

Introduction

- Hudson's game winning out - only one that saw the play was Randy.
- We often miss what's right in front of our eyes, and that's certainly true spiritually. It's not always easy to see God's work.
- [Psalm 121:1-4](#) - God does not sleep or slumber, but from our perspective, we often think that God must be sleeping. If God's at work, why is there so much brokenness in the world? Why is there so much brokenness in my life?
- Countless times in your own life you've wondered, "Where are you God? Are you slumbering? Do you care?" Some of you are asking those questions this morning.
 - Is God at work in my hard marriage?
 - Is God at work in my struggle against sin?
 - Is God at work in my difficult season?
- God is not asleep. He's at work for His glory and your good in ways that you cannot see.
- We're starting a twenty week journey through Ezra-Nehemiah. In Hebrew Bible, one book, so wise to study these books together to get the whole story.
- Ezra-Nehemiah is a story about renewal, restoration, and rebuilding. If you're here and you feel like your life needs renewal or restoration, this series is for you.

- In [Ezra 1](#), we're going to be reminded that our God is always at work. From this passage, two truths that you need to hear if you feel like God is inattentive to your life.

God is always at work around you.

- The story of Ezra-Nehemiah is the ending story of the Old Testament, and it's not a happy ending as we'll see as we make our way through the books.
- It should be a happy ending. The people come back to the land, but are they any different?
- Israel a prosperous nation under King David and King Solomon. Kingdom divided after Solomon - northern and southern. Northern kingdom had series of kings that did not honor the Lord, by and large northern kingdom was idolatrous. In 722 B.C., Assyrians wiped out the northern kingdom.
- Southern kingdom = Judah and Benjamin. [Gen. 12](#) - God promised that Abraham's descendants would be a blessing. [Gen. 49:10](#) - Promise to Jacob's son, Judah, the scepter would not depart. Promise to David, a descendant of Judah, in [2 Sam. 7](#) that a king would sit on his throne forever.
- Southern Kingdom not much better than northern. Evil kings, but some good kings. Eventually, their rebellion against God would lead them into exile. In 586 B.C., Babylon takes the southern kingdom into exile. But... the promise... They can't stay in exile forever.
- Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered the Babylonian empire in 539 B.C. He had a very different policy than Nebuchadnezzar. Instead of crushing conquered peoples, he allowed them to return home and restore their worship to their gods. Political thinking - if Cyrus allowed people to return to their homeland, they would be loyal to him.

- [Ezra 1:1-4](#) - God roused (stirred) King Cyrus' spirit to fulfill what was spoken through Jeremiah. Author wants us to know that this is God's work . God fulfilling His promise that exile would only last 70 years ([Jeremiah 29:10-14](#)). [Proverbs 21:1](#) - Cyrus' heart in God's hand like channeled water.
- [Isaiah 44:28-45:7](#) - Cyrus named by Isaiah 150 years before the end of the exile!
- Prophetic reminders that God was not sleeping - He was carrying out His Word. [Deuteronomy 28:36](#) - warning that if they rebelled, they would be taken to exile. God was faithful to allow Israel to experience the consequences of their sins.
- God was faithful to send into exile and faithful to bring out of exile because of His purpose to ultimately bring a Messiah from the line of Judah.
- God uses a pagan king to accomplish His purpose. Not the first time God has done this. Remember Pharaoh? Cyrus worshiped many gods. He would give credit to any god for his successes. By appealing to Israel's God, Cyrus gained support. (Cyrus' decree also recorded in [2 Chronicles 36:23](#).)
- vs. 4 - Not only return to Jerusalem - but return with provisions. [Exodus 12:35-36](#) - When the Hebrews left Egypt, they left with wealth. Now, it's happening again. [Ezra 1](#) is another Exodus - a reminder that God delivers His people.
- For 70 years, the people exiled in Babylon likely wondering if God had forgotten about them. However, God had not forgotten. God was at work behind the scenes, moving the hearts of kings to accomplish His purpose.
- You may wonder if God has forgotten you... You're not the only Christian to wonder that. Christians all over the world wondering if they are

forgotten. Many living under intense persecution for their faith. Where is God?

- God's at work around you in ways that you may not be able to see or understand. If so...
- **Know it.** Examine the Scripture. How does God work? ([Isaiah 55:8-9](#)) If you know that God is sovereign over the universe - that he is aware of every flower of the field and every bird in the sky ([Matthew 6](#)), then you know you can trust Him with all your heart ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#)). When life gets challenging and the storm rages, you can have peace. You need to regularly tell yourself to calm down. You don't have to panic when life seems out of control.
- **Long for it.** In Babylon, two choices: forget about God's work or long for God's work. Many exiles forgot about God's work. They drifted from God and never returned to Jerusalem. They didn't long for the words of the prophet to come true - maybe they didn't believe God would keep His Word.
- You have a choice: Forget or Long for it - to long for God's work means you keep praying when life is hard. You keep studying Scripture when you feel dry. You keep waiting patiently when it seems like nothing is happening.
- **Look for it.** Where do you see God's work around you? What does of opportunity is he opening even in seasons of difficulty? How does He want to use you in your seasons of waiting? If God is always at work, even when it doesn't seem like it, don't miss the opportunity to be involved in His work.

