

Thanksgiving to God for the Victory

Text: Ezra 6:16-22

Introduction:

1. Ezra 6 records the reversal of Tatnai's attempt to stop the work of God from going ahead. It is a wonderful testament to the power of God to give victory over the attacks of the enemy when God's people remain faithful at their post in the midst of the battle and keep on working for Him. Have a no retreat mindset as a believer!
2. The chapter also reminds us that God alone is the source of true victory. We are no match for the enemy with our own strength and resources but the power and Providential workings of God are more than enough to meet the challenge.
3. Concerning the structure of the chapter, M.K. Hall writes, "The first part of the chapter (1-12) is concerned with decrees – that of Cyrus, and three now made by Darius. The second section (Vs. 13-22) records the triumphant completion of the house of God and the joy which flowed from this and from obedience to the law of God in the celebration of the Passover."
4. The suggested outline for the chapter is:
 - The Preservation of the Work (Vs. 1-12)
 - The Prospering of the Work (Vs. 13-15)
 - The Praise for the Work (Vs. 16-22)
5. We will briefly review the first two points we covered in the last message then study the final point.

I. THE PRESERVATION OF THE WORK (VS. 1-12)

All through Ezra we see God's hand moving in the hearts of the Persian kings to ensure His work can go ahead. It is a reminder of how "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD (Prov. 21:1). God used Persian decrees to preserve His work – one in the past from Cyrus and several new decrees in the present from Darius.

A. The Decree to Search (Vs. 1-7)

B. The Decree to Supply (Vs. 8-10)

C. The Decree to Sentence (Vs. 11-12)

II. THE PROSPERING OF THE WORK (VS. 13-15)

The work went on, prospered and ultimately was completed. There were several things that helped bring about the success of the work.

A. The Defeat of the Adversary (Vs. 13)

B. The Declaration of the Word (Vs. 14a)

C. The Diligence of the Workers (Vs. 14b-15)

These saints of old:

1. Obeyed the command (Vs. 14b)

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- a. They obeyed the Heavenly Sovereign – “the God of Israel”. There is an important order in the verse. God’s authority is supreme and they were there by Divine appointment to rebuild the temple.
 - b. They obeyed the earthly sovereigns – Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes are mentioned.
 - c. This project had the backing of four kings!
 - i. The King of kings.
 - ii. King Cyrus.
 - iii. King Darius.
 - iv. King Artaxerxes.
2. Finished the job (Vs. 15)

III. THE PRAISE FOR THE WORK (VS. 16-22)

This section of the chapter records the rejoicing of the remnant in response to the completion of the work. Seeing God accomplish His work through His people is a wonderful joy and encouragement! The remnant demonstrated their gratitude through their:

A. Offerings to the Lord (Vs. 16-17)

- Offerings of praise, thanksgiving and gifts to the Lord are the heart response of the believer for what the Lord has done.
- a. Offerings of joy (Vs. 16)
 - i. “The theme of joy catches the reader’s attention in this chapter as also in chapter 3. In chap. 3 it was joy at the laying of the foundation. Here it is joy at the completion of that house (Vs. 16).” (M.K. Hall)
 - ii. Thankfulness is a very important part of the Christian life! 1 Thess. 5:18 “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” Thanksgiving is the golden thread that runs through the recorded prayers of the Apostle Paul. Thanksgiving will keep your heart sweet and perfumed as a believer. Un-thankfulness can lead to a devastating and destructive course in one’s life (Rom. 1:21).
 - b. Offerings of worship (Vs. 17a)

They offered:

 - i. 100 bullocks.
 - ii. 200 rams.
 - iii. 400 lambs.
 - iv. Compared to the dedication of Solomon’s temple, this was tiny. 2 Chronicles 7:5 “And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.”

