

# Where Are the Levites?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn in your Bible to Ezra chapter 8.

! This morning's message will be from Ezra chapter 8 verses 1 through 20. If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, there are Bibles in the pews that you may use.

If you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home as a gift from our church to you in our hopes that you'll continue to be reading the Word of God. Ezra chapter 8 verses 1 through 20, and I'll apologize ahead of time for these difficult-to-pronounce Hebrew names that I'm going to do my best to pronounce.

So if you are there, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together in Ezra chapter 8 verses 1 through 20.

These are the heads of their father's houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia in the reign of Artaxerxes the king, of the sons of Phineas, Phineas, Gershom, of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel, of the sons of David, Hattush, of the sons of Shekariah, who was the sons of Parish, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men, of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eli-e-ohenai, the son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men, of the sons of Zatu-shekariah, the son of Jehaziel, and with him 300 men, of the sons of Adon-ebed, the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men, of the sons of Elam, Jesh-ah-iah, the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men, of the sons of Shephetiah, Zebediah, the son of Michael, and with him 80 men, of the sons of Joab, Obadiah, the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men, of the sons of Benai, Shelometh, the son of Josephiah, and with him 160 men, of the sons of Bebe, Zechariah, the son of Bebe, and with him 28 men, of the sons of Asgad, Johanan, the son of Hakatan, and with him 110 men, of the sons of Adonikim, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men, of the sons of Bigve, Uthe, and Zechur, and with them 70 men,

[ 2 : 52 ] I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi.

Then I sent for Eleazar, Ariel, Shemaiah, and Elnathan, Jerob, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshulam, leading men, and for Joyerib and Elnathan, who were men of insight, and sent them to Edu, the leading man at the place Kasiphiah, telling them what to say to Edu and his brothers and the temple servants at the place Kasiphiah, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God. And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Malai, the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely, Sherabiah, with his sons and kinsmen, 18. Also, Hashabiah, and with him, Jeshuziah, and the sons of Merari, and with the kinsmen and their sons, 20. Besides 220 of the temple servants whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites, these were all mentioned by name. Praise the Lord. You may be seated.

A tongue twister. Wow. Okay. My mouth, my jaw is already sore. I'm sure that most of us this morning have taken a long trip a long way away from home.

Long distance trips that take us a long way from home require a lot of preparation and organization, which is stressful, especially when a large group of people is involved. When I was a youth pastor, I organized a mission trip for 35 youth and adults to the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. We were leaving from the Kansas City area. The trip took months to plan. And despite all of our planning, not everything went according to plan. For example, on our way back, we were delayed in New Mexico while one of our students got sick and was receiving treatment. We were supposed to stay the night in Lubbock, Texas at a church, and we got there at 2.30 in the morning. And the key for the church was not where my contact from the church told me where it was supposed to be. And so at 2.30 in the morning, I'm trying to call him to figure out where the key was, and he wasn't answering his phone. Thankfully, we found a hotel that was able to accommodate us on our way back home. All this to say, planning trips for a large group of people requires extra preparation, organization, and

patience, especially when things don't go as planned.

As we saw last week, God put it in the heart of Artaxerxes to send Ezra back to Jerusalem to institute reforms for God's people according to God's word. This was an amazing thing and served as a reminder that God is sovereign over the world, over world events, and also sovereign over our lives.

[6:19] Ezra was prepared for this task. He diligently studied God's word in his youth. He knew what needed to be done in the present, in Jerusalem, to reform God's people who had begun slipping back into their old sinful habits. This was a big task, and Ezra needed a lot of people. He needed a lot of help to accomplish God's will for his people in Jerusalem. Biblical scholars estimate that between 7,000 and 8,000 people returned with Ezra to Jerusalem at this point in time. It would take them at least four months to travel from Babylonia to Jerusalem. Could you imagine preparing and organizing a trip for a group that consisted of 7,000 to 8,000 people? Not only was it a long trip with a large group, but it was also a one-way trip, which only added to the challenge Ezra faced.

