

Ezra 5:3-17

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[0 : 0 0] By the time we get to the fifth chapter in the book of Ezra, 16 years have passed since the decree of King Cyrus. And not only have 16 years passed, there have been at least 12 years of a standstill in the reconstruction of the temple.

Now that problem is addressed in the first two verses because God encourages his people to begin again the work that he had called them to do through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. It is Haggai who says, You say now is not the time to build the house of the Lord. Is it time for you to live in your paneled houses and the house of the Lord remain in ruins?

By declaring that they were living in paneled houses, what Haggai is telling us is that the people's houses were not just built, but they were ornate. They were well done. They had taken their time on their houses.

They had established themselves and made themselves at home following the Babylonian captivity. But the one thing they were called to do, the one thing that their heart was moved to do, found in Ezra chapter 1, because those who came back were those whose hearts were stirred to respond to the decree of King Cyrus.

[1 : 1 1] And the decree of King Cyrus was, Whoever will of the people of the Lord let him return to Jerusalem and build again the temple of the Lord. So we don't ever need to separate the calling that they responded to from the life they were living.

God was not just decriing the reality that they lived in nice houses, and he was not even saying that it was a sin to do so. And if you remember Sunday night, I know I'm giving you a little bit of a backstory because I want you to understand that, that the prophetic word of those two prophets is unique because it was to a particular people at a particular place at a particular time.

It was not for all the Jewish people, but it was to those people that were living in Judah and in Jerusalem. Now that's a very small minority of the people of the Jewish nation because only 42,000 and some change came back.

The overwhelming majority of the Jewish people remained in what had now become the Persian Empire around the Babylonian region and were very comfortable with where they were at, and they were surely living in paneled houses, and God didn't say anything about their houses, didn't say anything about their work and their labor.

But he was calling those whom he had entrusted this work to do, and he was holding them accountable. Those two writings are really powerful in light of that.

[2 : 3 3] And we are told in the second verse of the fifth chapter, so Zerubbabel and Joshua, the priests, went back to work on the house of the Lord, and they were strengthened by those two prophets.

And as we looked at that, I said, that doesn't mean the circumstances got better, that the people of the land that they were afraid of that had brought the work to a stalemate had all of a sudden left, that overwhelming people of Jewish nationality had moved back.

Some interpreters, even what I would count as good Bible scholars, think that by this time Nehemiah has already come back, re-erected the walls, they have rebuilt the walls, and people are living in the city of Jerusalem.

I don't think that's the case, because Nehemiah does not come until many years later. He comes after Ezra comes, and Ezra shows up in the seventh chapter here, and there's multiple years, and by the time Ezra arrives, the temple has already been rebuilt.

So, if you want to have it in proper context, they're still living in an unprotected area among an unfamiliar people trying to erect the temple that God had called them to do.

[3 : 42] So their circumstances and their situation hasn't changed, because it's totally different to say, well, the walls have been rebuilt, now we can start working on the temple, because now there's this security blanket of the walls.

And there is this security that the enemy's out there, but the reality is, is they were still doing a work that was very exposed and very susceptible to the people of the land, but yet they remained in doing it.

Now, I know that's a lot of technical information to give you this, what we find starting in the third verse. I want you to see what it looks like to have a boldness of calling, a boldness of calling. Being bold in accomplishing what it is God had moved the individuals to do, led them to do, and how they lived it out. And we see it in the remainder of this fifth chapter.

It says, It says, This is the copy of the letter which Tetaniah, the governor of the province beyond the river, and Shethar-Bazni, and his colleagues, the officials who were beyond the river, sent to Darius the king.

[5 : 16] They sent a report to him in which it is written thus, To Darius the king, all peace. Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones and beams, are being laid in the walls, and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands.

Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure? We also asked them their names, so as to inform you that we might write down the names of the men who were at their head.

Thus they answered us, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, in our rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.

However, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house, also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought them to the temple of Babylon.

[6 : 26] These king Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazar, whom he had appointed governor. He said to him, Take these utensils, go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be built in its place.

Then that Sheshbazar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem, and from then until now it has been under construction and is not yet completed. Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon.

If it be that the decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his decision concerning this matter. I want you to see what it looks like to have a boldness in our calling and in our living.

