grandkids, and I'm willing to give God all the glory for this church. I pray you are too. Wouldn't it be so cool if somebody were out in the foyer wondering where is God! Would God just rush by somebody? I wonder if somebody is going to ask this week where God is, and God put your face in their face so they would ultimately see in your face, His face. Let's be God's house.