Adding to that challenge was the fact that a group of people that should have been there were missing. They weren't there. As Ezra prepared and organized this large group for this long trip, he realized that he didn't have any Levites, and this was a big problem. Ezra was going to reform the people of God's worship of God in the temple, the house of God. It was the God-given task of the Levites to serve in the temple. Without the Levites, Ezra's task would be incredibly difficult to achieve. He needed their help, along with the help of all of the other people who were making this journey with him back to Jerusalem to accomplish God's will. Ezra could not do it himself, which brings us to the main idea for this morning's sermon. God's people work together to accomplish his will. God's people work together to accomplish his will. In the New Testament, the human body is used as a metaphor to describe the church. In Romans 12, 4 through 8, we read, For as in one body, we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our serving, the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. If you are a Christian, Jesus has made you a part of his body, his church. He has a role for you to play. He has a function for you in his body. He has a mission for all of us to work together to accomplish. After his death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples before ascending back into heaven, and he told them about the work that they were to accomplish in Matthew 28, 18 and 20.

And Jesus said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. The better you serve in the function of the body Jesus has given to you, and the better that we work together as a healthy, functioning body, the better we will share the gospel, and the more likely it is that we will make disciples. This is a great task. It's the greatest task of all time, and it requires all of our efforts working together. But so often, I think what we find in the church is about 30% of the people doing 100% of the work, and that needs to change. The church that works together towards the same objective that Jesus Christ, the head of the body has given it, will be an impactful church.

It will be a shining city on a hill. It will be salt, and it will be light. It will please God. God, is that what you desire? Is that what you desire? Well, the Holy Spirit, through this text this morning, I pray, will help you determine whether or not this morning that is truly your desire. And if it's not, I pray that he will make it your desire. Maybe you're here, and you aren't part of the church.

[12:05] Man, I'm glad you're here. Jesus has brought you here to hear the gospel, because he doesn't want you to waste your life. He doesn't want you to die in your sins. He doesn't want you to work for the things of this earth and spend all of your time in pursuit of them, even acquiring them, these things that will perish. He wants you to know him as Savior. He wants you to know him as Lord. He wants you to participate in the greatest task, the greatest mission that there is, and I hope that he saves you today.

And I hope that you become a part of his church. It's awesome to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ. God's people should work together to accomplish his will. In every church, or I should say in every church, yes, wherever God's people meet, that large group typically consists of two

subgroups of people, as was the case in Ezra chapter 8. These two groups make up the entirety of God's people. God had a task that they were to share in, but some of them were more excited about this task than others were.

And I hope through his word, God will renew you as a Christian, your excitement to be a part of his church, and that he will revive your passion to work together to accomplish his will. And so we see the first group that comprises God's people in verses 1 through 14. Group number one is those who are willing. Group number one, those who are willing. The names recorded in verses 1 through 14 list the heads of the families who heard Artaxerxes' decree permitting them to return to their ancestral home.

It's likely all of them were born outside of Jerusalem. They were born in Babylonia in the exile. They trusted it was God's will for them to return to Jerusalem with Ezra, but it wouldn't have been easy. For one, many of them would be traveling with their children, and that came with a great deal of risk. Their journey would take them through dangerous places, thieves and marauders laid in wait to attack travelers. These men, these heads of their houses were willing to risk the loss not only of their own lives, but the lives of those whom they love. And they chose to sacrifice their safety and their comfort to pursue God's will. It also would have been hard for these volunteers to go because there's a lot of emotion in leaving a place where you've spent most, if not all, of your life. I can't, I think we can, it's safe to assume that some of the people in this group that was willing to go had family members who were unable to make the journey. They would have had to make arrangements for them. They would have had to make arrangements for their older family members who were just unable to make it. They had to make sure that they would be taken care of while they were gone.

They would have had to have said goodbye to those who chose to stay behind. They would have virtually no communication with one another. Once they said goodbye, they would never see each other face to face again.

