

Ezra 5-6: From Discouragement to Celebration

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Ezra-Nehemiah / Ezra 5-6

Introduction

- Chik-fil-a on Rivers in ruins... Depressing sight because of so many memories at that Chik-fil-a - Driving by - Every day I see what used to be. BUT...hope knowing it's going to be rebuilt.
- [Ezra 5](#) - a discouraging scene. The work had stopped. For fifteen years the people didn't work on the temple because of the opposition. It seemed like the enemy had won. Every day, when they passed by the foundation of the temple they were reminded of their unfinished work.
- The Israelites were done, but God was not done.
- And... God is not done with you.
- Some of you know what it feels like to see places in your life that seem unfinished. It's discouraging. It's a strained relationship that just doesn't seem to reconcile. Or maybe it's your spiritual journey - you feel stuck - battling the same sin, struggling with anxiety, inconsistent in your prayer life.
- Maybe it's in ministry - you serve the Lord faithfully, but you wonder if you're making a difference.
- Maybe your life just doesn't look like what you thought it would, and it's discouraging. I just want to remind you that God's not done with you. He is still writing your story, and He wants to take you from discouragement to celebration. Three ways to respond when life seems unfinished so that even when your story feels unfinished you can celebrate God's work in your life.

Let God's Word motivate action.

- The work had stopped for 16 years. However, God was not done. In His time, He raised up two prophets to motivate the people to action: Haggai and Zechariah. Two very different prophets, but God motivated the people to begin rebuilding through the prophets.
- Haggai is a short prophetic book that covers a time span of four months. Four sermons over four months encouraging Israel to get back to work.
- [Haggai 1](#) - The people had built their own houses but not God's house. As a result, God caused them to have a small harvest of food. God encourages His people to rebuild His house so He would be glorified.
- They made time to build their own houses, but they failed to build God's house.
- [Haggai 1:12-14](#) - the people responded in obedience.
- [Haggai 2:4](#) - Be strong - God is with you.
- [Haggai 2:5](#) - God's Spirit is among His people.
- [Haggai 2:9](#) - The glory of this temple would be greater than the first. The new temple would be a place of peace. How if the second temple was not as glorious as Solomon's? The second temple would be the place where Jesus presented as an infant, where Jesus taught, where Jesus cleansed it - the One who was all glorious would minister in this temple. Haggai was right - the glory of this temple greater than the first.
- Zechariah a longer prophetic book that's rich in imagery. [Zechariah 4:6-10](#) - Not by might or power, but by God's Spirit - the completion of the work depended on God.
- The two prophets exposed where the people had been negligent in God's work, reminded the people of God's promises, and stirred them to action by reminding them that God's Spirit was present among them.

- When the people were complacent, God gave them His Word. He used His Word to motivate action. The people didn't simply agree with what God said. They got up. They started building.
- God still uses His Word today. Even this morning, God is using the preaching of His Word to stir your heart. We don't listen to God's work simply to gain more information about God. We listen to God's Word to experience transformation.
- In seasons when you are discouraged, or life feels unfinished, you need to hear God's Word and let it motivate you to action.
- The next step is always to do what God says.
- If God's Word is going to move you to action, every time you open the Bible you should ask three questions:
 - **What is this passage teaching me about God?** Something about His character? How God rules and acts in His world? How God deals with people? How God deals with sin?
 - **What is this passage revealing about me?** God's Word is like a mirror - when we look into it we see ourselves as God sees us. flaws. We see specific sins. We see specific areas where we need to grow. We see areas where we are growing (e.g., fruit of the spirit).
 - **What should I do in response?** A specific sin to repent of? Forgive someone? Share the Gospel with someone? Show love in a specific way to someone? Serve in a specific way?

Let God's care motivate rest.

- vs. 3 - For 16 years, the people had not worked on the temple, but at the word of the prophets, they started building again.
- It didn't take long for the opposition to start back up.

- Tattenai, a Persian governor over the region west of the Euphrates, shows up. He has colleagues with him. They came to inspect the work.
- It was a tense moment - years ago the work had been stopped by the enemy. Would the work stop again?
- The government officials asked who gave them permission to rebuild the temple - truth is - God did.
- This time was different than 16 years ago. This time they didn't stop. The officials reached out to Darius to see what to do with the Israelites, but while the officials were playing politics, the people continued the work.
- vs. 5 - God was watching over the Jewish elders. He had given them His word. He had reminded them of His promises. He told them His Spirit was with them. There was no need to stop the work. God was with them. His eye was upon them.
- The officials had to write a letter to their king, Darius. He was away in distant land. But, Israel's King, Yahweh, was present among His people, caring for them as they worked.
- When you know that God is present with you, caring for you, you can continue to serve Him as you rest in His protection over your life.
- In [Ezra 4](#), the people feared. They panicked. They stopped the work. Now, they continue to work even when there's opposition. They're at peace. They're resting in what they know about God.
- Rest is not ceasing from activity. It's continuing the work of God without carrying the weight of the outcome because you know that God is fulfilling His promises even when you can't see His hand.
- How do you know if you're resting in God's care?
- **You give thanks more than you worry.** [Matthew 6](#) - You know that if God is able to take care of the bird of the air and the flowers of the field, He can certainly take care of you.

