

Ezra Ch5v1-Ch6v15 - God Watches Over His People To Build His Temple

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Preacher: Sam Ross

[0:00] Good morning, everybody.

Good morning. Could we please open our Bibles to Ezra chapter 5. Louise is going to read for us in a couple of moments.

It's been two weeks since we were here in Ezra. Here's a reminder of where we are in the story. God had allowed the Babylonians to conquer Israel as a punishment for hundreds of years of their idolatry.

The temple was destroyed. People were taken off into exile. So, 70 years later, as God promised, a new king, Cyrus, sent God's people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

But, as Johnny covered last time in Ezra chapter 4, we found that no sooner have they laid the foundations of this new temple, the surrounding peoples begin opposing them so fiercely that all the work came to a standstill.

[1:30] So, that's where we're going to pick up in Ezra 5. Before we read it, let's pray and ask for God's help to hear what he has to say. O Father, you are the God of heaven and earth, who has spoken to us.

May we tremble before your word today. May we be convicted of our inaction. And may we be encouraged and equipped to do your work.

Speak to us now by your spirit. Amen. Thanks, Louise. Now, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Ido, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of God of Israel, who was over them.

Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, son of Jussidak, set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem.

And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them. At the time, Tatanai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Sheetar-Bosanai, and their associates, went to them and asked, who authorised you to rebuild this temple and to finish it.

[3:09] They also asked, what are the names of those who are constructing this building? But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

This is a copy of the letter that Tatanai and the governor of Trans-Euphrates and Sheetar-Bosanai and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to King Darius.

The report sent to him, read as follows. To King Darius, cordial greetings. The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God.

The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction.

We questioned the elders and asked them, who authorised you to rebuild this temple and to finish it? We also asked them their names, so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information.

[4:29] This is the answer they gave us. We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago.

One that a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the Shaldean, king of Babylon, 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 of God.

He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon. Then king Cyrus gave them to a man named Shethbazar, who he had appointed governor. And he told him, take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple of Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God on its site.

[5:45] So this Shethbazar came and laid the foundations of the house of God of Jerusalem. From that day to the present, it has been under construction, but is not yet finished.

Now, if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if king Cyrus did, in fact, issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem.

Then let the king send us his decision in this matter. Thank you. We will continue up to chapter 6 and verse 15 later.

But that is as much as we will read for now. Thank you, Louise. A couple of tough words and names in there. You did well. If I could sum up this text in one sentence, is that God is watching over his people so that his temple is built.

And you know, in Ezra 5, God had given his people a monumental task. The work was colossal. It was overwhelming in scale, his temple that they were to build.

[7:04] And they were starting from nothing. And the peoples around them had opposed them so fiercely that the work had ground to a halt.

But what we're going to see in this text is that when God gives his people a work to do, he is going to see to it that it is completed.

He will watch over his people so that the work is done. And he's going to do it in these three ways. We're going to see in the text. Number one, he's going to equip and encourage them through his word.

Secondly, he's going to overcome all the opposition against them. And thirdly, he's going to provide every single need. So, where do we start in today's passage?

Well, the work God had given them to do wasn't happening. In fact, it had been at a standstill for 16 years. Now, look at what broke this cycle of inaction.

[8:06] Go to chapter 5 and verse 1. Now, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, descendants of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

The God who was over his people, watching over them in love, he spoke to them. That is so important. And this is the first thing we learn in our lives, that God's work prospers as God's word is heard and obeyed.

Keep your finger in Ezra 5. Turn with me, please, to the book of Haggai. Haggai. I'm going to have to give you a page number for that. Haggai is page number 948 if you're in the church Bible.

948. Look at Haggai. And let's read exactly what God said to his people.

In Ezra chapter 5. And it's really special that we have these exact words recorded, which Ezra refers to. So, Haggai, chapter 1, verse 1.

[9:32] In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai. This is what the Lord Almighty says. These people say that time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.

Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai. Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses? While this house, God's temple, remains a ruin?