[15 : 58] They didn't have phones. They didn't have the internet. They didn't have FaceTime. This goodbye was the last time that they would see one another. Those who willingly went didn't fully know what we know now. Their names are recorded in the Word of God. Think about this. Some 2,500 years later, later, the names of these willing servants have been read in our church in this place that they didn't even know existed. All they knew was that going on this journey and joining Ezra in this task was what God wanted them to do. I'm sure that for some of those who stayed behind and for most of their unbelieving Persian neighbors, their leaving seemed like a foolish thing to do.

When I read my Bible, what I see God often doing is calling people to obey Him in pursuing His will in ways that look foolish to everyone else. Even to the person who's being called to do God's will. God tells Noah to build a giant boat, an ark to save him and his family from the floods of God's wrath. To everybody else, I'm sure that looked crazy and foolish. God calls Abraham to take his only son, his beloved son Isaac, to the top of a mountain where there he is to sacrifice him.

That must have seemed foolish to Abraham, though he trusted in God. And ultimately, his son was given back to him as a type of the son who would ultimately give his life to save others, Jesus Christ. Moses is told that he's to go back to Egypt, a place where he is a fugitive.

And as an old man, he is going to be God's spokesman to lead God's people out of slavery. In the New Testament, Jesus tells Simon Peter to row his fishing boat back out into the water and to drop his nets for a catch. In the nicest way possible, Peter tells Jesus that they'd been working hard all night trying to catch fish with no success. They were the experts in fishing, not Jesus in his estimation. They were ready to go home. They were ready to rest. But he willingly did what Jesus told him to do. And they brought in such a large amount of fish that their nets began to break from the weight of it all. These examples and the examples of the people who returned with Ezra remind us that God calls us to trust him no matter how foolish it may seem to others, no matter how foolish it may seem even to ourselves. The life of faith is trusting in God's sovereign hand, however irrational it may seem or appear to you or to others. God does not call us to passive waiting, but active obedience.

Paul David Tripp says, when he calls, he goes with you. What he calls you to do, he empowers by his grace. When he guides, he protects. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. It says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. It's my favorite verse probably

because I've I've so often needed it, needed to remind myself that my own understanding is not as trustworthy as God and his word is. The parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25 verses 14 through 30 is the passage of scripture that has shaped my philosophy of ministry. In that parable, the master symbolizes Jesus. He entrusts his servants with sums of money. The foolish servant is the one who thinks he's done the wise thing by going and burying it and giving what has been buried back to the master when he returns. But it's the servants who take their master's money, take their master's gift, and they invest it. They risk it. And in risking it, they accumulate a profit for their master.

[ 21 : 03 ] And he's pleased with that. Following God's will might look risky and it may seem risky, but in the Bible, we hear, we see over and over again that it's worth it. It's worth it.

What we see in Ezra chapter 8 verses 1 through 14 is a list of names of real people who really existed and who were willing to do what seemed risky and were willing to do hard things to pursue God's will.

Does that describe you? Is that true of you today? Are you willing to look foolish for Christ as you pursue his will for your life?

Are you willing to do the hard things to serve Jesus in obedience? The Bible says that when God saves a person, the Holy Spirit indwells that person and gives them spiritual gifts.

There's a lot of interest in these spiritual gifts and taking these spiritual gift inventories. Maybe you've taken one of those. I know I've taken a couple in the past.

[ 22 : 26 ] And I'll tell you, I'm not a big fan of those spiritual gift inventories. And one reason why is because when I read the Bible, when somebody is saved and Jesus calls them to follow him, he doesn't say, oh, and here's your spiritual gift inventory.

Make sure that you fill this out and hand it to me so I know how to put you to service for me. That doesn't happen. These people didn't need spiritual gift inventories to know that they had spiritual gifts and to find out how they were to use them in service to the Lord.

I think Christians sometimes take those spiritual gift inventories for the wrong reason. I think they take them to learn more about themselves because we're interested in ourselves, aren't we?

