How To Live A Life God Blesses

EZRA 7:8-10 (NKJV)

Our scripture text this evening comes to us from one of the less familiar books in the Old Testament. Please turn with to EZRA chapter seven. And we're going to be reading verses 8-10.

(Now if you have any trouble finding it, the Book of Ezra is before you get to Job, Psalms and Proverbs)

EZRA 7:8-10 (NKJV)

8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

9 On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

P R A Y E R

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INTRODUCTION

If I were to ask you this evening, “How many of you want to live a life that GOD blesses?” I have no doubt in my mind that everyone of you would raise your hand.

But I wonder if we truly understand what it means to have GOD’S BLESSINGS on our life. It means much, much more than simply having GOD provide our daily needs of food......shelter......and clothing. Even unbelievers receive God's most basic blessings.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:45 (NKJV) “He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.”

To have GOD'S BLESSINGS UPON ONE'S LIFE means to live under God’s divine approval and favor. It means to have God's hand upon our life. It means to have GOD’S smile of approval upon us as a father smiles upon a child who brings him great delight and pleasure.

GOD has blessings to bestow upon us that you and I have never even dreamed of or asked for.

EPHESIANS 3:20,21 (NKJV) Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Chances are most of us have settled for God's most basic blessings, when GOD desires to give us so much more.

What is the secret to living a life that GOD blesses? What is it that causes GOD to put His mighty hand upon our lives in a powerful way?

We find our answer in these wonderful verses of Ezra chapter 7.
Before we look at THE FOUR KEYS TO LIVING A BLESSED LIFE let me tell you a little bit about this wonderful man named Ezra.

The story of Ezra takes us back in time 2,300 years to the days when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity.

The era of the prophets was drawing to a close. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were the last of the prophets. God didn’t raise up any more prophets after them, but He did raise up this very godly man named Ezra.

Ezra was actually born in Babylon, but he was deeply patriotic and loyal to his Jewish ancestry.

By profession, Ezra was a scribe. They didn’t have printing presses or copiers in those days, so a scribe had the duty of writing down the Jewish “torah” by hand on to scrolls. The “torah” was the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Ezra is also believed to be the author of four Old Testament Books: I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Ezra was also a priest descended from Aaron. In fact his blood-line to Aaron is well-documented in the first five verses of this seventh chapter.

When Ezra returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity he played a very significant role in the rebuilding of Israel.

-He wasn’t the one who had the Temple rebuilt. That was Zerubbabel.

-Nor was he the one who had Jerusalem’s wall rebuilt. That was Nehemiah.
Ezra was the one who set out to rebuild the spiritual life of the Jewish people. In fact, he was the one responsible for establishing the synagogues throughout the land of Israel.

This new system of worship allowed the Jewish people to learn the law of Moses in a setting near to their own homes rather than having to travel great distances to hear the law taught in the temple. At the time of Christ's coming, synagogues were a vital part of the spiritual life of the Jewish people, in fact Jesus taught in many synagogues during His ministry.

But for our thoughts this evening, there is something very important I want you to notice in our text. First of all, notice in verse 6 it says, “the hand of the LORD his GOD was upon him.” And then in verse 9 notice it says, “the good hand of his GOD was upon him.”

GOD'S RICHEST BLESSINGS WERE UPON THE LIFE OF EZRA. The question is: “Why?” What was so special about Ezra? What was Ezra doing that prompted God to lay His gracious hand on his life in such a mighty way?

We find our answer in verse 10........

Ezra 7:10 (NKJV) For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

In this one brief verse we learn FOUR KEYS to living a life that GOD blesses.
KEY #1: God Richly Blesses Those Who Diligently SEEK HIM (v.9b,10a)

v. 9b “........and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his GOD upon him.

v.10a For Ezra had prepared his heart...........

1. Now what does it mean when it says, “For Ezra had prepared his heart?”

It means that Ezra had made a deliberate, willful choice to make GOD the central focus of his life. He determined to diligently seek GOD.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV) But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Deuteronomy 4:29 (NKJV) But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Proverbs 8:17 (NKJV) I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.

