

Lean Into the Tension

A Story of Revival, Ezra 8:1-36

Introduction

- Why would the Jews leave Babylon and go back to Jerusalem?
 - Until recently, I thought the Jews were so traumatized by the exile they were counting down the days until they could return to their homeland.
 - But Jeremiah the prophet had this message for the exiles (Jer. 29:4-7)
 - Apparently, many took that message to heart because only a small portion of the people were willing to return to Jerusalem after 70 years.
- But Ezra & the 2nd wave of Jews knew that God was calling them back.
 - It was predicted by their favorite prophets. (Isa. 11:11-12, Ezk. 36:24, Jer. 30:3)
 - It matched current events (“the Lord stirred up the spirit” of the king, Ezr. 1:1)
 - It would usher in a new era (Many will come “in the last days,” Isa. 2:2-3)
- And so, like the American pioneers they set out on a long, dangerous, and exhausting trip in hopes of establishing a new life in a new land.
- Ezra 8:1-14 contains a list of the households that participated in the journey and verses 15-32 teach us that **If God is calling, then He will provide**.
 - God *called* the first Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and majority of the book of Exodus is about how God provided – for Moses & for the people.
 - As we talked about in last week, Ezra is “The Second Moses” and this portion of the story is about how God provides.
 - Ezra acknowledges God’s provision 3 times in this chapter by talking about “the good hand of our God.” (v. 18, 22, 31).
- Maybe you’ve experienced the tension as you stand between His calling & provision?
 - As a Christian, you’ve definitely been called serve & grow (Eph. 4:1-3)
 - Maybe you’ve been called to some kind of ministry leadership? (Luk. 5:1-11)
 - Maybe you’ve even been called to a specific ministry assignment (Act 16:6)
 - The problem with the tension is that we can become paralyzed by it – stuck in between were we started & where we want to go. We can’t stand in between forever. Sooner or later, you have press on or give up and go back.
- Ezra leaned into the tension & experienced God’s provision in 3 specific ways.

Body

I. God provides the people. (v. 15-20)

- A. Ezra met with the people for 3 days to prepare for the 4-month journey.
 1. Based on the previous verses, it’s estimated that he took about 5,0000 people.
 2. After observing the people, he realized that they didn’t have enough Levites with them.
 - a. They were an important part of the Jewish community.
 - b. They helped the priests & ministered in all kinds of ways in the temple.
- B. Ezra sent a delegation to a man named Iddo at the place of Casiphia.
 1. This was probably a training center for Levites & other temple servants.
 2. 38 Levites and 220 more temple servants were recruited to the cause.
- C. Ezra gave God all the credit as He intervened with His “good hand.”

1. This metaphor is reminder that our God is alive & interactive.
2. He has spoken in His Word & He moves as He pleases to bring about His will.

D. At its foundation, ministry is all about people.

1. There are facilities, finances, systems in almost every ministry, but the most important part of any local church, missions organization, or Christian school is the people.
2. When Paul told the believers in Corinth, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth,” he was talking primarily about people.
3. We spend a lot of time in ministry circles planning & praying over logistics (and we should), but we should also trust God to provide the people.

II. God provides the protection. (v. 21-23, 31-32)

- A. Ezra announced a fast while the group was gathered by the river.
 1. He was “ashamed” to ask King Artaxerxes for an armed escort, not because of what the king might say, but what it would say about God.
 2. He had not been shy about claiming God’s hand was on his mission, but if God couldn’t protect the group was He all that powerful?
- B. They fasted for the 3 days, and God heard their plea for help.
- C. Ministry leaders should feel the weight of responsibly on their shoulders.
 1. For example, pastors & elders are supposed to protect the church from spiritual danger, false teaching, & internal division.
 2. And yet Christ is the only true shepherd that takes care of the church.
 3. We can trust the L to leads us towards/away from specific ministry assignments.

III. God provides the resources. (v. 24-30, 34)

- A. The Jews who stayed in Babylon & the king gave a large offering.
 1. Estimates vary, but it seems like the offering for the returnees in v. 26 included about 25 tons of silver & 3 ¾ tons of gold, along with utensils.
 2. Ezra divided the offering among 12 of the leading priests for safe keeping.
 3. As an offering dedicated for God’s purposes, the emphasis here is that it came from God through the generosity of God’s people & even the king!
- B. God provides material resources as well as spiritual, but it’s the material resources that get stuck in the pockets of His people.

Conclusion

- Here we see that **if God is calling, then He will provide**.
- That means we need to be super clear about what God might be calling us to do.
 - We can find clarity in prayer. (Jam. 1:5)
 - We can find clarity in God’s Word (That’s what convinced Ezra)
 - We can find clarity in Christian counsel. (Pro. 11:14)
- Once we have clarity about how God is calling us to do, we must move forward in faith. Not ignoring His call, paralyzed by fear, or even moving in our own provision, but trusting in God got to provide.
- Jesus taught this truth in the NT through the metaphor of the Vine & the Branches; He said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain.” Jo. 15:16