



## A HOUSE REBUILT: RENEWING THE PEOPLE OF GOD

SERIES: EPIC

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Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi  
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I love to read. Right now my favorite genre is memoir. Several years ago I read a memoir called *Beautiful Boy*. It was a father's story of heartbreak over his son. His beautiful, bright, intelligent, and delightful son became lost to drugs and lost to him for many, many, many agonizing years. The father tells a story of constant hoping and longing for his son's return. Many times he made a way for him to get off drugs and come home, but every reform or program failed in a short time. Money flowed out of the father's bank like water and still no one could help his son recover his life. The boy lied to him, made promises and broke them, stole money from him, but still the father loved him. The father suffered financially, emotionally, and physically, having a heart attack at one point due to the stress, but still he could not give up on his son. When everyone else said, "preserve yourself and give up" he would not, could not, and did not.

This father's love reminds me of God's love toward his sons and daughters. He never gives up. He remains faithful and hopeful, making a way for his wayward children to return. How painful it must be when his children do not come home to him. "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3), God says to his people. And he means what he says. He shows it in action.

### Background

We are in the third and final week of our *House Rebuilt EPIC Era*. We have reached the end of God's story as recorded in the Old Testament. But since God's story will never end, next week we will embark anew on God's story as it continues in the New Testament. I don't think we can simulate a 400 year gap between the Old and New Testaments, but that is what we have.

We have covered a lot of territory in our three weeks in this era. The Babylonian exiles have returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt their temple. The remnant of exiles left in Persia have been saved from a holocaust by Queen Esther. This week Ezra and Nehemiah will bring the law of Moses back to govern the people of Judah and the wall surrounding Jerusalem will be rebuilt. The last prophetic voice in the Old Testament will be Malachi's and he will give us a vision of the final close of God's story in the day of the Lord.

We begin our journey this morning heading back to Jerusalem with Ezra the scribe in 458 B.C.. He will be taking several thousand exiles with him. Ezra's personal memoirs of this time in Judah begin in Ezra chapter 7 and that is where we will begin in this final chapter of Israel's history.

Ezra 7:6-7:

**. . . <sup>6</sup>this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. <sup>7</sup>Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.**

Ezra is a priest from the family of Aaron and a teacher of the law, so he is well equipped to lead Judah in her spiritual renewal. The group of returning exiles that he is leading is carefully chosen by Ezra. The group contains many Levitical priests who can teach and lead in temple service. It is about 60 years later after the first exiles returned to rebuild the temple. The King of Persia sends a letter back with Ezra authorizing this trip and Ezra's leadership.

Ezra 7:13-14:

**<sup>13</sup>Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. <sup>14</sup>You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.**

Ezra 7:25-26:

**<sup>25</sup>And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. <sup>26</sup>Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the**

**law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.**

God's law given to Moses is to be the governing law of Judah, backed by the approval of the king of Persia. God is getting a worldly king to do his bidding. It was Persian policy to let their conquered peoples be governed by their own gods and laws—it made them better citizens of Persia as long as peace was kept. Ezra is charged with keeping the peace by teaching them Israel's laws thoroughly. What works for Persia politically, works even better for God who is getting his people back home to Judah.

God is rebuilding his nation Israel. He has already rebuilt their center of worship (the temple), now he is going to give them back their law by which they may live to serve God's purposes. They are a holy people set apart from all the nations to represent the true God, Yahweh, on earth. They have failed at this before, being sent into Babylonian exile for discipline, but God does not and will not give up on his holy people. He brings them back to the land promised to their forefather Abraham, showing that God keeps his promises and is with his people. Ezra is now leading them into the truth of God's word and renewing them spiritually.

But knowing the word of God is not the end in and of itself. They were to "know" it in order to "do" it. How else would other nations know who God is and what God is like? It was Israel's charge from God to show them. Ezra is both a knower and doer of the word of God. The King of Persia knows this about him and that is why he chose Ezra to lead his people in spiritual renewal. But what became obvious to me when studying Ezra and Nehemiah is that both of these men were deeply, relationally connected to Yahweh. They were men of prayer.

At every turn they prayed. How can there be a spiritual rebuilding of God's people without it? How can there be a spiritual renewal in our lives without it? I think there is a lot for us to learn from their lives of prayer.