2. While God blesses each and every Christian, He reserves His richest and greatest blessings for those who diligently seek Him with all their heart.

3. You see, living a life that GOD blesses all starts with your heart. There is only one person who can limit GOD'S blessings upon your life, and that person is you.

If you don't want GOD to work in your life, He won't. If you want to follow the LORD halfheartedly, you can choose to do so, but understand if you do, you will never receive God's richest and greatest blessings.
4. But if you diligently seek GOD and want His richest and greatest blessings, you will get serious about the next three keys we are going to look at.

So here is......

**KEY #2: God Richly Blesses Those Who Diligently STUDY HIS WORD** (vs. 10a,b)

v. 10a,b  “For Ezra had prepared his heart to SEEK THE LAW OF THE LORD.”

1. Until you get serious about studying the word of GOD you will never know God's richest and greatest blessings in your life.

   -It is through HIS WORD God communicates His great truths to us.

   -It is through HIS WORD God unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

   -It is through HIS WORD God reveals His will for our lives.

And GOD richly blesses those who diligently study His word.

(A) **Ezra was CONSUMED** by his study of God's word.

v.10 a,b  “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord........”

That means Ezra made a willful and deliberate choice to immerse himself in God's word. He wasn't a man of many purposes, he was a man of one purpose, and that was to diligently study the word of God each and every day. He was focused! He was determined! He was committed to studying the word of God.
ILLUSTRATION: John Bunyan, the seventeenth century preacher and writer is most noted for his classic Christian book called “Pilgrim's Progress.” John Bunyan was totally consumed with studying the word of God.

Charles Spurgeon once said of Bunyan, “He has studied the Bible until his whole being was saturated with scripture; and through his writings he makes us feel and say, “Why, this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere, and you find that he “bleeds Bible” and the very essence of the Bible flows from him.”

Oh that we were that we were so consumed with studying God's word that the very essence of God's word flows from us.

(B) Ezra CAREFULLY studied God's word.

He didn't just casually read a few verses then go about his daily business. Ezra spent much time pouring over the scriptures. He investigated God's word like a forensic pathologist pouring over a crime scene. He searched God's word like an old miner panning for gold.

Illustration: The great Reformer, Martin Luther, once said, “When I was young, I read the Bible over and over and over again, and was so perfectly acquainted with it, that I could, in an instant, have pointed to any verse that might have been mentioned. He went on to say......

For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree, and all its words were little branches, I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer.”

(FAMINE IN THE LAND, Steven J. Lawson, p. 87, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL Copyright 2003)
One reason why so many Christians don't ever receive God's richest and greatest blessings is because they never get serious about studying God's word. Only 26% of those who profess to be Christians read their Bibles regularly. In fact, the vast majority of Christians never open their Bibles except on Sunday, if they even bother to take their Bibles to Church.

Oh that all of us would have the same attitude towards the Bible as John Wesley, the powerful 18th Century preacher, who said, “O give me that Book! At any price, give me the Book of God!”

GOD RICHLY BLESSES THOSE WHO DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM!
GOD RICHLY BLESSES THOSE WHO DILIGENTLY STUDY HIS WORD!

Now, here is.......  

KEY #3: God Richly Blesses Those WHO DILIGENTLY OBEY HIS WORD (v.10 a,b,c)

v.10 a,b,c “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it.”

1. While God richly blesses us when we diligently seek Him and diligently study His word, His richest and greatest blessings come from diligently obeying His word.

2. Ezra knew that it wasn't enough just to study God's word, he knew he must put God's word into practice in his daily life.
It is interesting that the Hebrew word used here for “to do it” or “to practice it” is the same word used in Genesis 6 when “Noah did everything as God commanded” when he constructed the ark. And it is also the same word used in Exodus 25 when the Israelites carefully constructed the tabernacle according to the pattern God had given them.

3. Ezra “constructed” his life according to the exact pattern given to him in God's word. He “diligently did what God's word told him to do!