God is making a point. You've been living only concerned about yourselves. You have neglected the work that I gave you to do.

Verse 8. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, says the Lord.

Look at verse 12. Zerubbabel, Joshua, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai.

[10:51] Because the Lord their God sent him, and the people feared the Lord. God's work prospers, as God's word is heard and obeyed.

Now you can imagine how these people were feeling. They were totally vulnerable at this point in their lives. Remember, there was no king in Israel at this point. No army. There were no city walls in Jerusalem.

Opposition staring them in the face. Talk about weak and vulnerable. They were faced with a choice. Who do we fear?

Will we fear God and do what he says? Or will we fear the people around us, like we've done for 16 years? Yet as God's word is spoken and obeyed, the people are changed to fear the Lord in a right way, in a good way.

Not to fear the people around them. And they restart the work that God had given them to do. And just listen to the very nice thing God says, through Haggai, to these vulnerable people who are risking it all to obey the Lord.

[12:06] Verse 13. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people. I am with you, declares the Lord.

So simple. I am with you. What greater comfort could you or I know than to know that the God of heaven and earth is with us as we work for him.

God's word comforts his people when the work he has set is difficult and daunting. But not only that, God's word moves powerfully in his people, moving them to action, equipping them for the task.

Turn back to Ezra. Chapter 5. And we will see the effect of God's word. Ezra chapter 5, verse 8.

Tatanai writes, he's the governor, he writes to King Darius, verse 8, the king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God, and the people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls.

[13:20] The work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction. Now skip forward to the end of this section, chapter 6, verse 14.

And Ezra finishes this account by saying this, so the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai and the prophet Zechariah.

Zechariah. So what we have here is Ezra starts and ends this account with the fact that God's word was being faithfully preached and obeyed.

Okay? Everything you see in the middle, all the rebuilding work on this temple comes in the context of God's word being heard and obeyed because God's word is at work in his people.

It's equipping us for the task that he's given us. Okay? God's word, when it's truly heard and truly obeyed, it pulls us out of our little worlds. My life, my house, everything about me, it launches us into God's world, into his mission, what he is doing in the world around me.

[14:45] And that is why we can never afford to let God's word slip into the background of our church. It must always remain right at the center of everything we do.

Our kids and youth ministries, our one-to-one discipleship, Sunday mornings, our evangelism in the town. Here's just one thought.

Do we pray with anticipation for Sunday morning? Do we pray that God's word will be truly heard and obeyed among us?

We desperately need to. And at every other point in our week together as a church, God's work will prosper as God's word is obeyed.

Here's the second thing. God's work prospers as God overcomes the opposition. And 16 years before we know it was the fierce opposition of the people around that stopped the temple rebuilding work.

[15:59] So as soon as God's people obeyed God's voice and picked up their tools again, started rebuilding, what happened? Well, of course the opposition restarted.

Have a look at chapter 5, verse 3. Tat and I, the governor, went to them and asked, who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it? And what are the names of those who are constructing this building?

They were in trouble. But verse 5. But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

Can you see? God is able to work in their hearts even of a pagan king to show favor to his people so that his work will continue. And it's all because God's loving eye is watching over his people.

What a comfort that is to you and I in the opposition that we may face in the work of the gospel in the places we are. God's loving eye is watching over us.

[17:16] But in this way, if God has a work for his people to do, no opposition can stop it from happening. Now there are times when God allows opposition to impede his workers but all of that is within his sovereign hand.

Tatnai writes this letter asking the new King Darius to check if these people really did get permission from the former King Cyrus 16 years ago to build the temple.

Now finding that original decree no doubt would have been challenging. No computers, no digitalized copy of the decree and you can just do a little file search on your computer. No. The whole building of God's temple now relies on a piece of paper being found somewhere in Persia that actually said that Cyrus allowed this to happen.

Read chapter 6 verse 1. King Darius then issued an order and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon but obviously nothing was found there.

