

Free to Build

Ezra 1:1-4

What a privilege to gather here on the first day of a brand new week to worship and praise the King of kings and Lord of lords. Open our bibles this morning to the book of Ezra as we get ready to kick off our fall sermon series. We're going to be looking at two books this fall, the book of Ezra and Nehemiah from the historical section of the Old Testament. For some of you that have been with us for a long time, you know we've hardly ever done two books at one time. We normally do one book and it takes us a while to get through that book, but this fall we're actually going to be doing two books. If you're wondering why two books, it's for this reason. When you open Ezra and Nehemiah in our English bibles, they are back to back and end the historical section. But originally, these two books were one book in the Hebrew Bible. The Jewish people did not divide Ezra and Nehemiah as we do; they thought it was a unity so they kept the book together. Even in the third century BC when Alexander wanted a copy of every book in the world in his famous library at Alexandria, he ordered the seventy scholars to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, and after they studied and translated the book, they left it together. So you're wondering why then do our English bibles have two books instead of one. It's because in the second century after Christ, Origen, one of the early church fathers (who was really one of the first Christians to come up with a scientific method of how to exegete Scriptures) exegeted the Old Testament and came to believe that this one book wasn't really one book, but it would actually be better if it were two books. So in his Bible, he divided them, and for the first time in history, Ezra and Nehemiah were divided into two books. I think most of you realize when the Greek Bible was translated into Latin by Jerome, another early church father followed Origen's order and divided the book into two. Our English bibles were heavily influenced early on, more from the Latin than the Greek. So most

English bibles follow the order of Ezra and Nehemiah not being one book but two books. So we've studied two books this fall because originally it was one book. Now let me share this with you. If you were to read a Jewish Bible today, guess what the Jews have done because of us? They have divided the book into two as well. When I read the book, they just fit together almost like they are one. What the pastoral staff wants you to see this morning, and this fall, is the unity of Ezra and Nehemiah. So we will be studying these two books as one book this fall, and we're excited about it.

If you're new to the church, you might be asking why we would spend all fall studying two Old Testament books. That's a good question. If you remember, the Apostle Paul wrote to a young man named Timothy, and he reminded him in his second letter that all of the Bible, all of the sacred writings, all of Scripture is inspired by God. That word, inspired, literally means to breathe out. When we open up our thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, which Paul was referring to, he is telling us that all thirty-nine of those books carry the very breath of God, and they are actually profitable to us; even in the church, King James says, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be equipped for every good work. I love what Warren Wiersbe says about these four things the Bible is profitable for. He said doctrine tells us what is right, reproof tells us what is not right, correction tells us how to get right, and instruction in righteousness tells us how to stay right. So just know that from our perspective as pastors, we are going to be studying this book, (which is actually two books) and we believe it will be profitable for us. We're going to learn what is right, what is not right, how to get right if we're not right, and when we're not right but we get right, we're going to learn how to stay right so that every time God brings along an opportunity for us, we're going to be equipped for that moment. Paul even wrote to the church at Corinth, reminded them as he told Old Testament stories, and brought Old Testament events into his letter that these things actually happened in the Old Testament to be examples for us. Can you imagine that? God ordained the life of His Old Testament people so that their life would be an example to you and me in the church today. Then Paul concluded that 20th chapter of 1 Corinthians by saying, "and they were

written down." In other words, they were put in the Bible to be instructions for us. We're excited to about studying these two books.

I've got to warn you, if you're a history buff you're going to love it because we're actually going to be studying about one hundred and six years, historically, in about three months. That's going to be cool. We're going to start in 539 BC this morning, and when we finish toward the end of November, we're going to be in the year 433, 432 BC. We're going to see the children of Israel under the reign of five different Persian kings. We will start with Cyrus and end with Artaxerxes.

Many of you realize our family went on vacation last week to Disney World. Kory made the arrangements for us, so all the rest of us were asking what we were going to be doing on each day. We wanted to know where we were going to be on each day so we would know what we would be doing. We want you to understand that this book, which is actually two books, but it is one book, actually divides into three parts.

