

Marked by God

A Story of Revival, Ezra 5:1-6:22

Introduction

- Famous architect, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, once said, "A building is not just a structure; it's a living entity that interacts with its surroundings, shaping and being shaped by the people who experience it."
- So far, the book of Ezra has been about the Jews returning from exile in foreign land and rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.
 - But what if the real temple in Jerusalem wasn't a building?
 - There's a surprising absence of production details here. It just goes from "the work has ceased" at the end of ch. 4, to "the temple was complete" in ch. 6.
 - The words "house" & "temple" are used interchangeably throughout this passage. Obviously, they can both refer to a building, but they can also be used to describe the people associated with that building.
 - What if the real temple in Jerusalem was a group of people dedicated to the Lord?
 - The prophets Haggai & Zechariah show up in v. 1.; they rebuke the people for their heart toward the Lord, not their skill in the trades.
 - Verse 5 is the end of the opening to this passage, and it says, "The eye of God" is focused on the "elders of the Jews."
 - I'm not questioning the historical accuracy of these chapters; I am wondering if we are supposed to see more than the building of a building in Ezra 5-6.
 - And if so, then this portion of Scripture is about a people who are marked by the power & presence of the Lord (Let's read the opening now – Ezra 5:1-5)
- Revivals and awakenings come in all shapes and sizes.
 - The Layman's Prayer Revival focused on noontime prayer meetings for business professionals. It started in New York City in 1857 and spread to every major city in the Midwest, including Indianapolis, by the following year.
 - Revival also came through the large-scale Billy Graham crusades in the 1900's.
 - We can get so focused on the methods of revival we lose sight of what it looks like.
- What kind of people do we find in Ezra 5-6?

Body

I. A People that Serves the Lord (5:6-6:5)

- A. Tattenai was the building inspector from the capital. Things may have been then, but building inspectors aren't usually known as "the life of the party."
- B. The inspector seems to have sent a fair report to King Darius. (5:6-17)
 - 1. He informed the king about his visit to the construction site.
 - 2. He relayed their answers to his questions.
 - 3. He brought up King Cyrus's decree & made a request to search for it.
- C. Cyrus previous decree was found, including a command to pay for the project out of the royal treasury (6:1-5)
- D. The Jew's answers to the inspector's questions are revealing. (5:11-12)
 - 1. They saw themselves as servants of Almighty God, not the king.

- 2. They admitted that their current situation was because their forefathers had provoked God to wrath.
- 3. They were in a vulnerable spot surrounded by enemies & under foreign authority, & yet they saw themselves as servants of God.
 - a. As a boy, Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Sam. 3)
 - b. When King David heard about God's covenant promise, he referred to himself many times as God's servant. (2 Sam. 7)
 - c. When King Solomon prayed at the 1st temple, he described Israel as God's servants who walk before Him with all their heart. (2 Chron. 6)
- E. Servants trust in their master's resources & power. We serve the Lord today, when we trust Him to change hearts & intervene beyond our control.

II. A People that are Separated to the Lord (6:6-15)

- A. Tattenai was like a good travel sports dad: pay the fees & stay out of the way. (6:6-7)
- B. But this distance was key to the success of the project.
 - 1. The Jews were unique in their covenant relationship with God.
 - 2. They were building according to the specifications of the Law.
 - 3. A graphic warning from the king highlighted this divide. (6:11)
- C. We live in a world of denominational differences & confusing categories. But I can think of 1 way that Christians today can separate themselves out as genuine people of God – to stand on the authority of God's Word against the flood of changing morals. (Pornography, Gambling, Med.-assisted suicide)

III. A People that Seeks the Lord in Worship. (6:16-22)

- A. When completed, the Jews dedicated the temple with a joyful celebration.
- B. Then, they observed the Feast of Passover & the Feast of Tabernacles. (6:19-22)
 - 1. The Passover was a reminder of the Exodus, w/ the covering of the lamb.
 - 2. The Feast of Tabernacles looked back at God's protection in the wilderness.
- C. In all this, they separated themselves so they could seek Lord.
- D. Seeking the Lord means seeking His presence, or His face. Yes, God is omnipresent & He's always with us, but that's not always our experience. The Bible repeated calls us to "Seek the Lord... seek His face continually. (Ps. 105:4)

Conclusion

- The dedication of the rebuilt temple put a spotlight on the real building project in Jerusalem – the rebuilding of a people marked by His power & presence.
- We face a similar dynamic today. We are the church - not the building, but the people here who are united by our new covenant relationship with God through faith in His Sinless Son, Jesus Christ.
 - We can't be content with the way the world defines us as a volunteer organization, religious club, or a voting bloc.
 - We can't be focused only on the ABCs of success: attendance, buildings, & cash.
- We need to see what it looks like when a people are revived and marked by the power & presence of God.
- As we close, let me challenge you personally to serve the Lord, be separated to the Lord, and seek the Lord with renewed energy.