

**Text: Ezra 1:1-11 (Pew Bible, pg.461)**

**Title: “God is in Control”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This morning I’m beginning a new series entitled “Rebuilding Your Broken World.” The world in which we live is broken by sin. The world that is your life and my life is broken by all kinds of suffering and weakness. This morning I have a burden for those of you whose world is broken by illness ... either your illness or the illness of a loved one. If that is your situation would you stand? I’d like to pray for you this morning as I begin.

Let’s open our Bibles together to the Old Testament book of Ezra. We’re going to spend the next few weeks learning from some of God’s people long ago about rebuilding our broken world. As you are turning I’ll just remind you that our new West Building is nearly finished. Sunday, November 3 is Harvest Day. We will have a special ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10:40am. On that day we are also asking the church to come prepared to give an extra generous offering that will go toward our budget and for Lasting Legacy, our building program. Now let’s read Ezra 1:1-5.

Now just take the pages of your Bible in your fingers, starting with Ezra 1 and going into the next book Nehemiah 13. What happens over the span of these pages in your Bible is one of the greatest revivals in the history of God’s people. It looked like they were down and out ... lost for good ... and no longer good for anything. But God has plans to rebuild their broken world. Specifically, what is broken is the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of Almighty God inside Jerusalem. For seventy years or so the city that was supposed to represent the Name of God, the Glory of God and the People of God as a witness to the nations was now in utter ruin ... broken in just about every way you could imagine.

You see, after King David and King Solomon the nation of Israel began to disintegrate spiritually and morally. Ultimately Israel split into two kingdoms ... south (Judah and Benjamin) and north (the other ten, sometimes called Israel or Samaria). The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria, utterly destroyed. About 150 years later the Southern Kingdom falls to Babylon, Jerusalem and the Temple are demolished and thousands of Jews are carried off into captivity as exiles in Babylon. Their world was broken in just about every way you could imagine.

Now people might ask, “These are God’s chosen people. Have God’s plans for them failed?” No, even in this time of discipline God is in control, and His purposes for His people are being fulfilled. God never gives up on us. In fact before they were carried off into captivity, the Lord told them through the prophet Jeremiah that this exile will last only 70 years. Then the exiles will be released to return to their homeland to rebuild their broken world. They would return not just to their homeland; they

were returning to their God, who, through them, would rebuild their broken world. God never gives up on His people. And that's what is happening on these pages of your Bible.

Maybe today you are looking at a broken world ... a broken marriage, a broken career, a broken life due to addiction, a broken home. And you feel like a big failure. Listen, God is still in control, even when your world is broken by your sin and foolishness. The fact is that all of us live in a broken world. We are surrounded by our own sin and suffering, but also a world filled with sin and suffering. And it's easy for us to just throw up our hands and quit. But God's plans for us have not failed. He is still in control; He's moving and working to redeem this broken world. It all started when Jesus came 2000 years ago to die on the Cross so that our lives, broken by sin, could be rebuilt. We can't do it ourselves, but God gives us the strength to begin again.

God has a redemptive purpose. And if He has a redemptive purpose then He also has a corresponding plan. And if He has a plan He has abundant provision to fulfill that plan.

As you look at your broken life, or your broken home, or our broken world you have two choices. **EITHER** you believe that somehow, perhaps mostly in ways you don't understand, God is still God, still at the control center of the universe, and He is moving and working in each and every circumstance toward some greater purpose He has in mind, **OR** you are forced to conclude that the circumstances in this world and in your life are just a sorry mess randomly spinning out of control with no reason, no meaning and no purpose.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Suppose you come home one day and someone suddenly says to you that you must pack your suitcase for a trip. Hurry and don't ask any questions. You are taken to a waiting car that in turns takes you to the airport. You are blindfolded as you check in for your flight so you don't know where you are going. You have no control of your life at that point. It isn't until you are airborne that your "captors" tell you what is happening and where you are going. How would you feel in those circumstances? Well, it depends on who is in control of those circumstances. If you walk into your house and a total stranger is standing there telling you to pack your bags, ask no questions, just get in the car, you would be terrified. Your presumption is that this stranger intends to harm you. And every step of that journey would be filled with fear. However, if the person that is awaiting you as you walk in the door is your wife or husband, and they are telling you to pack your bags, ask no questions, just get in the car, then you will feel differently. You will be excited that your spouse has planned a surprise trip for you. And when they put the blindfold on you in the airport, it only heightens the sense of anticipation. "I don't know where this will end up, but I'm sure it's going to be great." And the reason you feel that way is that you know the one who has control of your life at that point ... and you know they love you. The difference between crippling fear and hopeful joy is knowing that someone who loves you is in control.