1. Ezra 1-6
2. Ezra 7-10
3. Nehemiah

What happens is there are two really big events, actually three, but two really big ones. In the first six chapters of Ezra, we will see the children of Israel rebuilding the temple that was burned by King Nebuchadnezzar. Then, we will see in 458 BC that Ezra, who is writing the book but isn't actually in Israel when he is writing these first chapters, (Zerubbabel is the one that led the first captives out and back Israel) but when Ezra comes, he will restore the law. So they build the temple, then they restore the law. When the law gets restored, thirteen years later in 445 BC, Nehemiah is going to leave the palace of Artaxerxes and go back to Jerusalem because he hears the news that while the temple is being rebuild and people are rebuilding their houses, no one has rebuilt that wall back around the city of Jerusalem. He knows how important it is to build that wall around the city, so he actually leaves to go rebuild that wall. Here's what's going to happen. When we get to studying about these two great events, we're going to understand the very purpose of why God set Israel free. Please

note that. What we're going to learn in Ezra and Nehemiah is why God set His people free from Babylonian captivity. If you were listening, it's clear. He set them free so that they could go home and build something. So the first part of each book, the first six chapters of Ezra, and the first six chapters of Nehemiah will talk about building projects. We're building a temple, and then we're building a wall. But both books close with God instructing the children of Israel how they should be living while they're building what they're building and while they're doing what they're doing for the rest of their lives. Here is what He tells them. You ought to be living under My authority, under My reign. You are My kingdom, you are My people, and I want you to live a certain way. So Ezra brings order to the people by bringing them under the law. So while they are building the temple, and rebuilding the broken down walls, God wants them living under His authority, which is the Law of Moses. Does that make sense?

I don't think I told you this, but Ezra and Nehemiah follow Chronicles. You already knew that. Has anybody ever read through their Bible in a year? Not many of us. How many have ever tried to read through the Bible in a year? Wow, a whole bunch of us. Can we just confess? How many of you that has never done it got derailed in Leviticus? You did really well through Genesis and Exodus, but you got to Leviticus, threw up your hands, and said no way, and you skipped it! Now, for the rest of us who got through Leviticus, you got into the historical section, then you were reading Kings about the history of Israel as a nation and finished with them in Babylonian exile, then you started Chronicles. How many of you got derailed in Chronicles? After about two weeks in Chronicles, you're going, hold it God; I've already read this! Have you noticed that Kings and Chronicles are almost identical? I don't know about you, but the first time I tried to do that I questioned the sovereignty of God. I actually said, "God, why would you put two books in the Bible, back to back, that cover the same period of time?" That was confusing to me. Why not at least put two or three really good books in between those two books? God is not going to strike me dead; it's ok to be honest, right? Let me tell you when my Bible reading changed. It was when I came to understand why we have Kings and Chronicles in our Old Testament. See, they're kind of alike. They do cover the same period of time and the same events, but if you read it closely,

you begin to realize it is a totally different perspective. When you're reading Kings, it has been written by an historian from the perspective of life before the exile. When you read Chronicles, it's not the same perspective. The perspective of Chronicles is life after the exile, and that's big. Does that make sense?

Somebody asked me why Kings was written before the exile. The reason was so that Israel would know why they are where they are. God wanted Israel to wake up in Babylon, and when they heard the language they didn't understand in strange towns, strange cities, and they were no longer free under Him but in bondage to Nebuchadnezzar, He wanted them to know the reason they were there was not because Nebuchadnezzar was more powerful than Him, but that He had actually raised up Nebuchadnezzar to come down, conquer them, and take them into exile in the 606, 597, and 587 deportations to punish them for their sin. Wow...God raised up a pagan king in a pagan nation to punish His people for their sin. Can I just say this to us? We in the church should be more concerned about the sin in the church than the sin in world. It's one thing for the world to do what they do, blinded from the reality of the truth of God, but it's another thing for we in the church to continue what we continue in when we know the truth! So God wanted His people to see you are where you are because of what you've done. That's why Kings ends with Nebuchadnezzar coming down into Jerusalem and besieging the city and the captain of his bodyguard burns the temple of God to the ground! Then they tear down the walls and take the people into slavery. Chronicles doesn't end that way. Chronicles talks about the Chaldeans, but it doesn't mention Nebuchadnezzar. Why? Because Chronicles is from the perspective of why God set them free. Kings tells us why they are where they're at, but Chronicles gets us ready for where they're going, and that's back home. When they get back home, God wants them to keep the main thing, the main thing. Chronicles ends and Ezra picks up the story. Ezra and Nehemiah are written so that Israel will know what they're supposed to be doing when they get back home. In other words, Ezra and Nehemiah want the people to understand why God set them free. I really believe that the reason we're going to preach through Ezra and Nehemiah for the next

couple of months is because God wants each one of us as a Christian to really know why He set us free.