If you were to go back just a little bit, you would see that when they erected the foundation stones of the temple, they had rebuilt the altar, started the sacrificial system again, laid the foundation stones, and had a celebratory feast because the foundation stones had been laid.

Some were crying and weeping, some were rejoicing and shouting, but the sound was heard to all the people around. Immediately following that celebration, some of the people came and began to antagonize them, offered to help and labor with them.

[7 : 43] They said, you don't have any part and portion in this work. So they began to hire counselors and to frustrate their plans and to question why they were doing what they were doing. And so we are told in scripture they stopped. They stopped building the house.

For at least 12 years, probably about 14 years, they completely stopped the work. And then one day, the Lord God sends two prophets two months apart.

Haggai, which if you remember Sunday night, we looked at, was probably one of the older gentlemen who had seen the former temple in all of its glory. We get that from some of his prophecies.

Stood before them and encouraged them. Some two months following that, the young prophet Zechariah, whose prophetic ministry extends much longer than that of Haggai, comes and repeats the same refrain.

So now there is this common chorus of, now is the time to rebuild. It is from the book of Zechariah that we are told Zerubbabel laid the foundation. It will be he who will complete the house, not by might nor by strength, but by my power, says the Lord.

[8 : 43] And so they are encouraged. And then we're told, so they begin again. They just start rebuilding. And immediately after the rebuilding begins, the same questioning takes place. So it is the same response that had happened years earlier.

But the reaction of the people is totally different. And we've asked ourselves, well, how did that happen? Well, we know it happened by the word of the Lord. We're encouraged by the word of God.

And the word of God came to them with conviction, came to them in truth, and came to them in reality, and confronted where they were at, showed them the seriousness of their situation, and it was the word of God that really challenged them and moved them to begin again.

This is one of those great aspects that we see the centrality of the word of God among the people of God. We cannot overlook that in studying Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah, the political leader, will show up and do a great political work.

He will reorganize the things around the temple. He'll rebuild the walls. He will have people move back into the city. All those political works. But probably the greatest work that Nehemiah did is he called Ezra to bring and stand before the people and to read the word of God for half a day and then for the priests and Levites to give the sense for the other half a day that they just began expositionally making their way through the Old Testament.

[10 : 03] And he strengthened the people spiritually by the word of God. So now we find them, when the people come and question them, it says that they questioned who gave you the authority.

Now by this time, Cyrus is no longer king. There is a king between Cyrus and Darius that is not mentioned in scripture, only has about a two year, 18 months to two year reign in the Persian Empire.

So now we're into the reign of Darius. You should pay attention to Darius. You meet Darius. Daniel is there. It is he who throws Daniel into the lion's den. You remember that, right? So God is working. This is one of the wonderful things about this. When God is doing something over here, he is sovereignly also working over here. When he wants to do a work in Jerusalem, he's also working in Babylon.

He puts Cyrus on the throne. Cyrus issues a decree. We told you to pay attention to the thing that it tells us in 2 Chronicles in the last chapter, in the very last verses, and in the first chapter of the book of Ezra.

[11 : 01] And he put it in writing. The reason that's important is because of this chapter. What do they ask Darius to do? Look and see. Listen, Cyrus is dead. So how are they going to see? He put it in writing.

And when we turn the page and we get into the next chapter, we see what he did and he put in writing. We see it actually verbally repeated for us. And we see the blessing that God uses so many years prior to that through his sovereignty in moving Cyrus.

But also in that sovereignty, you have Artaxerxes, who's king there for just a little while. You have Darius now, who is king. And Darius is there under the influence also of Daniel.

So God is working on all fronts. Listen, when God works, he does not just work in one locale. God is omniscient and omnipotent. And he's working in all ways, in all manners, and at all times.

And he is moving. But it tells us that when they come, they are not shied away from it. I love this reality. It says, So we told them the names of the men who were working on the house.

[12 : 04] When they came before, they got so afraid and terrified of the people, they went home. This time, they said, We'll tell you who we are. These are our names. Write my name. Make sure you spell it right.

You can send that to Darius and do this. These people had never been in Babylon when Darius reigned. They were not an independent free people. They were still under the throne of the Persian Empire.

But they had responded some years prior to the decree of Cyrus in the first year of Cyrus' reign. They said, Make sure you put our names down. So they asked for the names. They didn't shy away from it. They didn't stop.