Now I want to just walk you back through the verses we read earlier. Let me show you how God is truly in control, even in a broken and chaotic world. And I'll have three reminders for you at the very end.

**READ EZRA 1:1-3.**

You need just a little history here to understand what is going on. The Babylonians who conquered Judah had since been conquered by the Persians under a king named Cyrus. So the Jews who were in exile were no longer under the Babylonians, but under the Persians and their king Cyrus.

**ILLUSTRATION** - It's sort of like the company you work for has new owners. Will the new owners keep you or let you go? Will they be fair to you or not?

You can imagine the surprise of the Jews when they get the news that Cyrus has big plans. He wants to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and he wants to release the Jews to go back to their homeland and do the rebuilding.

But it is God who is really orchestrating all of this. Notice it says that Cyrus did this, not necessarily because he was a nice guy, or that he had some other political agenda in doing this. He did this, according to v.1, "to fulfill the Word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah." Remember I said earlier that God told the Jews through Jeremiah before they went into captivity in Babylon that this would last only for 70 years. Well, 70 years are up. And suddenly, out of the blue, Cyrus says, "You can go home and rebuild your broken city."

You see, God called His shot.

**ILLUSTRATION** – We have a basketball goal on our back driveway. I put it up when our girls were little. We played many games of two-on-two and HORSE. You know about HORSE. You shoot in a rotation. If you make your shot, the person after you has to make the same shot, and so on. And the deal is that you have to call your shot. Occasionally someone would be horsing around and throw a wild shot from across the alley and it would go in ... a lucky shot. But it's a different story when you call your shot ... over the backyard fence hook shot. And when it happens it was not just luck.

Well God called His shot. God's purposes will be fulfilled, and it doesn't matter who the king is, or who the president is, or who your boss is. God is in control. God raises up leaders and He brings them down. He orchestrates circumstances in a way that only God can do. He raises up nations and brings them down ... and it all is part of His purposes in the world.

By the way, Jeremiah was not the only prophet God would use to call His shot. He used another mighty prophet named Isaiah. About 150 years before Cyrus was even born, much less before he started his march down from the north to attack and defeat the Babylonians, God revealed to Isaiah what was going to happen. This is before Judah is conquered by the Babylonians ... before Judah is carried off into captivity. God has already put into place the plans by which they would be allowed to return to their homeland.

**Isaiah 45:13 - I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.”**

This is about 150 years before the events actually occurred. God not only reveal this plan to Isaiah, the prophet, He even named the king! God is in control!

And the Bible says that Cyrus was inclined to do this for a very specific reason:

**Ezra 1:1b - The LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia...**

It means that when God was ready for this to happen He stirred up the spirit of this pagan king to do this extraordinary thing.

Now even Cyrus has a sense that this is true.

**Ezra 1:2 - “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.**

We don't know that Cyrus was sold out and committed solely to the God of Israel. More than likely Cyrus was hedging his bets, so to speak. He was a polytheist, which means the more gods he had on his side the better. So rather than destroying the gods and the worship of the people he conquered, Cyrus wanted them to keep their religions so their gods would look on him kindly.

Remember, God has a purpose for His people. And that purpose has a corresponding plan. Cyrus may have thought that he was strengthening his own hand in this move to let the Jews return home and rebuild their city, but really it was God who was behind it all.