I want to know what my gifts are so that I can know. But we're less interested in using those gifts for the purpose that God intends, which is clearly stated in 1 Peter 4, 10 through 11.

As each has received a gift, talking about these spiritual gifts, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

[ 23 : 38 ] whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to exalt the one with the gift, but to serve others so that the giver of the gift is the one who is exalted. Jesus' expectation, like the parable of the talents, is that each person whom he's saved and whom he's gifted be a willing participant in the work he's commissioned all of us to do.

His expectation is that we use our gifts to serve one another in the church in a way that advances his kingdom and advances his mission and ultimately glorifies his name.

And Jesus is not asking you to do anything that he wasn't willing to do himself. In Philippians chapter 2, verses 4 through 11, this great passage, it says, Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

[ 24 : 55 ] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Now I will say there are times like on a sports team where the participants need to take a breather. They need a timeout. And while they're on the sideline getting that breather, being treated for their injuries, maybe others cover for them during the game.

But there are no bench warmers in Jesus' church. That's not anybody's specific job. Your job is to sit on that bench and keep it warm for the guys that we really care about and who help us win.

[ 26 : 18 ] There are no bench warmers like that in the church of Jesus Christ. His expectation is that you be willingly involved because you understand what he willingly did to save you.

He didn't have to. But God in his love chose to make a way, the only way for sinners to be saved, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, lowered himself to the lowest position, the position of a servant to die on the cross to atone for sinners that by faith in them they are saved, they receive eternal life. And so I want to say to you, to those of you who Sunday after Sunday, Wednesday after Wednesday, and during other times of the week when we meet as a church for Bible studies, for book studies, or in small groups, to those of you who teach, who serve, who count money and deposit it, who change diapers, who sing, who play an instrument, who set up tables and chairs and take down tables and chairs, to those of you who stock our pews with pens, for those of you who pass out bulletins, who make coffee, change light bulbs, unclog toilets, and do a number of other things for our benefit in this church and for Christ's glory, thank you.

Thank you for doing that. What you do matters. It's important. You don't get paid and you don't get much recognition, but God sees it and God is pleased each and every time that you willingly do it, that you willingly dedicate yourself to him, to serving him, and you're consistent in doing that.

Thank you for what you do. Church is not for spectators. It is for servants of Jesus Christ. If you're not involved, get involved.

[ 28 : 31 ] If you're not serving, start serving. For you as a young person, I think oftentimes we send the wrong message to our young people in the church, just go over there and be quiet and don't do anything, don't get in our way.

What a wrong message to send to our young people whom the Lord loves and who the Lord wants to use to serve. I love when I go back in the sound booth and I see our young people back there serving and learning and doing things for our church.

I love seeing our young people in the choir singing and leading us in worship. I love seeing our young people volunteer for nursery and for VBS, helping out those who are down there, passing out bulletins, setting up tables and chairs.

Thank you for what you do. Be present. Keep serving. We want you to serve. So keep doing it. For those of you who are adults, if you are serving, thank you. Keep doing it. Keep doing it willingly. Don't do it begrudgingly. Show up. Be involved.

[ 29 : 37 ] Do the service. Do the work. I know for me, and I've heard other pastors say it, I heard one saying it on the way to church on the radio this morning. One of the greatest blessings to a pastor, to me as a pastor, I know, is when people show up, when they show up and participate, when there are more spots full on Sunday morning than there are empty.

That is an encouragement to me and I'm sure to each one of you as well. Senior adults, to those of you who are retired, invest in the younger generations who are here.

Again, don't see them as a distraction or as an inconvenience, but the future of the church.

Volunteer your time, as many of you do during the day, to serve here.

And thank you to those of you who do. Be present and continue to be willing to serve. The list of names in verses one through 14 have a clear arrangement. The first two returnees named come from two lines of priests descended from Aaron.