If you're new to Hardin, please catch this. Hardin believes that the full and final revelation of God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. No shadows when you look at Jesus. No types when you look at Jesus. You look at Jesus and you see God, amen! Therefore, the full light of God shines in the New Testament, and that's why most of us read the New Testament more than the old. It is because we need the light turned on. When you go back and study your Old Testament, it's dark; it's dim. I'm not taking away from the Old Testament, but you don't see the full light of God; you don't see the full revelation of God. Therefore, there are shadows, and types. If you don't believe me, read the book of Hebrews. It says the Old Testament is shadows and types. Know this at Hardin; we don't read the Old Testament through dark lenses. We turn the light on in the New Testament and we shine that light back into the Old Testament. Just so you know this; we read our Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Some of you came from churches or have Christian friends who read the new in light of the old. We don't do that. We read the old under the full lens, the full and final revelation of Jesus Christ.

Are you ready? Let's stand as we read the Word of God and get ready to look at the first part of Ezra and Nehemiah. When we get to the book of Nehemiah, you will understand why Hardin, several years ago, started standing every time we read the Word of God publicly from the pulpit. It's actually contained in the book of Nehemiah, and it's why we do it.

Scripture

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him

go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

(Prayer)

Father, we ask You at this second serving of Your Word this morning to anoint us to hear and anoint us to speak. Father, we're excited about this study as Your New Testament covenant people looking at the example of Your Old Testament covenant people, knowing that You are going to use it in our lives to remind us of why You ultimately set us free. Don't let us lose sight of that, that really, the main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing. That's what we want Ezra and Nehemiah to do over these next few months. In Your precious Son's name now we ask for that anointing that only You can give, amen.

What's the purpose of Chronicles? Why is Ezra continuing the story? If you've got a Bible like mine and you've got Ezra on one side and the end of 2 Chronicles on the other side, would you look at the last two verses of 2 Chronicles? "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up." Does anybody see that how Chronicles ends is how Ezra begins? What's the purpose of Chronicles? It is to let God's people know why He set them free. Why did He set Israel free from Babylonian captivity? So they would go home and build Him a house. Ezra borrows the last two verse of Chronicles because he knows that the writer of

Chronicles, while in exile, understood why God was going to set them free. He, under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, gets ready to continue the historical story. What have we been doing during the historical book section? Do you remember this from Route 66? We were looking for a king who was going to build the house of God, sit on the throne of David, and reign over his kingdom forever, and we thought it was Solomon. He was the wisest man on the planet, but did the most unwise thing a man could ever do. He fell in love with more than one woman. Instead of bringing them to church with him, he started going to church with them. The next thing you know, he brought down the house that God allowed him to build. We thought Solomon was the coming king because he built a physical house in Jerusalem. Now because of Solomon's sin and the sin of the nation, the temple has been destroyed, they've been in bondage, and now God is getting ready to let them go. I want to make sure you understand that next week when we see Zerubbabel get ready to lead them back home to build the house of God, don't get your hopes up; he's not the coming king. We know who the coming king is; that's Jesus, and He came to build God's house, which is God's church and use it as the vehicle to establish the kingdom of God, not just in Jerusalem and Judea, but literally throughout the whole world. So why did God set His people free? So they would go home and rebuild the house of God. While they're rebuilding the house and the walls, He wants them living under His authority. He wants to reign over them. He wants them living under the Law of Moses. As we read this in light of the New Testament, do you get it? Do you know why you're free? Do you know why you're no longer in bondage to sin? It's so that you can build God's house, so you can build God's church. You can help build the vehicle that literally carries the message of the kingdom to the nations. While we're building God's house, God wants to reign over us, but He doesn't put us under law; He reigns over us by His grace. As Christians, we don't live under law; we live under the grace of God. The grace of God is God's enabling power. Wow! Tell me you get it. We're free to build, but while we build, we live under God's reign.

