

"GOD'S WORK, GOD'S WAY" - EZRA 5-6

INTRO: Hudson Taylor

"Depend on it. God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply."

TAKE HOME: I may face opposition & trials as I follow the Lord, but God will be faithful to finish His work.

RIISING UP TO REBUILD (5:1-5A)

1-5a) How did this work begin again? 4 things we will see here:

1) GOD'S SPIRIT WORKING THROUGH GOD'S WORD (1) - through the prophets **Haggai & Zechariah**, God challenged & encouraged the people to get back to the work and finish it. They seemed to be down and depressed. "It's not time to do this!"... "we can't."

Haggai said, "Thus says the Lord, 'You can build your own homes but leave the Temple in ruin. It is time to reprioritize things and put God first. Get the supplies and finish the job!' ... "I am with you!"

Zechariah said, "It's not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord."... "the hand of Zerrubbabel have laid the foundation of this house and his hands will finish it!"... "Don't despise the days of small things."... He also prophetically gave them visions of what was to come (end times, Jesus, restoration of Israel, etc.).

Haggai kept their eyes on the work; Zechariah kept their eyes on the coming Messiah!

NOTE: **we often face fears of moving forward after failures.** We don't want to have it happen again... we say, "What if..." "What if I fail again? I can't take the loss"... We may even be overwhelmed at the workload before us, or the enemy's threats around us. We even know it's going to take some work & time (can I count the cost? Do I have the energy and time?).... But if God is speaking to me His Word and if His Spirit is stirring my heart, then I must rise up and obey!

God's Spirit & God's Word that are like oxygen and fuel to the fire of God's work. It will sustain you to the finish line!

What else helped them move forward?

2) GOD'S PEOPLE HELPING IN UNITY (2) - the prophets were not just telling them what to do, they were in it with them, getting their hands dirty in this work!

NOTE: **we need other believers willing to come alongside us (and us them) and say, "Let's do this together for the glory of God!"** People willing to set the example. The word of encouragement was heard and seen through their leaders.

But with any move of God, people begin to ask questions - v.3, "Um, what are you doing? Who told you to do this? Give me names!"... Enemy's look to tear down, others are just curious as to why

3) LIVING IN TRUTH & TRUSTING IN GOD (4) - this was shared by Ezra to show that this work wasn't done out of rebellion to the Persian king. They gave names.

NOTE: Forward faith says, "I've got nothing to hide. I will stand on His Word, stand with His people, stand in integrity, and trust God as I keep moving forward."

And with that stance, they saw God stand up for them to protect His work in v. 5. **5) "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews..."** (God was watching and protecting His work! His favor was seen!). Nothing could be done until a report was sent.

4) "GOD MOVES" (5) - things only God could do!

NOTE: **God's Work, done God's Way, will always have God's fingerprints on it!** Things happen that can only be attributed to God's hand is upon us & His eyes are watching!

How did this work reignite? God's Spirit working with God's Word...God's people helping in unity...people living in God's Truth and trusting God's Hand...and watching God do what only He can!

THE REPORT SENT & THE RESPONSE OF THE KING (5:5B-6:12)

5b-17). The governor systematically recounts to the king what was happening & what they did about it.

8) The temple was being rebuilt with heavy stones, timber being laid in the walls, and **“this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.”**

NOTE: your witness is not just with words, but with actions. The body of Christ working as one is a powerful tool in God's hands. Keep at it. Keep at the missions, the ministries, the movements of God no matter what others do! Your progress is noted!

9-17) The governor said that asked for names and the Jews said, “We are servants of God and doing what God told us to do. Our fathers built God a great temple in Jerusalem, but they didn't obey God and so that is why we ended up in Babylon and our temple & city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. But King Cyrus ordered this temple to be rebuilt, gave us the funds, made the way... and so that is why we are doing it!”

NOTE: when confronted - the people of God, stood on the promise of God, and did the plan of God, in the face of the enemies of God!

So too, when people say, “Why are you doing that ministry?” - you and I say, “I'm following the KING of KING's WORD to me...I'm rebuilding my worship & walk as God wants...I'm laying the foundation for generations to come of faith in God...and even though I've failed, and the enemy stands ready to accuse me, I know I've been restored by God. I'm not the same as before! And so I'm not quitting now!” That's forward faith, that get's the attention of people! They can see that God is working in your life.

So they said, “King, check the records to see if an actual decree was issued and tell us what to do next.” (I'm sure they were thinking “No way this was decreed!”)

6:1-5). The king checked the records and found it to be true...King Cyrus did just as the Jews said.

6:6-12). The king gives further counsel to them:

1) STEP BACK & LET THE WORK CONTINUE (6-7)...I realize that God is able to handle His work! He is able to handle His enemies! He doesn't need me defending Him, or panicking and living in fear that somehow God will lose!