After the two priestly figures, we see the name of Hattush, a descendant of King David. These names listed remind us of the importance of worship and the promise of God to one day send the Messiah, Jesus Christ, our great high priest and King.

[ 31 : 04 ] The one in whom we serve, the one who we worship, the one who these two divisions of high priest and King are ultimately united. The other names represent the other tribes of Israel.

However, one of those tribes, one of those groups who should have been present and who should have been willing to go and who should have wanted to serve was missing.

This brings us to the second group that often comprise the people of God. You have those who are willing and then group number two, those who are unwilling. In verse 15, again we read, Ezra says, I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava and there we camp three days as he's making preparations, as he's organizing everything.

And as I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi. The call was sent out. Any Jew in exile who wanted to return to the promised land with Ezra could go.

Also, Artaxerxes also decreed that anyone who worked or served in the temple was completely exempt from paying taxes. This should have perked the ears of the Levites, of anyone descended

from Levi.

[ 32 : 35 ] In Numbers 18, two through six, we read about the important and specific calling that God gave to the Levites. And with you bring your brothers also the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may join you and minister to you while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony.

They shall keep guard over you and over the whole tent, but shall not come near to the vessels of the sanctuary or to the altar lest they and you die. They shall join you and keep guard over the tent of meeting for all of the service of the temple and no outsider shall come near you and you shall keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel.

And behold, I have taken your brothers, the Levites, from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you given to the Lord to do the service of the tent of meeting which later became the temple. the Levites were like the cogs in the wheels that kept the temple of God going. Their service was important.

While all priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests. Those Levites who weren't priests worked in the temple. They policed the temple. They guarded the gates.

[ 33 : 59 ] They would clean and polish the instruments that were used in worship and they served the priests in performing their duties. In exile, the Levites didn't have a job to do because they were outside of Jerusalem and there was no temple.

It had been destroyed for them to serve in. And so they couldn't fulfill their God-given role. And so you'd think that they would be excited at this point to return to Jerusalem.

The temple has been rebuilt and they would be excited to do the work to fulfill their calling, the important function that God had given to them specifically to do in his house.

On top of that, they didn't have to pay taxes. Man, what a great, what a great thing that you think would motivate them to go.

But after three days of preparing and organizing the people, Ezra realizes there aren't any Levites.

[ 35 : 05 ] Where are the Levites? Why didn't they show up? Ezra doesn't say, but I think they no-showed for either one of two reasons.

First, it could have been that they had forgotten who they were. they'd been in exile for so long. Most, if not all of them, again, were born and raised outside of Jerusalem. And so maybe they just had no idea of the specific role that God had created them to do.

And so they needed a reminder. Or, secondly, maybe they did know who they were.

But they didn't want to be who God called them to be and they didn't want to do what God called them to do. Is the same true of you?

[ 36 : 14 ] Maybe you don't know who you are. Human beings are created in the image of God. God created you to have fellowship with him.

God created you to know him and to enjoy him. But sin, your sin, has severed that fellowship and separated you from God who is holy.

Instead of looking to our creator for our identity, human beings so often look to other things, turn to other things for satisfaction and for purpose, for meaning, to find identity in those other things.

But none of those things, no matter what they are, can completely and totally satisfy us. God created you for himself to enjoy him, to love him, to serve him, to worship him.

and it is through knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior that our sins are forgiven, that our fellowship with God is restored and it's through him that we find our true identity.

[ 37 : 32 ] Jesus is calling you today to believe in him, to turn from your sins and to trust in him, to know your identity in him. Maybe you're a Christian today though and you're suffering from some kind of spiritual amnesia and like the Levites then you need to be reminded of who you are in Christ today.

You are a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5 17 says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

God has saved you. You are a part of his church. You are a part of his body, his light to a world that is veiled in darkness. And so in 1 Peter 2 9 we read, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Christian, you have been reborn, recreated, made in the image and likeness of God. You are being conformed to the one who is the image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, and we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

[39:05] and so I ask you, are you brother, are you sister, embracing your role?