It is 539 BC. How do we know that? Because the Bible says in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia. Now, if you did really well in history in school, and if you'll think back to world history, you know that from a secular point of

view, Cyrus did not start reigning in 539 BC. He started reigning in 559 BC. The question is why is the Bible twenty years off? We've got to be honest in case there is someone here who is not a believer and is skeptical and you've heard about the contradictions in the Bible. I know Cyrus started reigning as a king in 559 BC, but you've got to understand that historians are never neutral. They always have a prejudice, a point of view. They always have a slant, an angle. Does everybody agree? When the Bible addresses the first year of King Cyrus, king of Persia, it is not looking at this from a secular point of view, but from God's point of view and Israel's point of view because Israel's point of view is really God's point of view. You can look at history and see what man's been doing, or you can look at history and see what God's been doing. Sometimes those perspectives are different.

Let me give you an example. Last Saturday morning, we drove to Nashville to fly to Orlando to go to Disney World. I had the privilege of sitting beside Garnett on the plane. Garnett is now five years old. He was so excited to go to Disney World. We're on the plane and he has his little things that will entertain him while we're going. We've got the window up and get ready to go, and when he felt that engine thrust start forward, he grabbed Papaw's arm and whispered (and he doesn't whisper)

Papaw, I'm scared! I'm scared!" He put his head in my arm, and he was scared. I said, "G, I understand. It's ok!" All of a sudden, that plane lifted, and as soon as it did, he raised his head up. He didn't look at Papaw; he looked out the window, and he went from being scared to being really excited. He started saying, "Papaw, everything's getting small! Look!" He started talking about buildings, cars, and how big everything was in the plane and how little everything was down there.

Do you get it? When you're above things, your perspective changes. You've got to remember that God is both in time and out of time, at the same time. Wow! So, in time, chronologically, world historians would start the reign of Cyrus in 559 BC, but historians will tell you that he's not the king of Persia in 559; he was the king of a little state nation. It wasn't until he conquered the Medes, then the Babylonians, that he became the king of Persia. When did he conquer the Babylonians? According to the texts in

that famous cylinder that was found, he conquered the Babylonians on October 12th, 539 BC. Here is what is amazing. Remember what's happening in Chronicles. Chronicles ends by telling us that God is getting ready to set the children of Israel free. How did God set the children of Israel free? He raised up Cyrus as the king to march on the city of Babylon while Belshazzar was drunk with wine. Belshazzar had a thousand of his leaders there, and they were all in the banquet hall, drunk. They weren't drinking out of their goblets. When you get under the influence of alcohol, sometimes you do things you wouldn't normally do, and he actually had the audacity to call for the goblets to be brought out of the house of the gods, and God's goblets that had been taken from Jerusalem seventy years earlier were put on his table. They filled them with wine and drank out of the goblets of God. Do you remember this story in Daniel chapter 5? All of a sudden, a hand appeared on the wall. The Bible says Belshazzar thought he had seen a ghost. No, he saw a hand, and it wrote something on the wall. He didn't understand what it was. He was scared to death, and he sent for Daniel. Daniel appears, prays, and interprets the writing. He tells Belshazzar that night you have been numbered by God, been weighed, and you come up short. Tonight you will die. Guess what was happening. Outside the walls of the city of Babylon that night, Cyrus and Darius had marched their armies and surrounded the city. Before the night ended, Belshazzar had lost his life. Guess how God and Israel dates Cyrus's kingship. See, he is going to tell us that God has given him all the kingdoms of the heavens because God is the God of Heaven, so they don't start counting his reign until he conquered Babylon, twenty years after he first rose to the throne. Does that make sense? No contradiction. Here's what is important. Here's why this is important. Remember who God used to punish Israel for their sins: Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Now, God raises up Cyrus just as He had raised up Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, on the night that Cyrus conquered Babylon...now, somebody is going to say, hold it; Daniel 5 says Darius was king over Babylon. Yes, Darius was over Babylon, but under Cyrus. Does everybody get that? Don't be skeptical of Scripture. God raises up Cyrus, verse 1 says, to fulfill the word of the Lord, spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah. So on this night when Cyrus marches on Babylon and Belshazzar loses his life, God is doing this to fulfill