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- v. Theirs was the day of “small things” but God was still with them as much as when He was with Solomon. Zec. 4:10 “For who hath despised the day of small things?”
 - vi. Dennett wisely observes, “Christ remains the same for His people in a day of difficulty as in a season of prosperity. To be in the power of this raises us, as nothing else can, above our circumstances, and gives us courage to press onward whatever the perils of the path.”
- c. Offerings for sin (Vs. 17b)
- i. This is the first mention of the sin offering in the Book of Ezra. It wasn't the Day of Atonement, as they would have to wait seven months for that to arrive. It appears the remnant had a consciousness of the enormity of the nations sins and hence why they offered the sin offering. (Hall) A soberness and sensitivity towards sin and a willingness to confess it is a feature of revival.
 - ii. Twelve goats are offered, one for each tribe of Israel. Interestingly there were only two main tribes represented in the returned remnant – Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom of Israel comprised of the other 10 tribes had been taken into captivity by Assyria before the southern kingdom comprised of Judah and Benjamin had been taken captive by Babylon. The fact there was an offering to cover each tribe and thus the whole nation speaks points to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to cover every sin. 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”
 - iii. The sin offering reminds us that Christ is our sin offering and that cleansing is available for the believer. 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

B. Obedience to the Lord (Vs. 18-22)

Obedience is another important facet of true worship (John 14:15, 15:10). Obedience in:

1. The structures of the Lord (Vs. 18)
 - a. They “set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses” in obedience to what was “written in the book of Moses”. Each one needed to be in his proper place of service in the house of God.
 - b. This reminds us of the New Testament truths that God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33) and that God would have all things done “decently and in order” in His local churches (1 Cor. 14:40). As a New Testament priest (1 Pet. 2:5, 9, Rev. 1:6), it is

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important that you be in your place in the local church (1 Tim. 3:15) to offer spiritual sacrifices and serve. 1 Peter 2:5 “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

2. The services of the Lord (Vs. 19, 22)
 - a. The feast of Passover (Vs. 19). Approximately six weeks had gone by since the house had been completed on the third day of the twelfth month Adar. The first feast of the Lord in the new year to be celebrated on the 14th day of the first month was Passover. (Hall) The Passover commemorated the Jews deliverance from Egypt. No doubt as they celebrated it for the first time since returning to the land, they thought also of how God had delivered them from Babylon. The shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb would remind them again of their need of redemption. The feast of Passover also points to Christ – “For even **Christ our passover** is sacrificed for us.” (1 Cor. 5:7)
 - b. The feast of unleavened bread (Vs. 22). Leaven is a type of sin and corruption in the Bible. “During the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jews had to remove all yeast (leaven) from their dwellings, a picture of personal purification. To a Jew, yeast was a symbol of evil, so Passover was a time to put away all evil from their lives. What good is a dedicated temple if you don’t have a dedicated people?” (Wiersbe)
3. The separation unto the Lord (Vs. 20a, 21b)

Note the two parts to their godly separation.

 - a. Separation from – “the filthiness of the heathen of the land”. The purity of the priests is also mentioned – “For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure” (Vs. 20a). How we need believers today who will be separate from the wickedness of the world and walk in purity. We are called to a distinct, holy and separated walk. Sadly, this principle is largely ignored, dismissed our outright rejected in this Laodicean age.
 - b. Separation to – “unto them...to seek the LORD God of Israel”.
 - i. They were separated unto the people of God. We need to be in the company of other likeminded believers who are also living a pure life of separation from sin, the world and error. 2 Tim. 2:22 “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, **with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.**” 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, **we have fellowship one with another**, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son

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cleanseth us from all sin.” It has been wisely said that “separation from evil is God’s principle of unity.”

- ii. They were separated unto God. This is the most important aspect. The purpose of their separation was that they might seek the Lord. Make sure both aspects of separation are real in your life or you will leave a vacuum. Remove sinful things from your life but be sure to replace them with godly things. The purpose of separation from the world is that we might be consecrated for the Lord’s use.
- c. We note these two aspects to separation in 2 Cor. 6:14-18. Separation from sin, error and the world are essential if we are going to know close fellowship with the Father.

Conclusion: Is thanksgiving a part of your life? Do you demonstrate your thankfulness to God through spiritual offerings and practical obedience? Are you living a pure and separated life – separated from sin, error and compromise in company with other separated believers in order that you might be devoted and consecrated to God?