## **Ezra's Prayer of Praise**

Ezra 7:27-28:

**<sup>27</sup>Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way <sup>28</sup>and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on**

**me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.**

All the credit for this return is given to God, not to man. Ezra does not magnify the king or himself in anyway, he magnifies God.

This brought up a question for me. How do we know whom to follow in our Christian life? Ezra is a good model. Follow the one who doesn't point to themselves but points you to God. Sometimes spiritual leaders can be so charismatic, it is hard to remember that you must test the leader's conformity to the word of God (which means we need to know it) and whether they live it out in their own life. We love eloquent speakers and flashy visual displays (advertising has trained us), but that is not what God most values. God values a heart yielded to him.

On the journey to Jerusalem, Ezra seeks no help from man, but calls on God to protect and deliver them, showing his dependence on God for everything.

## **Ezra's Prayer of Petition, Help!**

Ezra 8:21-23:

**<sup>21</sup>There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.<sup>2</sup> I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him."<sup>23</sup>So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.**

Notice that Ezra leads them in a fast. We are in the season of Lent, which traditionally for believers is a time to give up something until Easter. In doing so, the purpose is to humble yourself by acknowledging that you need God more than the thing you've given up (chocolate, coffee, breakfast, lunch, dinner, television, shopping, email). Likewise, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah all employed fasting with their earnest seeking of God. Renewing the nation spiritually required Ezra to fast and humble himself before the Lord.

When Ezra does this he prays before meeting the king and at the beginning of his journey. He takes the time to stop, fast, pray, and petitions God for help. He stopped his busyness to seek God out. Before we begin a new

adventure, job, relationship, life transition, or ministry do we talk to God? Are we as ready to pray as to act? Sometimes it seems we are so anxious to get our lives going that we forget that God is much more than a companion in our lives, but the leader of our lives. At least I confess this is true of me. How about you?

It is also good to remember that God is relational and he wants to have a deep and honest connection with his children. Prayer is relational conversation. Ray Stedman called it talking to our father. We don't have to be elegant of speech or use lots of words, but we need to pray, believing God is listening.

My son called me last week, totally excited, because his little girl said, "Dada" for the first time. Do you know how much that meant to me? He wanted to share his joy with me over my granddaughter's first words. He also has called me recently so I can hear her babble to her toys before she goes to bed. How does that make me feel about our relationship? Really good. My son shows his love and connection with me by sharing everyday little moments. This is what God wants from us too. He wants an intimate relationship with us, talking to us about our everyday joys and sorrows.

Ezra has this kind of relationship with God. And God answers Ezra's prayer. Ezra, the exiles, and the huge caravan, weighed down with all kinds of treasure from the King of Persia, make a safe passage through bandit territory and arrive in good time at Judah.

## A Mess in Jerusalem

But what they find in Jerusalem is a mess. They find that Judah's spiritual leaders, the Levites and priests, who made a good start 60 years ago in rebuilding the temple and worshipping God, have now declined into leaders who have led their people into sin. They have intermarried with the people of the surrounding nations and encouraged the people to follow in that forbidden practice. This is an utter rejection of Israel's covenant with God. Ezra's reaction to their sin is quick and dramatic. He leads them in prayers of confession and repentance. Ezra weeps and tears his clothing, and goes into mourning for Israel's sins. He prays earnest prayers of confession and intercession on behalf of his people. He includes himself in the sin acting as the true priest that he is making intercession for God's faithless people. Here is part of Ezra's prayer for Judah.

Ezra 9:6-7

**“O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our**

**sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. <sup>7</sup>From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.”**

He ends his prayer with this statement:

Ezra 9:15:

**<sup>15</sup>“LORD, the God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.”**

If you were leading the people and you hadn't committed such sin would you have prayed this kind of prayer? Or would you have said, "these people Lord, they sin all the time, what can I do with them?" Ezra cannot see himself apart from his people. He is one of them. Their sin is his sin. We can learn from this humility and deep identification with the people of God. By praying like this, we might actually attract one another to a deeper connection with God.

Ezra's loud demonstration of mourning and prayer attracts the attention of the people and they join in with him. After this time, they recommit themselves to God and earnestly act to make things right.