what He told Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah chapter 25, he preached for twenty-three years to Judah--you better repent, you better quit sinning; the Babylonians are coming and if you don't repent, they're going to ransack the city. Other false prophets are saying no, no, no; God would never let our temple fall. God would never let our city be destroyed. For twenty-three years, Jeremiah preached, and in the 29th chapter, he said the Babylonians are coming, and when they lead us away and we wake up one day hearing a strange voice, we're going to be there for seventy years. At the end of those seventy years, God will bring us back home. Get this picture. Can you imagine being thirty and being told you're going to go into bondage for seventy years, but then you'll get to go back home? That's not good. Does everybody agree? That's not good. As a matter of fact, if you read the 29th chapter of Jeremiah, here's what Jerry tells. I'm sorry; I like Jerry. We're kind of personal, so I call him Jerry. Jerry says you're going to be there so long that when you get there, don't rent, don't move into a tent, or a mobile home. Build a house, plant a garden, buy land, influence the city, make the city the best you can make it because as it goes in the city, so it will go for you. Catch this. Even when they're going into bondage, God doesn't want Babylon influencing them; He wants His people influencing the Babylonians. But here's what he tells them, after seventy years, we will come back home. The Bible is teaching God raised up Cyrus to conquer the Babylonians, who He raised up to punish Israel's sins, so He was getting ready to fulfill what He told Jeremiah, and that is they would be in Babylon only for seventy years, and then they were going home.

Guess what time is it now. It is time to go home. It's time to go home, so what does God do? He raised up Cyrus to conquer the Babylonians, but while He raised him up to conquer the Babylonians, He was stirring his spirit. God put this thought in the spirit of this pagan king: Israel's God wants me to build Him a house. Wow! Have any of you ever had God stir your spirit? God has different ways He can stir our heart, but have you ever wondered how He stirred the heart of a pagan? I've had this thought. Do you remember the prophet, Isaiah? The prophet, Isaiah, prophesied about one hundred and fifty years before this time. He told the southern kingdom that if you don't get your act together, God is going to do the same thing to you that He did to the northern kingdom. That is you're

going to fall to the hands of the Babylonians. They wouldn't listen. As you read all the way through the prophecy of Isaiah and you come to the 44th chapter--now let me set the context here--it is one hundred and fifty years before this event. People didn't live to be one hundred and fifty at this time. Here is what God tells Isaiah and Isaiah tells the children of Israel, one hundred and fifty years before this night happens. Look at Isaiah 44:28. "...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" When God showed this to Isaiah, the temple was still standing on its foundation and the children of Israel would in no way believe that the temple would ever be destroyed. One hundred and fifty years before the fact, before Cyrus was ever born, God told Isaiah, not just a leader from Persia would come, but He told him the very name of the king who He would use to lead His people out of bondage, and they would go back home for the purpose of rebuilding the temple and laying the foundation! Tell me you get this! Look at verse 1 of chapter 45, "Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus..." He's talking to Cyrus, but He's telling Isaiah one hundred and fifty years before what He's going to do to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped." I can't tell you how many times last week I would grab G, Finley, or Crider's hand because I wanted them to do a certain thing. I didn't leave it up to them; I just grabbed their hand. Have you ever grabbed your kid's hands? Get this picture. God in Heaven grabs the hand, but He tells Isaiah about it one hundred and fifty years before He grabbed his hand! I will grab his hand, his right hand, the hand of power, "to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains; I will break down the gates of bronze and cut through the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by name." He's talking to a pagan, one hundred and fifty years before! "For the sake of Jacob My servant and Israel My chosen one, I call you by name; I have given you a title of honor, though you have not known Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God but Me. I will equip you for battle, though you have not known Me, so that all may know, from the rising of the sun to the place of

its setting, that there is none but Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I bring prosperity and create calamity. I, the LORD, do all these things." Wow! Are you ready for the finale? Look at the last verses of this chapter. "I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the Lord of hosts."

What we are learning right here at the beginning of the book of Ezra is this: God took Cyrus by the right hand and anointed him, even though Cyrus didn't know God; God knew him so that he would set God's people free so they would go back to Israel and do what God ordained Cyrus to do, and that was build Him a house. Wow! Do you realize the God you and I serve, He stirred this man's heart? Do you know how I think He stirred his heart? I think one of the Jewish people who knew the Word of God took the first chance he got to get Cyrus's ear when he first began to sit on the throne, and said 'hey buddy, look what God wrote about you one hundred and fifty years ago.' Wouldn't that stir your heart if you knew that as a pagan king you were sitting on the throne, not for your sake, but for God's people's sake, and the God of Heaven had given you victory over the Babylonians so that you would sit on the throne, so you could set His people free, so that His people would do what God called them to do?

