

Hurst Green

16th Jun 19

Ezra 4

God's providence (again) and recovery

So last week we looked at strategies for resisting the enemy which we must do because he will try and thwart us and we must always remember that key verse:

James 4:7 (ANIV)

⁷ *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Always also remembering the first part of that verse – *submit yourselves to God.*

But at the very end of Chapter 4 we have Artaxerses issuing his decree

Ezra 4:21 (ANIV)

²¹ *Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order.*

Which also note is part of God's providence for Israel – don't look surprised. The decree could have been much stronger and don't forget that these decrees could not be revoked. Here Artaxerses has given himself a get out of jail card but adding "*until I so order*". God's providence.

But at that Israel's enemies took quick action

Ezra 4:23 (ANIV)

²³ ~~*As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop.*~~

Which had the desired result.

Ezra 4:24 (ANIV)

²⁴ *Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

We shall see how Israel should have responded later in this chapter but work on the temple stopped. Israel went off at set up their own homes and settled into daily lives as you do – as we do!!

This shows how easy it is to just forget about our passion and just get on with our lives after all, as we all know, living lives is busy and takes up all of our time.

Like the Israelites we stop living for God and just acknowledge him now and then such as on a Sunday morning. This is why I like the way you take to the homework I set every now and then.

But is that enough?

If I asked you today "**What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?**" what would you say?

Lots of puzzled looks!

You should have an instant answer! Think on that – do not forget that question because it is what actually matters in the Kingdom. You have had lots of ideas put before you any one of which you could have taken up but did you?

“What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?”

Because the Israelites should have asked that question instead of going into normal living for 16 years.

That is how long it took them to get going again – despite walking 1000 miles, giving over £17M towards the rebuilding of the temple, then as soon as they got there rebuilding that massive altar, celebrating the appointed festivals, re-establishing worship and celebrating laying the foundations. They were stopped and didn't get going again.

Now to start our reading for today we have a lovely one liner that hides a great deal.

Ezra 5:1 (ANIV)

¹ *Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.*

Wouldn't it be good to know what was said?

Well we do know because Haggai and Zechariah were part of what we call the minor prophets. That is a misnaming – they were so minor they restarted the building and had books of their own included in the bible! If you read their books they are full of things we should know about.

So let us see what happened. First Zechariah 1:1-6.

Reading 1 on page 950 of the Church bibles

Return to me and I will return to you. What a great phrase but what a challenging phrase. Did it challenge you?

It should!!

We are back to that question

“What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?”

Why are we not seeing God working in mighty ways in our land? Because our people need to return to God; not simply go to Church but really return to God with a passion.

Then we will see God not just in small areas but setting this land alight which is what we want – right?

That should be our passion.

Zechariah then says “*Then they repented*” so let's look at Haggai 1:1-11

Reading 2 on page 948 of the Church bibles

Again God is on their case and we have the typical excuse.

“The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built”

Or our version

“the time has not come for revival because God is not doing it” and we covered this last week or have you forgotten?

Where's the passion in that?

Where is the first love in that?

“What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?”

The church is not growing and the Kingdom of God is not being extended because we have lost that first love.

Remember The Church of Ephesus in Revelation?

Revelation 2:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

This to a Church that has just been commended

Revelation 2:2 (ANIV)

² *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.*

And then they are condemned for having lost that first love and are told to repent!

“What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?”

Are we using “the time has not yet come” as our excuse or are we on our knees and getting the gospel out there and inviting starving people into the banquet?

“What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?”

Haggai then contains several warnings for us today.

Haggai 1:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"*

The Israelites had had sixteen years to build their fine houses while God's house remains in ruins.

How long have you lived? In all that time you have been building your panelled houses – you lives and yet have you neglected God's house – your spiritual lives?

Your emphasis is on the least important part of life and you neglect the most important!

Remember Ephesus! They had been doing the right things but without the passion.

Do you put the spiritual things first? How do you measure if you are?

Simple – are you seeing the fruits of the Spirit growing in your life – growing daily?

Are you seeing the gifts of the Spirit growing in your life? Are you earnestly desiring them, practising them, using them and seeing the Kingdom grow?

Remember the other week I had to encourage each of you to obey the bible and bring something to our worship service on a Sunday! 1 Corinthians 14 – read it again if you have forgotten it already and remember this sermon on how easily we forget.

Then also remember that Haggai goes on to say “Give careful thought to your ways.” And he then hits various aspects of **our** lives:

- *You expected much but it turned out to be little*
- *What you brought home I blew away*
- *The heavens withheld their dew and the earth its crops*
- *God called down drought on all aspects of their lives, on the labour of their hands*

Does that strike home? This is not the name it and claim it gospel for that is utterly false but is God withholding blessings in your life – is your family suffering because you have not remembered your first love?

That is what it comes down to!

Are there blessings in heaven waiting to be poured out if only you would return to God – return to God with a passion and earnestly desire the things he promises in the bible?

Because Haggai has a verse for you

Haggai 1:9 (ANIV)

⁹ *"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Why? Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.*

If you want a simple story that we teach our infants that is building your house on the shifting sand and storms will knock it down.

I implore you – build your house on the rock of Christ.

Then you will see those measures – the fruits and the gifts of the Spirit.

But do not just sit back and expect it to happen – when it is God’s time it will happen.

Life is not like that – the things you want require work and the things you earnestly desire require work.

There is a line in a song that says “On Sunday I prayed for revival; on Monday I can’t even find my bible”

That is being Ephesus! Doing the right things but without that Passion.

Look again at Haggai and he tells you the answer:

Go to the mountains; bring timber and build that God may be honoured.

Don’t forget that. The house was not to be built with the cheap and nasty; with everything done the easy way.

The house was built with the finest timber there was brought all the way from Lebanon.

The House was built with stone hewn and cut in the quarry and moved to site in its finished form so the site of the temple was kept quiet and respectful.

And God was honoured.

What are you doing to build the temple of God?

What are you doing to build your spiritual life?

Are you just doing the easy bits? Turn up here on a Sunday and perhaps do your homework if you remember.

Or are you putting some effort in? Are you going to the mountain for the finest timber? Are you hewing stone, solid stone to build the best house in the land?

What does that mean?

Not just relying on what we do here on a Sunday. Yes do that, take part in the service and you will be blessed.

Are the things of God your first priority? Do you make time for them before anything else?

But are you aware of the great teachers? Do you take time to find and study their works?

Do you find ways to let God into your life because you have that passion for your faith?

There are no end of conferences, days away and study periods that you could be taking advantage of and so growing in God. **Are You?**

Are you passionate about your God? Because the Israelites were reminded and became passionate and they obeyed the word of God.

That is a good start but you can only obey what you know. When Ezra returns we will see more of what that means but don't wait for then – do it now.

Remember that question.

“What did you do to extend the Kingdom of God this week?”

The Israelites set to work on rebuilding the house of God – are you going to do that?

This time they did not allow their enemies to stop them in v5. Are you going to do that? Not stop despite what the world says? Not stop because your life gets in the way? Make this your number one priority and get some passion in your life.

I can tell you from my own experience that when you put God first life is just so much better. It is more exciting, more fulfilling and more rewarding and those are the important part of God's blessings. The world will look for physical success, more money, more things etc but those can just be other Gods.

The important thing is having God in your life; God working in your life, God blessing you with the Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit as you earnestly desire them and work on them.

So that is verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 5.

Consider this week if you are building your spiritual life, is God your first love, are you eager about your spiritual life, are the fruits of the spirit and gifts of the spirit growing in your life.

If not why not?