But it tells us that they just continued working and laboring. So how do they get this boldness? How do they maintain that boldness even when opposition begins to arise?

I like what Warren Rearsby says here. Pay attention to the grace that they have in responding to those who are opposing their work, right? They didn't get offensive. They didn't get mad. They didn't get hostile towards them.

[13:03] They just said, Oh, yes, we're doing our work. Here's our names. Go ahead and write them down. We're going to keep doing our work. Okay? That's boldness. One of the realities I find in church history is that those who have a subtle boldness does not necessarily mean pride.

It does not necessarily mean that they are confrontational. It just means that they have a subtle boldness to accomplish what it is God has called them to do that they just continue to press forward.

So how do we do that? First thing that we notice is there is a dedication to a purpose. They're dedicated to a purpose. I said, So they just kept building.

But look how dedicated they are. Even the people of the land because Tetaniah is a governor of that land. He's appointed as governor of the province beyond the river, it tells us.

Much like Zerubbabel had been appointed the governor of the region around Jerusalem. But he makes this writing and when he writes it down and sends it to Darius, even he responds to the dedication that the people are displaying.

[14:09] He says, Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, it says in verse 8, to the house of the great God which is being built with huge stones and beams are being laid in the walls. All of that matters.

We'll get to that line just a little bit when we get to the next chapter. But notice how they describe the work. And this work is going on with great care.

and succeeding in their hands. It's going on with great care. They're paying attention to what they're doing.

It's succeeding in their hands. It's not, another word is, it is going on with diligence. They're not halfway doing it. The implication of the huge stones or these stones had been rolled in.

These were not just small cut stones. They were laboring and working to ensure in this, as we'll see when we get to the 6th chapter, they are following to a tee everything that they had responded to.

[15:08] And we'll see that later on. But right now, we see that they had a work to do. They were dedicated to this purpose. They knew because of the prophetic ministry of those two prophets who had come and encouraged them to go back to doing what God had sent them there to do.

It was time to rebuild the house. They were responding to that. And so they began again to build.

And when they were questioned, they didn't stop building. As a matter of fact, the care and the diligence and the success of their efforts was noticeable to the people around them.

It's encouraging because what we find out is that when the people of the Lord are dedicated to the purposes that God has commanded them, even the mundane purposes, the people around us notice that.

They see the diligence and the care which we take and how we do things and what it is we are laboring towards. This is why we really encourage one another.

Paul says, do all that you do as unto the Lord, right? With great care. Not to please men, but as to the Lord. That we want to make sure that whatever it is we're putting our hands to, be it the simple task of our daily lives or if it's the high calling of something else, we ought to be careful.

[16:26] We ought to be dedicated to that purpose that God has put before us. Laboring and putting our effort into it so that it would succeed not for our recognition, but rather for the recognition of the one who called us to do that.

We ought to walk with some careful attention to the way we labor. Even Tetaniah and Shethar Vaznai paid attention to that.

That these laborers were dedicated to what God had called them to do and that dedication is what caused them to question, but they did not stop it. They were not antagonistic against it.

They were just questioning, but they noticed that and they were concerned because it looked as if they were rebuilding a kingdom because of the dedication they had. So how do we stay bold?

Well, we are dedicated to the purpose that God has called us to fulfill. Sometimes that purpose looks just like being a good neighbor or sometimes it looks very normal to the world around us, but when we know that that's what God has put before us, then we ought to be dedicated to it.

[17 : 34] That's not something that is very popular in today's culture, but something that ought to be seen in the people of the Lord. A commitment to those things that God has called us to do.

So they were dedicated to a purpose, but their dedication was really in response to the second thing is they understood their position. They understood who they were.

They understood their position. They were not a renegade group of individuals trying to reestablish the Jewish kingdom as Tetaniah and Shethar Bosniah thought they probably were.

They were not those who were trying to do a grand revolt. Tetaniah is the governor of the province beyond the river. Zerubbabel is the governor of the province within Jerusalem.

So you have people of two equal political standings, but there's no competition there. There's really no trying to reach for supremacy and show, we're greater than you guys.

[18 : 31] Look at how they define themselves. And how they define themselves is really a window into how they see their position. They define themselves as saying in verse 11, thus they answer as saying, we are the servants of the God of heaven and of earth.

The first way they define themselves when they're asked, what are you doing and who are you? Is they define themselves as being the servants of the God of heaven and of earth.