2) STEP UP & FOOT THE BILL (8-9)...taxes from the region were to go to them to finish the work, not from the Persian treasury...sacrifices and “whatever they need” were to be provided upon request without delay **“day by day without fail”**.

NOTE: God is not only stopping any threats, but is providing for His work. (Even humiliating their enemies!) The nations around them would pay for it all and be at the Jews' beckon call! can God handle your issues, your enemies? Yes! Even better than you could!

And so in v. 10 **Darius I** (Darius the Great - 521-486 BC) asked for this temple to be done so that prayers can be made for him & his family to God! Good mark of a leader - asking for prayer! He was a friend of the Jews!

3) STEP CAREFULLY OR PAY THE PRICE (11-12)...any disobedience would be met with a swift justice: 1) You'll be hanged from a beam from your house and your house made a rubble heap! 2) God will destroy those who come against His plan. (king, nation, people). His word will not be altered or destroyed!

Prov. 21:1. “In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.”

NOTE: God took care of His work, His workers, and the enemies of Israel. God's people only had to trust in Him and keep their focus on God's work.

What are you facing that God is saying “Trust Me. Let Me work it out My way. You stay focused on what I've called you to do.” Hang onto that direction from His Spirit.

THE REJOICING & FINISHING OF THE TEMPLE (6:13-22)

13-15) the enemies & nations were forced to comply...the Jews were encouraged by the prophets Haggai & Zechariah to keep on building...and the work was finally finished on March 12, 515 BC (23 years after the first decree from Cyrus; 4 years after Darius gave his order.)

NOTE: what God promises, He performs. He will complete the work not just IN you, but THROUGH you. All to His glory. So don't quit even when the enemy attacks and you are tired and it's taking too long in your eyes. Just because a door is opened, and God has promised, doesn't mean the work won't be hard at times...Be encouraged by God's Word and let Him lead you forward one step at a time.

Now that the Temple was done it was time to "dedicate & celebrate"!

16-18) with great joy they dedicated the new Temple together. The sacrifices abounded as an expression of that joy & gratitude to God (712 is a bit meager in comparison to the 142,000 Solomon had sacrificed at his temple dedication - 1 Kings 8).

They also offered **12 goats as a sin offering (17)** (1 for each tribe - there is no lost tribe of Israel after the dispersion to Babylon...all are represented here). This offering was a way of saying, "We have sinned. Here's our sacrifice with repentance. We believe in Your covenant God. We're now back to You Lord as a nation."

18) the priest all took their places and the worship services at the Temple continued on a daily basis! This was March...but there was coming next month the yearly Passover Feast. It would be the first one with the Temple in place and everyone was excited!

19-22) The priests were ready - they went through the purification rituals to perform their duties. The people were ready to worship joyfully. And so the sacrificial Lamb was slain and the 7 day celebration of the Feast of Unleavened bread commenced.

It was celebrated by those Jews who came out of captivity, as well as **"those who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations...in order to seek the Lord." (21)**

what does that tell us? People were watching this all. They were seeing God at work in wonderful ways. They were seeing the Jews faithful to God's promises and victorious over their enemies. In the end, others said, "I'm tired of useless idols and fairy tales. I want the living God, I want the truth that changes my life. I want to follow Jehovah God too!"

Jews and Gentiles are seen worshipping in this Temple...a picture of what God would do in the future. Jesus made the way for Jew and Gentile to be One in Christ. The only ones who miss out are those who choose not to be a part of things!

22) summary of the work and God's hand in it all.

1) The Lord made them joyful (joy comes from God's hand working His way)...

FB MYER - "Do not be afraid of joy. When God makes you joyful do not think it necessary to restrain your songs or smiles". Joy is a gift from God. Joyfully worship Him!

2) the Lord also turned the heart of the kings of Assyria (Darius) toward them...

3) the Lord turned the hands of the king to strengthen their hands in the work (provisions, decrees)....

4) the Lord encouraged them through the prophets to finish the work.

POINT: God's fingerprints were all over this work!

NOTE: Look back and you will see God at work in your life. The joy, peace and rest He gives you from the victories...the way He turned the hearts of those over you to grant favor for a particular task...the provisions, the protections, the guidance from God's Word and other believers. He has carried you this far & won't drop you now no matter what you are facing. Phil. 1:6 - He is faithful to complete the work He began in you.

Hudson Taylor's words from 200 years ago still ring true for us today - **"God's work, done in God's Way, will never lack God's supply"**. It's not up to your wit or willpower. It's not done through your strategies & schemes & stresses. God looks to show Himself strong on behalf of those who's hearts are turned to Him. Turn to Him and let Him glorify His Name through your life in what you face today. **Pray/ Communion**