- **You serve more than you complain.** [Philippians 2:14](#) - What does complaining accomplish? What does serving the Lord accomplish? [Philippians 4](#) - Rejoice in the Lord always - because you know that the peace of God guards your heart. You continue to serve Him.
- **You give your cares to the Lord more than you carry them yourself.** [1 Peter 5:7](#) - You know that the Lord is more than able to carry the load you can't carry. [Matthew 11:28](#) - You come to God and you tell Him where you are weak, where you need His help. You ask Him to help you trust Him.

Let God's sovereignty motivate joyful worship.

- 5:6 - An official letter sent to Darius. Tattenai explains exactly what happened. He wants to know who gave the people the authority to rebuild the temple.
- He gives the people's response to his investigation: vs. 11-16. The people did not compromise. They continued to build. They owned up to their sin and told Tattenai that it was because of their sins that the first temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians.
- The people also tell Tattenai that Cyrus had given a decree for them to rebuild the temple, and Cyrus had even provided the physical resources for them to rebuild the temple.
- Vs. 17 - Tattenai requests that Darius search the royal records to see if Cyrus had actually given the decree.
- 6:1-5 - Darius has the royal records searched and finds the decree of King Cyrus. God orchestrating the events according to His plan - even causing Darius to find the decree of Cyrus.
- 6:6-12 - The people didn't need permission to rebuild. God had already stirred it in their hearts to start building the temple again. But, God uses a pagan king to provide for the building of the temple. Darius allows the

rebuilding of the temple. He orders the opposition to stay away (6:6-7). He fully funds the project (6:8). He also funds ongoing worship by providing animals and supplies for sacrifices (6:9-10). He announces stiff punishment for anyone who interferes with his decrees (6:11-12).

- [Ezra 6](#) is very different than [Ezra 4](#). In [Ezra 4](#) there's opposition. In [Ezra 4](#) there's fear. In [Ezra 4](#), there's a stop to the work. But, not in [Ezra 6](#). [Ezra 6](#) is a reversal - God at work in the hearts of His people and in the heart of a pagan king so that His temple would be rebuilt. In [Ezra 6](#), instead of fear, their's rest in the sovereignty of God. Instead of the work stopping, the work is completed. Instead of a king opposing the work, there's a king supporting the work.
- God sovereignly at work turning the people's discouragement into celebration!
- In vs. 16-22 - The temple rebuilt and Passover celebrated. Significant that the temple finished during Passover - a reminder of the Exodus. The first Passover is what finally led Pharaoh to release the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt.
- Ezra is about a second exodus. The people have come out of captivity to start again.
- vs. 17- twelve male goats offered as a sin for all Israel - one for each tribe. God forgives His people. The exile had fractured the nation, but God was restoring his people ultimately to prepare the way for His Messiah.
- vs. 22 - They observed the festival of Unleavened Bread with joy because God had made them joyful. God had stirred the heart of a pagan king to support tyhe work of God. In chapter 4, there was discouragement and fear, now there was joy because God is faithful to complete what He has started. God turned the heart of Darius. God strengthened the hands of the people so that His temple could be completed His temple. God made His people joyful.

- God wants to live a life of joyful worship as well. You might be discouraged. You might feel like you're always fighting the opposition. But here's how you can be motivated to live in joyful worship.
- **Before you tell yourself everything that might go wrong, remind yourself of ten ways God has already been faithful.** We like to dwell on our problems, but what if you spent more time dwelling on God's provisions? What if you spend more time reminding yourself of all the ways that God has been faithful to you? What if instead of counting your problems you counted your blessings?
- **Every opportunity you can, tell your story.** Telling your story of God's provision and hearing the stories of how God has been at work in the lives of others produces joy. It's joyful to hear of God's work in our lives. We don't share our stories near enough. This week, who will your story of God's faithfulness with?
- **Identify what God is doing in your life right now and praise Him!** He is at work in your life right now. Stop and think about it. What is He teaching you? How do you see Him at work in your family? God is always at work, we just fail to identify His work. The more you see God's work in your life, the more your heart will be filled with joy.
- Life is discouraging, but there's joy in the midst of discouragement because of God's faithfulness to you.
- Have a heart full of joy-filled worship because God completes His work! Aren't you thankful? in [Genesis 3](#), Adam and Eve fell into sin. But, God was not done with humanity. He promised He would send a Messiah who would crush the head of the serpent. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel rebelled over and over again. Prophets warned them. God did not give up. He refused to abandon His promises. The people come out of exile, and they continue to fall into sin. However, God is not done. He sent His Son to live for us, die for us, and rise again for us so we can know forgiveness of sins.

- What took place at the temple only pointed to what was to come at the cross. At the cross, Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice for our sins so we could be forgiven and given the gift of life.
- Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Have you repented of your sins and turned to Him?