Now we know that is in direct response to the prophecy that was brought to them through Haggai and Zechariah. We know that originally they did not see themselves that way. They had some excitement about this new journey that they were embarking upon.

They had this new zeal because we're going to this region and we're going to rebuild. And they were kind of like the seed that was on the rocky soil, right? They sprung up really fast and then the conflict began and opposition showed up so they said, hey, we're going home.

Because they thought for a moment they were just people who responded to the decree of King Cyrus. But when the word of God came to them, they realized that they were the servants of the Lord God Most High.

[19 : 41] And if you remember the resounding name because it tells us in chapter 5 verse 1, they came to them and prophesied in the name of the Lord God. And we paid attention to that, that phrase.

They came and prophesied to them in the name of the Lord God of Israel. And if you go and you read those two books which is important to do in connection with this study and if we make our way, it's not every time we have to really kind of cross reference but when you get into this you have to. If you remember there is one name that keeps being repeated in the book of Haggai. There's one name, I believe it's over 50 times that is repeated in the book of Zechariah. And it is the name the Lord of Hosts.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts. Now that's a very, very peculiar name because the of hosts is really not an adjective defining him.

It is an official title. The Lord of Hosts really means he is the supreme eternal ruler over the armies of heaven and earth who is in covenant relationship with you.

[20 : 46] I know it's a long way to define it but that's what it means. He is the supreme ruler of all of the armies. And now because the name of God that they serve is not just he's not just Elohim he's not even just Yahweh.

He's Jehovah Shammar he's the Lord of Hosts and he is the one that rules all of heaven's armies he rules all of the world's armies. Now we're the servants of Helm not just the servants of Cyrus or the king of Persia or Darius.

Now we're serving a greater kingdom. And they understood their position. So when the people came to them they said we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.

That's a good way of telling the world the one I'm serving and laboring for is in control of everything that happens up there and down here. And so we're just going to keep going on.

And it's when people understand that position that reality I was reading a book by Martin Lloyd-Jones today the book's titled Spiritual Depression but it's not really about depression it's about having a faith that's really grounded in realities it's the old usage of the word depression but Martin Lloyd-Jones was using Romans chapter 8 speaking of how we need to understand that by the spirit of adoption we cry out Abba Father we forget about the first part but God has not given us a spirit of fear right but we've got the spirit of adoption and the reality that the position we maintain being led by the Holy Spirit because all throughout the 8th chapter Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit its work in an individual's life and that we are already accepted into the family of God and now we're

laboring from a position of already acceptance rather than laboring from a position of seeking acceptance and the difference it makes in the position we see ourselves in and the position that we understand ourselves as sure the servants of the most high and how we see ourselves in the world really matters when it comes to our boldness if he really is the king of kings and lord of lords and if he calls us his beloved children and he does and he is and if he tells us that he is with us always and he has and we understand that position of his nearness the indwelling of the fullness of the deity then all of a sudden this new standing or this new weight of reverence comes upon us not a weight of fear not a weight of drudgery but what we call the weight of glory of being his people for his glory and his honor in the world he has put us in it is understanding our position we are bold not because we are self confident we are bold because we are confident in the one who has called us and we know that we are his people so third we see our boldness and calling is not only a dedication to purpose and understanding a position boldness also comes from an acknowledgement of the past look at what they say it says they come to him and ask what they are doing and before they even say anything about

[24 : 30] King Cyrus they say we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and we are rebuilding this temple and then he followed it down and they said we are rebuilding this temple that used to be a magnificent temple that a great king had built this temple had been completed 500 years prior to this so it has been some time but they look to the past and they understand that God had done something amazing with his people that there was a great king you know him as Solomon and he had erected this temple but notice they don't just stop with the good old days they also acknowledge the reality they acknowledge the reality in verse 12 but because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath that they had sinned there is one resounding thing that seems to be connected to the end of the Babylonian captivity Daniel does it Nehemiah does it we find it here in the book of Ezra even Ezra does it Jeremiah speaks of it that it would come when the 70 years are complete and it is this truth that each one of them while considering who the Lord