Do you realize that your identity, your true identity is in Jesus? Do you know that his command to go and make disciples is a command that he's given to you, to all of us?

Or maybe you know these things, but you don't want to do what God has called you to do.

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 12:14 through 18. Again, Paul talking to the church and dysfunction and he reminds them of who they are and what they are to do by comparing them to the body.

For the body, he says, does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body.

[40:16] And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

if you resist the role that God has for you in the body, what are you saying? I think in essence, you're basically saying or thinking that you're wiser than God, that you know better than God.

And such an attitude reflects a desire to be the one who is glorified instead of Jesus and if that's the case, such an attitude like that, that's a satanic attitude.

Because isn't it Satan who wants to be glorified and exalted over the Lord Jesus Christ? It's not a Christ-like attitude. Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

[41:35] He didn't think that he was above such a menial and dirty and filthy task. If you truly want him to receive the glory, you'll gladly and you'll willingly serve the body, serve him in the specific function that he's given to you.

If you think about it, a body that is nothing but hands or a body that is composed of nothing but feet or eyes would look hideous. It would look like a monster.

People would run away from such a thing like that. it takes all of us willing to work together and if we do, we can be sure that the Lord will use us in great and greater ways to advance his kingdom.

And so I ask you, do you want to be a part of that? And if so, then it's simple. If you're in the unwilling group, repent.

Repent. Repent of that sin to not be involved. Repent of that sin to refuse to be the part and play the role in the function that God has given to you and serve and join in what God is doing.

[42:51] Ezra had a problem. He needed the Levites, but they weren't willing to come. So what does he do? You know, I think he was probably discouraged.

discouraged, but in his discouragement, we don't notice him or hear him saying something like, well, forget them. Forget them. We don't need them.

We'll find some other way. Just let them stay here. We don't need them. He also didn't disparage them in calling them names or anything like that.

He didn't do those things. What he did do, though, was he confronted them. He confronted them. In verses 16 through 17, Ezra gathers some of the people willing to go, and he gives them, he delegates the responsibility to them to find these Levites who were unwilling to go.

And what we learn here is the necessity of confronting people in their sin. Not so that they can put them in their place, but so that they can get them into place.

[44:04] I wouldn't be surprised if the message to these Levites sounded something like this. Yes, there will be hardship. Yes, there will be struggle.

But you are Levites. To you and only to you has God given the call to serve him in his temple.

people. And so guys, you have a decision to make. Come with us and be and do what God created you to be and to do.

Be a part of this great thing that God is doing. But if you stay on the sidelines, we'll know, God will know, who you truly serve.

are you going to be courageous or are you going to act like cowards? We're going. Come and join us.

[ 45 : 09 ] And verses 18 through 20 record the effect that Ezra's delegation had on the Levites. Many of them came. Ezra loved the Levites.

He needed them and he wanted them to join in the work God had for them to do to reform God's people and to reform the worship of God in the temple.

He needed both the willing people of God to join him, to work alongside of him, to accomplish God's will. He also needed those who were unwilling, that they would be willing, and that they would work together to do what God was planning to do.

And as a result of that, we see that God's hand moved the hearts of those 258 men within seven days to drop everything and to serve the Lord, to be who God called them to be and to do what God called them to do.

Here's a lesson about recruiting those who are unwilling in the church. Ezra doesn't put a note in the bulletin, does he? Say, where are the Levites?

[ 46 : 19 ] We need Levites. Put it in the bulletin and they'll respond. He doesn't do that. He doesn't get up and make an announcement in, you know, the church. Hey, you know, we're going on this trip.

We need Levites. If you're a Levite, we really need you to come help out. Would you please join in? He doesn't do that. He isn't passive in his recruitment.

He's active and he's even kind of aggressive because he knows what is needed and he knows who needs to do it and he knows that the work will be worth it.

And he doesn't want the unwilling people of God to be left out. And so if you are a leader in this church in whatever capacity that might be, even outside of the church, I think this is a good principle.

