

A Worship Study Guide for Individuals, Groups and Families for the week of March 22, 2020

Took Courage

This week, Pastor Steve Shelby preached from [Ezra 7:11-28](#)

¹¹ This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: ¹² “Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now ¹³ I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. ¹⁴ For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand, ¹⁵ and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶ with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem. ¹⁸ Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. ¹⁹ The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. ²⁰ And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.

²¹ “And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the

priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, ²² up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. ²³ Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. ²⁴ We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

²⁵ “And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach. ²⁶ Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment.”

²⁷ Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, ²⁸ and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

- Here in this chapter Ezra recounts all the gifts and support that King Arataxerxes gives for the beautifying of the Temple and the ministry there. Finally, in verse 27 we hear directly from Ezra himself. What Ezra sees is happening here is due to the ‘steadfast love’ of the LORD and because of that steadfast love, Ezra takes courage because it assures him that the hand of the Lord was upon him. It is as if....
- How can you and I take courage in a time like this?
- How can we be encouraged in a time like this?
- We need to be encouraged, to have courage because of the question, that I think we all ask, What is next?
- Maybe, and I have heard from many a confusion between prudence and panic. It is prudence that calls on you social distance and wash your hands a lot. It is panic that causes you and I to hoard. How can I be prudent, while trusting and serving during this time?
- God's promises that he will always be with us, that he will strengthen and establish us, and that nothing will ever separate us from his love in Christ are so precious precisely because they are calibrated for the exact suffering we are facing. The voice of panic tells us that unless we fantasize sufficiently about every possible kind of suffering we may face, we will be unprepared, out of control, and ultimately left alone.

But faith is honest and clear-eyed. It sees the trial right in front of it, but it also looks above and sees the One who tells it to cast all cares on him, because he cares for you.

- To the students
 - To the parents
 - To the grandparents
 - To the addicted and those who struggle with mental illness
 - To the alone and lonely.
- Where are the sources of courage, the places where I can see and know the steadfast love of the LORD and the courage that comes from knowing his hand is upon me?
 - Three sources:
 - History
 - My history
 - The Promise of God in the Good News of Jesus Christ.
 - Let me tell you about my own fears. This is not the first time the church has faced pandemics.
 - Francis Grimke, an African-American Presbyterian pastor in Washington D.C. "While the plague was raging, while thousands were dying, what a comfort it was to feel that we were in the hands of a loving Father who was looking out for us, who had given us the great assurance that all things should work together for our good. And, therefore, that come what would—whether we were smitten or perished, we knew it would be well with us, that there was no reason to be alarmed." (Francis Grimke)
 - How does the steadfast love of Christ apply?
 - To students
 - To parents
 - To the economically threatened
 - To the elderly
 - To the addicted and the mentally ill
 - To the alone and lonely
 - 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:18-39)

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