What they had to do to make things right was very hard. They commit to giving up their foreign wives and families. This is strange to our ears of course, but society back then was not the same as it is today. We can imagine these foreign people returned to their original family group which often stayed together. While we cannot directly apply this to our marriage situations, we can apply the concept that repentance and making amends can be really hard. Sometimes the things that you need to do to make your life straight with God require courage. Maybe God has challenged you to make a new start. What might he be asking you to do to be faithful to him?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). Notice it takes illumination from the word of God to see the path he is leading you on, but it also takes action on our part to step out and walk on the path in the light. Hearing and doing the word of God in Ezra is obedience. There is no separation in the two. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22 NLT).



One of my relatives got divorced when he was in his 30's. After 10 years together I think he just got tired of being married and unfortunately decided a girl at work was so much better. He cheated, got caught, and the marriage ended in divorce. Several years later he wanted to remarry, but since then had become a Christian and his pastor told him he was not free to remarry unless he went back to see if his first wife would take him back. He didn't want to be married to his first wife but he went back and asked her just the same because he was trying to make a new start with God. Obedience can be hard and very challenging at times, but doing things God's way is worth it. We make such a mess when we do it our way.

Ezra proves a faithful Israelite among many unfaithful. His life holds out the possibility that it is possible to follow God faithfully and notice I said faithfully not perfectly. I think we get that mixed up sometimes. All of us fall short of God's holy perfection but Ezra loves God and seeks to serve him. He is an example of what God would like to see in his children.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love, God says." He sent Ezra to give his wayward people the Law of Moses so they might renew their relationship with God. Now the people have their temple in Jerusalem, and the law of Moses to guide their steps. Now Nehemiah will come to rebuild their city walls.

## Nehemiah on the Scene

Thirteen or fourteen years after Ezra went to Judah another servant of God, Nehemiah, hears a report while living in Persia that the walls in Jerusalem are broken and burned down.

He is so distressed with this news that he cries and cries for days, mourns, fasts, and prays. He feels so connected with God's people and city that he desires to go back and rebuild the broken down walls of Jerusalem. Like Ezra, he begins with a prayer.

Nehemiah 1:5-7:

**<sup>5</sup>Then I said: "LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not**

**obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses."**

He begins as Ezra began by acknowledging the faithfulness of God and unfaithfulness of Israel. We don't always have to follow this pattern, but group confession is something we might learn from. Nehemiah wasn't even there. How often do we pray for the church's failures in the past? For our family of faith which has messed up? We are so individualistic yet God wants a family—a people. He wants his family to pray to him, to worship him, and to serve him.

After identifying with God's people in Judah and setting his mind to go there and make things right, Nehemiah prays again: Help!

Nehemiah 1:11:

**<sup>11</sup>"Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."**

Without God's help King Artaxerxes certainly might not let his cupbearer go back to Jerusalem. It is a sacrifice for the king after all. Nehemiah, in his prayer, is very clear about who is in charge. In his prayer he calls the king of Persia "this man." Give me success before "man." Kings were thought of as god's in those days. Although Nehemiah is cupbearer (a very high and trusted position), he is not overly impressed with himself or the king. To Nehemiah, man is man and God is God. Nehemiah has his head on so straight.

So he takes the courageous steps to go into the king's presence and he allows his troubles to show.

Nehemiah 2:1-5:

**<sup>1</sup>In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, <sup>2</sup>so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."**

**I was very much afraid, <sup>3</sup>but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"**

**<sup>4</sup>The king said to me, “What is it you want?”**

**Then I prayed to the God of heaven, <sup>5</sup>and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”**

It is dangerous to be sad in the king's presence—it was not allowed, but Nehemiah takes the risk and God prepares the heart of the king. The king lets him go and sends him with a letter promoting him to governor of Judah for the duration of the project.

Nehemiah sets out with another group of exiles to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. Why the need for a wall? No ancient city was at peace from their enemies without a wall. Jerusalem was in a state of defenselessness and to other nations she looked vulnerable (like her God had abandoned her). If God had abandoned his people then it was a disgrace to Israel's God, so Nehemiah is going to affirm through the wall building that God is faithful to his people Israel.

But poor Nehemiah is opposed at every point by the enemies of God in this building project. It is so reminiscent of the rebuilding effort of the temple and the great opposition. Nehemiah is such a capable leader, both in leading his people and outwitting his enemies (it helps to be cupbearer to the king). He finishes the wall in 52 days. The wall had its' desired effect Scripture tells us. When Judah's enemies heard about its' completion they were afraid because they knew that it had been done with the help of God.