[18:30] Verse 2 a scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media. Now this city was actually 450 kilometers from Babylon where the initial search was made.

From Persian records we know that after Cyrus had conquered this region he built himself a summer residence at Ecbatana from where he must have issued this decree 16 years ago where a scroll was found.

Here's the point for us. God is sovereign over every single detail. Even the finding of a piece of paper in this vast empire. God is watching over his workers so that opposition is overcome and his temple is built.

Not only is the decree found but God gives this pagan king Darius the heart to uphold Cyrus' decree which he didn't have to do.

he says in verse 6 chapter 6 verse 6 he writes in his letter to Tatnai he says now then Tatnai governor of trans Euphrates and Shethar Bosani and you other officials of that province stay away from Jerusalem do not interfere with the work on this temple of God let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its side look at verse 11 furthermore Darius says I decree that if anyone defies this edict a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it this king ain't kidding around and for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble verse 12 may God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or destroy this temple in Jerusalem isn't that amazing you see when God chooses all opposition present and future is emphatically resoundingly overcome and verse 13 tells us that

[21:05] Tathani had no option but to carry out Darius' decree with diligence there are times when opposition will threaten to impede God's work among us a couple examples in school it could be getting reprimanded for inviting one of your friends to come to the Rock Kids Club and hear about Jesus that happened to one of our kids they simply wanted to hand a flyer to their best friend and we said yeah absolutely you should do that a day later we had a phone call home the flyer was sent back with interest with a written letter we were pulled in for a word at the door by the teacher the opposition opposition is real it could be a colleague criticizing you just for suggesting that people need to repent and to believe in

Jesus you shouldn't try and change anyone's beliefs they might say it could even be family member telling you that you've been brainwashed telling you that you shouldn't be reading your Bible what are you doing that for the opposition to God's work is real it's not just back in Ezra's time it is right here how are we to stand like the Israelites did well I think it's in this confidence the loving eye of our God is watching over his people in Karagallim the work will continue despite the opposition God is sovereign over all even the ones who oppose his work they can only go as far as he allows when God decides all that opposition will be overcome and his work is going to prosper so take courage I think there's one more thing that we learn from this text and it's that God's work prospers as he sovereignly provides God is going to give his workers every resource that they need to complete the work that he's given them to do now we had a government budget release about two weeks ago 17 billion euro to build a metro underneath Dublin building costs a lot of money doesn't it and don't get a start on the national children's hospital well God was about to ask his people to rebuild this magnificent temple okay this would require thousands of workmen volumes of timber stone gold all to be imported from other places and transported 2500 years ago all at a time when God's people were destitute they were just arriving back from exile in a different country but if

God has a work for his people to do he will see that their every need is provided just look chapter 6 verse 8 and what Darius says to Tatnai the Persian governor of the region he says moreover I hereby decree what you Tatnai are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury from the revenues of trans Euphrates so that the work will not stop whatever is needed young bulls rams male lambs for burnt

offerings to the God of heaven and wheat salt wine and olive oil as requested by the priests in Jerusalem must be given them daily without fail that's what

Darius said Tatnai wrote to the king seeking to stop the temple work he ends up funding it out of his own region's treasury isn't our God amazing I'm sure Tatnai had wished he'd never sent the letter see how God sovereignly provides for his work and here we see God's heart to provide for his workers in the words of Darius whatever is needed let that be given without fail!