4. It is absolutely foolish for any of us to believe that we can receive God's greatest and riches blessings upon our life while living in disobedience to His word.

5. You see, the goal of diligently studying God's word is NOT to fill our heads with a bunch of Bible facts, the goal is to conform our lives to God's word by diligently obeying what God commands us to do.

6. Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks once said, “No man obeys God truly who does not endeavor to obey God fully.”

   A.W. Tozier said, “Scripture learned is useless until it is lived.”

7. The point is this: Partial obedience to God's word is nothing more than disguised disobedience.

8. If you and I want to enjoy God's greatest and richest blessings upon our lives we must diligently obey God's word.

God richly blesses those WHO DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM.

God richly blesses those WHO DILIGENTLY STUDY HIS WORD.

God richly blesses those WHO DILIGENTLY OBEY HIS WORD.
Now, here's……

KEY #4: God Richly Blesses Those WHO DILIGENTLY TEACH HIS WORD (v.10)

v. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

1. Remember earlier I told you that while Zerubbabel dedicated himself to rebuilding the Temple; and Nehemiah dedicated himself to rebuilding the Wall around Jerusalem; Ezra dedicated himself to rebuilding the spiritual life of the Jewish people.

2. You see, had there not been a rebuilding of the Jew's spiritual life having a rebuilt TEMPLE and a rebuilt WALL would have been meaningless.

3. According to tradition, Ezra organized an institution around 450 B.C. called “The Great Synagogue,” which consisted of 120 devout students of God's word and Ezra was their teacher.

   Tradition tells us that among the student body in “The Great Synagogue” were men such as Daniel, and Nehemiah, and the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

4. Ezra passionately desired to teach others the great truths he himself had learned in his personal study of God's word. And God's gracious hand was upon Ezra every step of the way.
5. In **Nehemiah 8** we read that wonderful account where all the Jews who had returned from captivity gathered as one man at the square in front of the **Water Gate in Jerusalem**.

   They asked **Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses**. He stepped forward before the people, and stepped up on a wooden platform that had been built for the occasion, and with the scriptures in hand, Ezra began to read the word of God to the people. And as he began to read, the people rose to their feet in reverence as Ezra read scripture to them from morning until midday. (Nehemiah 8:1-6)

6. Too many preachers today are more like entertainers and stand-up comics than expositors of God's holy word. But while the preacher who tells great stories and makes people laugh draws a bigger crowd, God's greatest and richest blessings are upon the man who faithfully and reverently proclaims His holy word.

7. But we must understand one does not have to be a preacher, or a Sunday School teacher, or a missionary to diligently teach God's word.

   God richly blesses parents and grandparents who faithfully teach His word to their children and grandchildren. He richly blesses that Christian man or woman who is courageous enough to share His word with a friend or a co-worker. God richly blesses the Christian man or woman who will go to the nursing home with a Bible in hand and read some scripture with an elderly person.
When we diligently seek GOD........and diligently study His word........and diligently obey His word........and diligently teach His word........GOD pours out His richest and greatest blessings upon our lives. He places His gracious hands upon our lives and blesses our family, our work, and our service for His kingdom. Is God's hand upon your life? Are you living the kind of life God blesses?

The Touch of the Masters Hand

Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much time on the old violin, but held it up with a smile; "What am I bidden, good folks," he cried, "Who'll start the bidding for me?" "A dollar, a dollar"; then two! "Only two? Two dollars, and who'll make it three? Three dollars, once; three dollars twice; going for three.." But no, from the room, far back, a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow; Then, wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening the loose strings, he played a melody pure and sweet as caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low, said; "What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow. A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two? Two thousand! And who'll make it three? Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice, and going and gone," said he. The people cheered, but some of them cried, "We do not quite understand what changed its worth." Swift came the reply: "The touch of a master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune, and battered and scarred with sin, Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin, A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine; a game - and he travels on. "He is going" once, and "going twice, He's going and almost gone." But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd never can quite understand the worth of a soul and the change that's wrought by the touch of the Master's hand.

- Myra 'Brooks' Welch