

Text: Ezra 4&5

Sermon Series: Searching for Normal

Sermon Title: It's a Battle

Sermon Synopsis- Like the Jews returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon to rebuild the temple, we are in for a battle when living out our calling from God! We will be faced with opposition in the building of the temple (the church) but the Good News is that we are provided the presence and power of God to do the work He has called us to.

Ezra 4: 1-5, 24 ESV

4 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, ² they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here." ³ But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." ⁴ Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build ⁵ and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. **Skip forward to vs 24- vs 6-23 chronicle a future example of opposition in rebuilding the city that we won't dive into today..*

²⁴ Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Intro story- 40 years around sales people, my favorite thing to do is a funnel review, one of the questions- who are your competitors? The answer I never wanted to hear (I don't have any). Why? There is always competition, always a battle to win the prize....**opposition**. It's the same thing when we endeavor to do what God calls us to do, it was that way for the temple builders in book of Ezra and the same thing for the Christ followers listening right now....We will have opposition- **It's a Battle!**

We will look at 3 things in this text that apply to those rebuilding the temple in Ezra and all of us.

1. The Calling

2. The Opposition

3. The Provision

Calling:

Ezra 1:2-3 (ESV)

²“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. *Cyrus prophesied in Isaiah 44, more than 150 yrs prior

Recap of Chapters 1-3-

- Jeremiah 29 says these people Cyrus is calling into action have spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon (why- wickedness, idolatry, disobedience)
- 50,000 people, thousands of animals- traveling for 4 months- Probably 3 generations have been born since exile- **This was a commitment...a calling!**

Look at these 3 important things about their call:

- **Calling had Authority-** Called to return from exile in Babylon & rebuild the temple by a calling from God by decree of Cyrus (Pagan King)
- **Calling prompted Action-** They (50,000 of them) go back with a mission to rebuild the temple, the place for them that represents Gods dwelling place, get the job started- altar first, then temple, ending Chapter 3 with joy & weeping
- **Calling had the promise of God’s presence-** He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

What they were called to do is so significant- rebuild the temple:

- **The place where God is present with his people, generations pass**
 - Over 2500 years later, Jews worship in prayer at the Western Wall, Wailing Wall. Why? It’s thought to be the only remaining wall of the temple in Jerusalem (p of God)
- **The temple is also significant to us as Christians.**
- But everything about it changed for us with Jesus.
 - It’s not about a physical structure anymore, the presence of God was manifest on earth by Jesus Christ himself- tear down & raised up in 3 days
 - He is “the cornerstone” of a living temple, (not a building)

- His people (individually and collectively) are living stones in the temple of God w/ the HS inside of us (1 Cor 3:16)..... (eph 2: 19-22) as the temple builders, we too have a calling given with Authority and requiring action and powered with the presence of God...From a temple of stones to a temple of His People, The Body of Christ, The Church

Physical Temple built with stone **but How is the living temple built?** Here is His calling to us:

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

A Call based on Authority and Action and Presence of God- Same as the calling to the builders in Ezra-

- All Authority in heaven & earth given to Him
- Build a Temple
 - Make disciples- living stones
 - Teach them to obey His commands- built strong with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone
- Promise- I am with you

Sounds familiar doesn't it- Off the fence and onto the pathway of life in Christ (explain)

- Some of you may have objections already spinning around in your head about this calling:
 - I can't move across the world
 - I'm an introvert
 - I can't talk to people about Jesus
 - I don't know my bible that well
 - I don't even know his commands
 - This sounds complicated and difficult.
- In Cyrus's decree it was simple & direct, **go and build**, Jesus also has a simple & direct command when asked by the lawyer in the gospels “what is the most important command”? This is the story: Jesus teaching with authority, wanting to stump him.....Lawyer asks what is the most important command.

Mark 12:30-31 (ESV)

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

- **All in- John 15** (Vines & Branches- Abiding)
- **Loving neighbor- Luke 10** (Good Samaritan)

John 13:35 (ESV)

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

If you don't know where to start- this is where you start....Be light in darkness, draw people to Jesus with the love he has given you and in turn you give him and others!