God is always at work in you.

- God is not only at work around you. He's at work in you.

- The decree went out to all the exiles. Finally free after 70 years. You would expect a mass exodus back to Jerusalem, but that's not what happened.
- Many stayed in Babylon. You can understand why. For many, all they knew was Babylon. It was where they grew up. Where they started families. They knew the culture and the language. Sure, they had heard their parents and grandparents tell them stories of life in Israel, but it's not what they knew. Their entire lives lived away from the land of God.
- Some stayed because of what they remembered. Remembered how Babylon came in and conquered the southern Kingdom. Remembered their houses being destroyed. Remembered the temple being set to fire. Remembered being drug from their homes and taken to Babylon. The memories were horrific - no desire to return to what Babylon had destroyed.
- But... Ezra-Nehemiah reports three waves of exiles returning to Jerusalem. The first wave to return - family heads of Judah and Benjamin, priests and Levites.
- Second time the word *roused* used (stirred). Author wants us to know this was all God's work.
- God was at work in the hearts of His people drawing them back to Himself, putting in them a desire to return to Israel and rebuild.
- Truth: God works in us - He stirs our hearts. You are saved because God roused your heart. He brought you out of spiritual death and into life. The Holy Spirit drew you to Himself and opened your eyes to your need for a Savior. You believed that Jesus died and rose again for you because God opened your eyes to His truth.
- God is *still* at work in you ([Philippians 1:6](#), [Philippians 2:13](#)).
- vs. 6-11 - They didn't return empty handed. Ezra (the author) gives us an account of everything the exiles returned to Israel with.

- Neighbors = exiles that were not returning as well as pagan neighbors provided for the needs of those returning.
- Amazingly, King Cyrus returned the articles of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered. In [Daniel 5](#), another king, Belshazzar, took the items from the temple and drank from the cups that were reserved for the worship of Yahweh while they worshipped the false god Marduk.
- But now, it all returns to Israel. Mithredath and Sheshbazzar take an inventory of all the times. They're all there!
- The people were in exile because of their rebellion against God, but God is a God of grace. He is restoring His people. He is allowing them to return to the land where they had turned to idolatry. He will allow them to rebuild the temple, and He will even allow them to return to Jerusalem with what Babylon had plundered.
- The exiles unlikely didn't know all that awaited them when they returned to Jerusalem, but evident that God was at work in them. He stirred their hearts AND provided everything they needed to return.
- As they returned, reminded that God cared about every detail - even 29 silver knives. These returned items gave the people hope. The exiles returned in faith trusting that God was going to restore His great city.
- If God cared about silver knives, then certainly He cares about every detail of the lives of His children. He cared about the exiles, and He cares about you. So much so that He stirring your heart. He is calling you to trust Him. He is calling you to obey Him.
- God is at work in you, but how do you identify God's work in you? How do you know if God is rousing your heart?
 - **Cooperation.** ([Philippians 2:12](#)) God is at work, but are you responding? Do you want God to work in you? You pray, and as you do, you begin to see God answering that prayer.

- **Changing desires.** You don't want what you used to want. Instead, you want God. You want to be near to Him. You want to fellowship with God. You want to be stretched and challenged.
- **Conviction instead of guilt.** Guilt = I know I did wrong. I'm such a failure. Guilt is heavy and condemning. Conviction = God shining a spotlight on my sin, but it's hopeful. I know He can change me. I repent. I don't give up and just keep walking in the same patterns of sin.
- **God's Word is becoming personal.** You read Scripture and you begin to see how it applies. You hear God's voice as you study His Word.
- **God's provisions are becoming obvious.** You see God open doors and provide the resources to walk through those doors. People who encourage you, opportunities for growth, financial resources, etc.
- God is regularly at work in the hearts of His people. Are you aware of His work in you?
- Sometimes it seems like God isn't working because the challenges of life seem so insurmountable. But, if you're a follower of Jesus, look closely at your life and you will see evidence of God's work. Let the evidence of God's work fuel your confidence to continue to pursue Him.
- God brings the people back to Jerusalem ultimately to fulfill His promise: that ALL the nations of the earth would be blessed ([Gen. 12](#)). This is about far more than the temple being rebuilt. This is about God preparing the way to send His Son. A thriving Jerusalem wasn't God's ultimate plan. Instead, the redemption of humanity was God's ultimate plan.
- The OT is telling the story of how God desires a relationship with the people He created. But, rebellion constantly keeps people from enjoying

a relationship with God. The OT tells the story of God's love, but it also tells the story of God's judgment. There is a price to pay for our sin.

- So, God determines to send His Son, the lion of Judah, from the lineage of King David, to come to this broken world, live the life we could not live, take the punishment we deserve on the cross, only to rise from the dead three days later so that all who repent and believe might have new life.
- This morning, the same God who stirred the hearts of His people in Ezra is stirring your heart. If you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins and turn to Him by faith.