So the first mountain has been moved. The Jews can't rebuild their city unless they are freed from their captivity. Cyrus does that. But now they face another mountain. How will they rebuild their city and the Temple? They have been captives and have no financial means to rebuild. Well God has that taken care of as well. God's *purpose* includes a *plan* and *provision*.

Unexplainably, Cyrus makes a decree.

**Ezra 1:4 - And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.' ”**

The people who lived where the survivors (remnant) lived were to help out these pioneers who were returning to their homeland by giving them silver, gold and other resources to help them. God is in control! So the second mountain has been removed. But there's still a third mountain. It was in the hearts of the people. Would the Jews rouse themselves to join God in what He was doing? What they see the challenge of rebuilding their broken world, or would they think, “Everything is lost. No sense in even trying to rebuild.” Well God moves this mountain as well.

**Ezra 1:5 - Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.**

God is in control! He willed it, and it will be so. God moved the heart of Cyrus to make the decree. He moved the heart of the Jews to return and rebuild. And God moved the heart of the neighbors to help them do it.

**Ezra 1:6 - All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.**

You see, God finishes what He starts. What He ordains He sustains. Where God guides He provides.

And it didn't stop there.

**Ezra 1:7 - Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.**

**Ezra 1:11 - In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along when the exiles came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.**

What a humiliating defeat this was! Seventy years before when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, carrying off most of the citizens into captivity. And when he did he took the sacred articles that were used in the temple for the worship of the One True God.

**ILLUSTRATION** – It would be like someone coming in vandalizing our church, taking this pulpit and the cross and the piano and putting them up as decorations in a nightclub somewhere. It was the ultimate disgrace to the people of God, but most importantly to the glory of God.

So the things that were once used for the purposes of God now for decades had been used for the purposes of pagans. But now these sacred items would once again be put back in their rightful places and used for their intended purposes.

Listen, God created this world for His purposes. He created your body for His purposes. And this world is broken today because what was originally designed for the purposes of God has been stolen by Satan, the prince of this world. This world is broken because of our sin. Your body was created by God for His purposes, but sin has hijacked what was designed for God's holy purposes. And our lives are broken because of it. But the Gospel tells us that by the Cross of Jesus Christ what was captured by the enemy has now been redeemed through the power of Jesus Christ. He did that to set you free from the grip of sin so that you can live the glorious purpose He has in mind for your life.

God is in control. Let me just remind you of three ways that is true.

### **1. THIS IS TRUE IN ETERNITY.**

From eternity to eternity God rules and reigns; He knows and controls all things.

**Psalms 90:2 - Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

The Bible reveals to us a God who is all-powerful and able to do any and everything that is consistent with His own nature. He is Almighty God ... the Hebrew name for God, El Shaddai.

### **2. THIS IS TRUE IN HISTORY.**

Time after time, generation after generation, age after age in history, the God who is eternally in control has exercised control in history. Our text today is just one example of that.

**Daniel 4:35 - All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"**

What is true in eternity, and what is true in history ...

### **3. THIS IS TRUE FOR YOU PERSONALLY.**

**Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

Notice that this is true for those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. If you have surrendered your life to God through Jesus Christ, in everything that happens in your life, God is doing one of two things:

- He is doing good to you, or...
- He is bringing good out of bad that happens to you.

### **CONCLUSION**

Remember that this all started when God moved on the heart of of a pagan king ... and He moved on the hearts of His broken people. Will you let your heart be moved?

Today, if you have never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, you are broken and you can never be fixed until you surrender to Him. Even now God is moving your heart toward Himself. Don't resist God. You aren't in control ... He is.

Many of us here today have already made that choice. God moved on our heart and we placed our trust in Jesus. And the question for us is the question that faced the Jews long ago. We will let God move our hearts to join Him in what He is doing. God is in control. He is moving in this broken world. I don't want you to sit on the banks of this great river, watching things just float by. I want you to wade into the river and feel the tug of the current of God at work rebuilding the broken world of the people around you. I want you to let God move your heart to some great thing He wants to do through you to rebuild this broken world we live in through Jesus Christ.