[26:50] God will do the for you and I do the same! we know that in chapter 6 verse 14 it says this they finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of the kings of Persia God will provide all that is needed until his work is done God is watching over his people so that his temple is built he's going to equip and encourage them with his word he's going to overcome all the opposition he's going to provide every need now that's all very encouraging reading the story from Ezra's day but what about us today in Karageline Baptist Church clearly we are not stonemasons in temple construction but all this temple building relates to us more than we might first think can you please turn with me to

Ephesians chapter 2 Ephesians chapter 2 verse 19 that's on page 1174 Ephesians chapter 2 verse 19 now from the garden of Eden just to say that it has been God's desire to fill the earth with his presence it's been God's desire to be with his people the temple in Jerusalem well it was a start on the fulfillment of that promise it was a point in the road even king Solomon who built the first temple on its opening day he said the whole universe cannot contain

God's presence how much less this temple he knew that that physical temple in Jerusalem was actually just pointing forward to something better and that better was Christ God's very presence came to earth in a person but here's where it gets real for you and me as well look at Ephesians chapter 2 verse 19 onwards consequently Paul says you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which

God lives by his spirit Paul is saying this we are the new spiritual temple of God with Christ God's people in whom he lives by his spirit are God's dwelling place on earth God does not dwell in buildings made of stone anymore we Peter would say later are like living stones being built together into a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit and Christ is the corner stone this spiritual temple is all built on him on what he has done for his people he's the one who cleansed us and made us into the dwelling place of God and this has astonishing implications for you and for me because God is building his temple today the church and he says the gates of hell will not overcome it

God is watching over the building of this church until it reaches its completion until every last living stone every last person every last soul has been brought in to take its place in that spiritual house we are the builders God has made us workers building this spiritual house we proclaim the gospel of the risen and reigning King Jesus our cornerstone we call people everywhere to repentance to take their place in this spiritual temple God's dwelling place forever and you know what the work continues until every last one that God has called comes into his house what a work we've been given that work happens in the rock and rooted on Fridays in polo on Thursdays every day of the week as we meet one another in the body of Christ every time we sit down for a conversation with someone in our community and seek to share the gospel with them what a purpose to build this house for the praise and glory of God by the way this is no temporary structure the Jews watched their temple burn in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans all the toil and effort over all those years to build it it went up in smoke in a day this temple we are building can never be destroyed your work building

[33:12] God's house his people lasts forever why because the new spiritual temple is the people sitting around you right now their souls are eternal everything you do for one another matters forever and that gives the most surpassing significance to our work for the Lord each day it is nothing fancy or spectacular from the outside it's the bread and butter acts of love sharing the word with each other it's comforting encouraging building up others correcting where needs be you are God's worker in their lives and vice versa to build them up in Christ to secure their place in God's forever people don't think that your work doesn't matter it matters more than anything and

God who never changes is the same for us today as he was for those temple workers back in Ezra God is watching over his people until his church is built and the gates of hell will not overcome it

God's going to equip us with his word he's going to overcome the opposition he's going to provide everything that we need in January our church celebrates 40 years of God building a people right here in Cargilline Baptist praise God but you know at this time of pastoral transition many of us are anxious about how is the word going to continue that's natural who will be there to lead the work of shepherding who will equip the members of the church for the work yet to be done will we have enough workers to continue to reach out to continue to disciple one another as we should I think God is saying to us today you got to trust me God is saying I am building a people for my name in carrigal line I'm watching over the work until my church is built God will prosper this work as his word goes out faithfully and is obeyed as he overcomes the opposition in our town as he provides over and above what we need to continue the work for 40 years he's done he's not stopping now we are his workers the builders of his temple and we can have that very same confidence that those temple builders had back in Ezra 5 when people in carrigaline ask us who are you what are you doing let us say with boldness look with me at chapter 5 verse 11 may we say we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and we are building his temple may that be our confidence may that be our boldness let us pray our sovereign father you know each one of our hearts you know the anxieties the concerns we have when we consider the work yet to be done in this town and the other places you put us yet you have caused your name to dwell here in this people continue to prosper your work in us so that your name will be glorified more and more until the full number have taken their place in this house of God in your people not just in our church in every church that proclaims your gospel faithfully each week Lord do this prosper your work until the day that your presence fills the whole heavens and earth for Christ's sake we pray amen we're going to sing a song to respond I love what it says in the chorus of this song it says we will stand as children of the promise we will fix our eyes and gain our soul reward until the rest the end the day and who is the and o lip sing