They have a calling- Build the Temple of stone

We have a calling- Build the Temple of His people

Opposition:

But.....there will be opposition- In this passage in Ezra they may not be using swords, spears, arrows or the like but make no mistake about it. These temple builders are in a battle. It's the battle of God's way vs the way of the world....

Ephesians Chapter 6 speaks to this kind of opposition in vs 12

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

*(wrestle = other translations- fight, struggle, conflict, battle)

When they endeavor to step into their calling to rebuild the temple and as we step into our calling to make disciples and teach them to obey Jesus's commands....we step into a battle!

Chapter 4 of Ezra starts with *"now when the adversaries heard"*, (enemy, haters)

It didn't take long did it, had just laid the foundation for the temple, worshipping/celebrating...but a lot still to do

“Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do,

- They don't seem like an enemy, just trying to help, right? - “let us build with you”
- They knew from the past- Why they we exiled- disobedience, idols

2 Kings 17:33 (ESV)

³³So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.

- Said NO THANKS to help, hard to do, but united, they remembered, obedience, desiring to be pleasing to God not man
- Intentions of the “people of the land”, Samaritans, adversaries became clear
- They remembered the consequences of their father's disobedience.
- **Their obedience generated a reaction!**

Ezra 4:4-5 (ESV)

⁴Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build ⁵and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The enemy engages/battles in many different ways doesn't he:

- **Dilutes** (weakens)- we will help, mix of truth & lies, waters it down
- **Discourages** (lack of worthiness/readiness, willingness)
- **Distracts** (desires of our heart, comforts)- creates fear

Q- Can you relate to the discouragement, the fear created by the tactics of the enemy when you engage in God's calling in your life?

What was the response of the builders (remember 50k returned, after 70 years...unified ..they were committed right? This is important, this is the temple

Ezra 4:24 (ESV)

²⁴Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. (16 years)

- They stopped building the temple, **what does that look like for us?**
- Who is winning the battle when we stop- 16 years of stop time-

Ezra 5:1 (ESV)

Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

Haggai & Zechariah- Prophets- the words/voice of God to man through man

Haggai 1 (ESV)

1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: **2** **“Thus says the LORD of hosts:** These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.” **3** Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, **4** **“Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? **5** Now, therefore, **thus says the LORD of hosts:** Consider your ways. **6** You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.**

What is God’s WORD to the builders- after 16 years of being in a time out?

- 1. Not the right timing: (almost hear sarcasm in His voice)
- 2. Priorities out of synch, dwell in their paneled house- (earthy vs kingdom)
- 3. Treadmill of activity not producing results, (john 15- vines & branches, no fruit)

Has your obedience to Gods calling ever generated a reaction of opposition?

- **What did you do?** Did discouragement or fear set in? Did you disengage, did you stop?
- **Where are you at right now?**

Here was God’s word to those who stopped building the temple- **maybe to you!**

Provision- (Power & Presence):

God didn’t want them to stay in time out, sometimes He wants to call you back into battle! **Haggai 1**

7 **“Thus says the LORD of hosts:** Consider your ways. **8** Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD. **(Jump back in)**

13 Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, **“I am with you, declares the LORD.” **14** And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, **(I am with you, unify around me)****

Our God wants us to be ready for battle, to jump in, to be unified with each other & himself

Ephesians 6:13-18 (ESV)

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of **truth**, and having put on the breastplate of **righteousness**, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the **gospel of peace**. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of **faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of **salvation**, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the **word of God**, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

But the opposition doesn't stop- we are in a battle, we need to be prepared

Ezra 4:6-23 and 5:6-17

1. They were called to rebuild the temple (as are we)
2. There will be opposition of all types
3. He gives us what we need to battle
 - His presence & power

A Way forward:

- 1. Embrace the Calling**
- 2. Be ready & willing to take on the Opposition (prepare for the Battle)**
- 3. He promises to be with us & provide what we need**