The nation of Israel is now reconstituted and back on her land. The temple is built, the law of Moses has returned, and the wall around Jerusalem is rebuilt. After some time has passed Ezra and Nehemiah come together to dedicate the wall. At the dedication of the wall the Levites and priests led choirs of people in worship atop the walls. It must have been a marvelous sight and full of joy. The God of new beginnings has given his people a fresh start in Jerusalem 100 years after her return from Babylonian exile! “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” says God. He has now brought his people back to the land of promise.

It would be wonderful to stop right here. As a matter of fact I really wanted to be able to stop right here, but alas this is not the end of the story. Nehemiah returns to Persia as was expected and after some years he returns to Jerusalem to see how things are going. When Nehemiah returns he finds the people working on the Sabbath and evil Tobiah (an enemy of God) living in the temple court.

The people had once again intermarried with the pagans around them. They even had children who could not speak the language of the Hebrews.

Can you imagine how frustrating this must have been for Nehemiah and, of course, God? It is like if someone isn't present to watch them every minute then the people stray.

I know how this feels. When my children were small I had this experience: I went from the back of my house to the kitchen to make dinner. My house was only 1800 sq ft so this is not a long journey. I left my boys playing in one of their bedrooms. About 15 minutes later I heard screaming, laughing, and this strange noise that sounded like a waterfall. I ran to my youngest son's bedroom and there was my oldest son standing outside his open bedroom window hosing down my youngest son's room with our garden hose. It was on full blast! Our youngest son had a “car bed” with a foam mattress which was by now so full of water that it looked like we had dropped it in a swimming pool. It took 15 minutes for all of this to happen out of my sight. My son knew better. He knew the house rules/laws. He just did all of this in spite of my good motherly instruction. Why? Because he wanted to—he thought it was fun for the moment to be bad. However, the consequences later were not so fun. I think this is how people are. We know better, but we can't help ourselves.

Although God is faithful to his people, his people continually prove themselves unfaithful to him throughout the Old Testament. The few notable exceptions are important to notice. They spring up to show us there is another way of being with God than constantly going astray. But their example and commitment are not enough to overcome the sin patterns we see exposed in Israel. The rebuilt temple, the rebuilt city walls, and the reading of the law could do nothing to transform the hearts of God's people.

God knew this of course. He has already given a promise, almost 200 years earlier through Jeremiah that. “ ‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people’ ” (Jeremiah 31: 31-33).

After Nehemiah made so many reforms for God, Israel continued to break every one. Nehemiah's final words at the end of his book ask God to remember him not for his success but for his faithfulness. Nehemiah prays:

Nehemiah 13:14:

**14“Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its’ services.”**

Nehemiah 13:22:

**22“Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.”**

Nehemiah 13:31:

**31“Remember me with favor, O my God.”**

## The Last Prophet

The last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi, reveals that God indeed will remember Nehemiah and all those who served him. Malachi begins his book with a statement from God.

Malachi 1:1:

**“I have loved you.” Says the LORD.**

He certainly has. And then through a series of rhetorical questions and answers God challenges Israel about her unfaithfulness while he has been faithful. Malachi recounts the same sins we have heard about in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In summary, the people have offered blemished animals on the altar of God, the priests have shown favoritism in their law courts, they have not upheld the truth, and the people have divorced the wives of their youth and married outside Israel. Same old, same old.

Then in this last prophetic book of the Bible there is something new. It is what closed the Old Testament. The day of the Lord is coming.

In that day of the Lord we find out that God hears and sees and remembers everything. Nehemiah will be remembered. Ezra will be remembered. All will be remembered. But some will be remembered for the good they did to serve God and some will be remembered for being unfaithful.

Malachi 3:13-14 tells us that God hears his people who accuse him falsely or don't trust him.

Malachi 3:13:

**13“You have said harsh things against me,”**

**says the LORD.**

**“Yet you ask, “What have we said against you?”**

**14“You have said, “It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? 15But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper and even those who challenge God escape.”**

Doesn't this sound like something you or I might have heard or said in times of pain or discouragement? Don't people, when they are angry or disappointed, say or think, “What good is it to serve God? I don't have what I want. I don't have the money, power, position, relationships, or the success that I see others around me having? What good is it to serve God?”