So guess what Cyrus proclaimed. He even wrote it down. You've heard about the Law of the Medes and Persians. Once it gets written down, it's law. Basically, he says the LORD, the Tetragrammaton, the personal name of God, Yahweh, the God of heavens has given me as a gift all the kingdoms of the earth. Scholars tell me that if you go to the Middle East, starting where Iraq and Iran is on a map, and you take the United States of America and sit it on that part of the Middle East, that's how vast his kingdom was. All of a sudden, I'm on the throne at this moment because God wants me to build Him a house, and he is stirred. He's moved. Can you imagine if you had been commissioned by God to build Him a house? I think he was pretty wise because he decided to do what God wanted him to do. I think he thought if I set them free to let them go home, they

would so want to worship their God that they would build His house, thus doing what God has called me to do. But instead of me having to go do it, I'll just set them free to go back home and they will want to build me a house. He says whoever among you, may God be with you and let them go up. We're going to find out that almost fifty thousand people leave Babylon to go back home to build God a house, but not everybody goes.

Have you ever wondered why some go and some don't? Guys, this is going to be a nine hundred mile journey. Seven hours I was from 1204 Redbud Road to Orlando. Can you imagine going nine hundred miles? It took them four months. Can you imagine being a granddaddy, who was a farmer, you've raised your kids, you've got grandkids, and now the king has set you free. You're going to walk away from everything you've built. You're being an influence where you are, but it's not home. Do you understand why some don't do what God calls them to do? It's just so much easier to sit right where you're at and keep living the life we're living because we've got it pretty good in Babylon. God didn't make everybody go. The king didn't make everybody go. The king just says whoever wants to go. Then he said if you're not going to go, you've got to give to those that are going. I think this is ironic; we didn't plan this, but last week Chris talked about one of the responsibilities we have as Christians is to give and go. He didn't give you a choice. It wasn't a pick to give or go. It was we give and go. If we were still under law, we had a choice. We could either go, or we could give. Do you not agree? If somebody is going to leave Babylon and give up their home, life, job, career, and move themselves and their family nine hundred miles and start all over again, those of us who aren't going to make that sacrifice ought to at least give toward that sacrifice. Amen! We're not living under law anymore. We're living under the grace of God, and we've been set free! We've been so lied to that God saved me so when I die I will go to Heaven; now, that is a benefit, but that's not why He set you free. He set us free because He wants His house to be built. But He wants the builders to build the house under His reign, not under legalism, not under law, not checking boxes, but living in a personal relationship with Him to where we really believe that when God stirs in our heart, we can do it by His grace because we have His enabling power!

Perspective is so amazing. We got up about 3:45 yesterday morning to catch the first flight back home. We're in the airport, and everybody is ready to go home. We're saying, "Is everybody ready to go home?" Memish says, "Papaw, did you hear Evie?" Evie is our littlest one. I said, "Evie, where do you want to go?" She said, "To Disney." ☺ Six days, non-stop, she still wanted to stay at Disney! I promise you, all five of us adults wanted to go home! God is amazing. As only Disney can do, they want you to feel at home when you're there, and every night when we bring the bus back to our hotel, the bus driver would get to the gate and say, "Welcome home!" G would get so mad...he would say, "This is not our home! This is not where we live!" Which perspective do you have? Do you still want to stay where you are, really believing that life is about you and God set you free so it could be about you? Or do you want to be home, not being Heaven, but you be where you're supposed to be, building God's house under His sovereign reign of grace? See, we're free. We're free to build.

As we read this story in light of the new, let me remind you of what God did to punish our sin. He put His Son on a cross. At the same time He is punishing His Son for our sin, He was also setting us free because He wanted His Son to build Him a house. His Son knew that to build Him a house, He would have to die on the cross, and He willfully died on that cross so that He could set you and I free, so that you and I can do what God ordained us to do, and that's build a house. You're free. I'm free. We're free to do what God has called us to do and to be who He's called us to be.