God Almighty is and when looking in the past fall on their faces and repent of the reality that they were a deserving people of the judgment that God brought upon them that God was just in his judgments that he was right in his disciplinary actions and they admit the fact that what has come upon them was indeed their fault it is an acknowledgement of the reality that we are where we are at not because God failed but because we failed because until we realize that God is just in all of his disciplinary actions and that sin carries amazing consequences with it then we cannot be bold in our present calling we come to the recognition that yes we fail at times but God is faithful still that there were times where he did some amazing works and every time we have fallen every time shame was brought to his name was not because of his faithlessness but rather ours we see Daniel crying out and asking for forgiveness of sins which Daniel says we have committed he names his name

Nehemiah does the same thing we have done this and they own the reality because it is not in the Old Testament in particular and I know this kind of goes really against the grain of American even Western society they own the reality of the corporate body they don't say well that was them we didn't do it that's their fault they you know God judged them no we are here because we as a people have failed and that's why we're laboring because in the past now if you look at this these people the majority of these people weren't there some of them were these were the ones that were weeping because they had seen the form of glory of the temple but the majority of them weren't but they acknowledged the past failures and their past mistakes and their past sins and God's sovereignty and faithfulness to his word and the understanding that since

God is faithful then we ought to be faithful as well and so boldness comes because they acknowledge the past and then finally boldness comes because they trust in the present it tells us that they give their names and they share it and it says but the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews and they did not stop them until the report could come from Darius so they just kept laboring and they were trusting in the present they gave their names they didn't they didn't get upset because the enemy was there it was only then after they declare who they are what they're doing the position they have under the Lord God Almighty why they're having to rebuild the temple the past mistakes and sins of the nation we kind of come to this time of confession if you will a little bit they're acknowledging that God is faithful in all these things that God is not to blame that it is their fault they own that then they say but in the first year of King Cyrus he issued a decree I mean they could have led with that right because the question was who issued a decree for you to do this they

could have just said well King Cyrus did but that's not really the main thing the main thing was is they were the servants of the

Lord God Almighty who were reconstructing the temple that was destroyed because of their sins and their failures in the past and now it was their responsibility to rebuild it and restore that worship to walk in faithfulness and God had used King Cyrus to issue a decree and so it's much like Paul being stretched out on the rack getting ready to be whipped before he ever declares the reality that he's a Roman citizen Paul could have led with that at any time when Paul was arrested where he was being drug out of the temple in the book of Acts and he was really in jeopardy of being stoned to death and the Roman soldiers came and got him at that moment all Paul had to say is I'm a Roman citizen and they would have just taken him away he'd have been fine he didn't he allowed him to drag him on the steps he addressed the crowds and the multitudes he spoke to them in the Hebrew language then they carried him upstairs they put him on the rack stretched him out getting ready to whip him they're going to beat him he's all you know it's a very uncomfortable situation all this torture is about to go on and then

[30 : 03] Paul says oh by the way I forgot to tell you I'm a Roman citizen no it's because that wasn't the main thing now that was a gift that the Lord God had given him in standing he uses it later on he uses that right as a Roman citizen to you know appeal to Caesar and make his way to Rome he uses that right later on it is a right and so now what we see is the people of the Lord here after Babylonian captivity God had gifted them with this decree of King Cyrus which was written which is very important historically and so now they they know that one of the trusts they have in the present is that God had so moved even in the secular world that they could be confident in what they were doing in the spiritual realm because it was King Cyrus go look it up and just went back to work after they testified to the reality of the work they were doing they were trusting in the present faithfulness trusting in the present reality that God had it in his sovereign hand and he does we get to chapter six and we see

I don't want to kind of get ahead of ourselves not only does God protect the work God provides for the work through the world and he's going to meet those needs but the question we ask ourselves is how do we stay bold in a society that often questions what it is we're doing dedicated to a purpose understanding our position acknowledging our past I've been reading church history here lately in case you haven't figured it out church history is not really that pleasant at times actually I just finished the middle the middle ages you know inquisition crusades all that stuff not a really good time for church world it's a lot of bad stuff going on there and when we own that right because what we see is God is faithful even when men are messing up you know that's you can't say oh well that wasn't us they're claiming the same name we claim so careful and you know if we're not careful then we're putting we're blame shifting it to someone else and we're not carrying a weight of responsibility in the past many have done great harm for the name of Christ but yet God is faithful and we see his faithfulness in this how do we stay bold well we understand that and we trust in the present that

God's got it in control Ezra 5 verses 3 through 17 thank you brothers brothers