But while it might be natural for man to think these ways, it is not pleasing to God. He hears this lack of trust and faith and it is a character assault on God. But he gives his people a response which can help them believe and trust in him for their future.

Here is God's answer to the question of whether it is profitable or not to serve the Lord.

Malachi 3:16-18:

**16Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.**

**17“On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. 18And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.**

God hears, God will act. He makes those people who like Nehemiah want to serve him his “treasured possession.” He has written their names down in the book of remembrance. These people are his children who will be spared from judgment because he has compassion on them. And there indeed will be a distinction between those who wanted God in their lives and those who did not. This then is God's question to us: “What do we want?”

For in the last day of this era and the first day of everlasting life there will be a reckoning. Malachi calls it the day of the Lord.

Malachi 4:1-6:

**<sup>1</sup>“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. <sup>2</sup>But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. <sup>3</sup>Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty.**

**<sup>4</sup>“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.**

**<sup>5</sup>“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. <sup>6</sup>He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”**

The day of the Lord is coming. Then the Messiah of God will come and begin his reign.

So how is it pictured? As a new day dawning. There will be a sun rising that will have a different effect on different types of people. As it rises it will burn up those who did not want God in their lives. They will be judged and will be no more. For those like Nehemiah who wanted God, the sun will bring vindication (this is what righteous means here) healing, freedom, and joy. The sun will bring healing from our brokenness; freedom from the shackles of sin; and joy in the presence of God. This sun will never set, and all of God's people will live forever in its' brilliant light.

This sun of righteousness that marks the end of our salvation history is also a person. The Son of Righteousness = Jesus Christ.

In Luke we hear about him. The angel Gabriel said to Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, you are to give him the name Jesus (Yahweh saves). He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most high. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:30-33).

Jesus came as a baby but he will come again as the son of righteousness. Like a new day dawning, Jesus will come back and bring all things to conclusion. Even though not one of us is righteous in our own selves; we are just like Israel and are constantly unfaithful. God made a way to free us from our unrighteousness and give us a joyful life. At every football game you see the verse which invites us to come home to God. Believe it. It will change your destiny if you do.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. Whosoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

The choice is clear. “Whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”

Before Jesus was crucified for our sins he had dinner with his disciples and he held up and cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20).

Hebrews 9:15 explains that “...Christ is the mediator of a new covenant.” Christ has fulfilled Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant which puts the law of God in our minds and writes it on our hearts through his work on the cross. For those of us who believe in Jesus Christ we now have the Holy Spirit inside us. He is bringing healing, freedom, and joy which will someday be complete in the day of the Lord which is coming.

There used to be a pastor here and he always reminded us that when he went to heaven to meet his maker he was going to point to Jesus and say, “I'm with him.”

I like that. That is the idea. Remember me oh Lord, I'm with Jesus.

## Conclusion

I began our time this morning telling you about a great memoir I had read. A memoir about a father who lost his son to drugs for many years. It was an agonizing tale with no happy ending in sight and then one day, surprise of surprises, this son called his father on the phone and asked him to lunch at a pretty nice restaurant. He hadn't seen his son for a long time, but the last time he had, his



son was a mess—you know the typical druggie look. The father didn't know what to expect at lunch but was happy to at least have a chance to see his wayward son once again; hoping that he would indeed show up. When the father came into the restaurant he was surprised to see his son sitting at a table already. He was clean shaven, his hair was cut and neat, he had on a nice shirt and pants and looked healthy. He told this father that he had a job, was getting his life back together and he was sorry. He was home. This father's beautiful boy was home.

This is how our father God feels about us. He has written his love on every page of the Old Testament. His heart's cry is for his beautiful, broken sons and daughters to come home to him. "Return to me and I will return to you" God says. And remember: "I have loved you with and everlasting love." Come home to me.

Let's pray, "Father, you are a great and loving God who has forgiven us all our sins through the sacrificial death of your son, Jesus. We don't deserve your mercy, but you have given it anyway, because you are good and your love endures forever. We thank you and praise your Holy Name for making a way for us to come home to you and live in your presence forever. May our lives be an acceptable offering of service to you and when they are not, may we run to you quickly and begin again. Trusting in your Son, Jesus, who makes all things new. Amen.

For this period of Israel's history, the following reference books were used:

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