But let's look at the church. If you want the unwilling people of God to be involved in the mission, in the ministry that you're doing, first of all, I would say pray.

[ 47 : 25 ] Pray to God, the God of the harvest, for laborers and pray that he will help you identify those people to serve in those roles and then ask them personally.

Ask them face to face. When Danny and I, not long after we had first were married, there was a lady in our church who taught a young Sunday school class.

I want to say these kids were maybe first graders. And she came to me one Sunday and she said, hey, I'm getting ready to go out of town.

I've been praying about it and I think you and your wife should substitute for me and teach my class. And you know, I'm hearing all this stuff and I'm like, no way.

No way. And then the next week she comes to me and she says, hey, have you been praying about it? And I hadn't been praying about it, but I kind of, you know, I lied. Lord, forgive me that I had.

Yeah, I just, you know, I don't think that, I don't think that we're able to do it.

[ 48 : 32 ] And she said, well, I've been praying for you. I haven't asked anybody else because God has put it on my heart that you two need to teach this class. And what could I do after that? I could say no and sound really like a jerk in need of a lot of sanctification, but I said yes.

And honestly, it was hard. That first week of teaching that class, it was, we were just glad that we survived and no kid ran away or died. They all got back to their parents.

But we enjoyed it and she kept asking us and we kept doing it. And so if you need volunteers, that's the approach that I would encourage you to take.

Pray about it and make sure that you're not manipulating them, you're not lying to them. This is truly, I've prayed, you are the person that God has put on my heart to do this. And you ask them. And if you're asked, then do it.

And you'll be thankful that you did. Because I'll tell you this, I've never regretted the times that I've said yes to whatever God asked me to do.

[ 49 : 36 ] I've never once regretted that. And I promise you that that'll be true for you too, if it isn't already. So how should we adjust our lives according to what we've heard?

I think it's very simply this, be ready and willing to participate with others in the work God calls his people to do. Be ready and be willing to participate.

If you're already willing, keep being willing. If you're unwilling, repent of that and get involved. Be a part of the body of Christ. He wants you to serve.

And if you're not sure what to do, then pray about it. And it could be that for some of you today, God you know is calling you to do something and the answer that you've told him has been no over and

over and again.

And Jonah is a reminder to us all that it is better to say yes to God. If you say no, you might end up being fish food. So don't be fish food, say yes. I'm going to be down here during our invitation.

[ 50 : 37 ] If you've heard the gospel and you realize that you are not a part of the body of Christ, you realize your need for Jesus as your Lord and Savior, please come and find me during that time or afterward.

I would love to pray for you and encourage you. We're here to make disciples and we want to come alongside of you to know Jesus more. If you're a believer and you've heard this sermon, maybe you need to come and pray about that thing that you keep saying no to and you need to say yes.

Or maybe you just need to come and respond right now and tell the Lord, whatever you ask me to do, I'm willing and my answer will be yes. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for this reminder from your word. This truth, Lord, that you call all of us to work together in the role and the function that you have specifically given to us to advance your kingdom, to accomplish your will.

Lord, thank you for this great privilege that you've given us and forgive us that oftentimes, Lord, we refuse or are unwilling to participate.

[ 51 : 52 ] Lord, I would say that it's all of our desires. Every member of Highland Park Baptist Church, it is their desire to be the city on the hill that you've commanded us to be, to be an impactful church in our community and our state and our nation.

And Lord, for that to happen, it means that we all must be willing to get involved and to stay involved and to do the work that we do, not for the accolades of people, but for you to be glorified and for you to receive all the exaltations.

And so, God, we pray for our church that that's what we would be. Lord, that what we're doing now, we would excel still more in our effort to do this, that we would desire to be used by you, that the name of Jesus Christ would go and be heard and proclaimed, that disciples would be made.

Lord, thank you for this privilege that you've entrusted to us. And Lord, may we be diligent about the tasks that you've given to us, that you would receive all the praise for it.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.