

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2020
SERMON: "GOD OF RENEWAL" EZRA 5
TEXT: HAGGAI 1:1-15

Have you ever really failed at something miserably? Assignment, hobby, work, relationship, financial...have you started something that just flopped? I know I have! When I was in my music undergraduate degree, I was asked to be the assistant director of a choir that sang in our school chapels. I was given the piece I was to direct and thought I had prepared adequately. The rehearsal came and, with a little too much ego, I began the rehearsal with the choir. It crashed and burned in a fabulous way. So much so, that I found an excuse to not be the assistant and not participate. It took me a long time to direct again.

It can be hard to restart, especially when you have failed. To step out of your comfort zone and try again.

In Ezra 4, we saw the enemies of God's people start a systematic campaign of harassment. Officials were bribed to constantly discourage those, who were tasked, to build the temple of God. Finally, they were officially stopped, and they also became their own worst enemy. The people compromised on the task at hand and slowly stopped building the temple in favour of their own comfort and own needs.

We come to Ezra 5 and 6 and we see that all is not lost. By the end of Ezra 6 the temple is finished! How did the Remnant get started again? To get a greater understanding, we will go, not to Ezra 5 and 6, but rather to the first chapter of the Book of Haggai:

A Call to Rebuild the Temple

***1 On August 29 of the second year of King Darius's reign,
the LORD gave a message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel***

son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

²“This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: The people are saying, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.’”

³Then the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: ⁴“Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? ⁵This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Look at what’s happening to you! ⁶You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!

⁷“This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Look at what’s happening to you! ⁸Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. ⁹You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses. ¹⁰It’s because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops. ¹¹I have called for a drought on your fields and hills—a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olive trees and all your other crops, a drought to starve you and your livestock and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get.”

Obedience to God’s Call

¹²Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God’s people began to obey the message from the LORD their God. When they heard the words of the prophet Haggai, whom the LORD their God had sent, the people feared the LORD. ¹³Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave the people this message from the LORD: “I am with you, says the LORD!”

¹⁴So the LORD sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the enthusiasm of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the enthusiasm of the whole remnant of God's people. They began to work on the house of their God, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, ¹⁵on September 21 of the second year of King Darius's reign.

If we are in Ezra 5 & 6 – why read Haggai 1? That's because Ezra, once again, gives us highlights of WHAT happened, but Haggai tells us the "WHY!" We could have also read the first chapter of the book of Zechariah, which basically is the same passage that we read today. I encourage you to read Ezra 5 & 6 on your own.

After years of procrastination, political drama, disobedience and delay, Ezra 5 finds the work on the Temple restarted! What changed? What had happened to turn worn out, discouraged disobedient hearts back to God?

The historical information we have tells us that a new king sits on the throne in Persia. This king is Darius. Darius is the king whose main advisor is Daniel and is the one who is tricked into throwing Daniel in the lions den. Darius will officially allow the building of the temple once more, but before this happens the people defied the royal edict to stop building and commenced once more. WHY?

The "why" lies in the fact that God is the author of renewal! Restoration begins with God, who is sovereign over all things and who inspires new beginnings regardless of past failures.

God called the prophets Haggai and Zechariah into service. Haggai and Zechariah proclaimed God's message for the people and that message renewed the hearts of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the new High Priest, the two who were the central leader of the Remnant and they inspired the people restart the building.

In Ezra 5 and 6, we have the story of how the Persian governor of the area saw that the building restarted and he attempted to stop it. He wrote an official

letter to Darius advising him of the defiant building. All that accomplished was Darius discovering that Cyrus had originally given the official nod to the temple rebuilding and so Darius allowed it to continue. The temple was finally completed and the people joyfully celebrated Passover in Jerusalem.

WORLD OF “WHAT IFS”

Throughout the years, people have pondered about God’s ability to act or not to act. A typical question I might get is “If God is so good, why doesn’t he do....?” The reality God has made the choice to use His children. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10:

¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

What would have happened if Haggai and Zechariah, or Zerubbabel and Jeshua had decided to be disobedient and not obey God? We don’t know for sure, but there is a good chance the work would not have continued at that point.

God starts renewal, but His children have a role to play. We must respond obediently. God’s work often benefits from the ripple effect. When individuals respond obediently to God, others become inspired and respond to God.

LIVING UNDER GOD’S EYE

Why did the people succeed even after the failure caused by disobedience? Ezra 5:5 tells us that:

⁵ But because their God was watching over them, the leaders of the Jews were not prevented from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned his decision.

God was watching over His children!

Is there anything we can do to make sure God watches us?

Listen to what Psalm 33:18-19 has to say:

***18 But the LORD watches over those who fear him,
those who rely on his unfailing love.***

***19 He rescues them from death
and keeps them alive in times of famine.***

God's "eye" will be upon "those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy."

Do you want God to bless you with new beginnings? If YES, then ask yourself, "Do I fear God? Do we have hope in His mercy? To fear God means to respect God. We respect God for his power and his sovereignty. We acknowledge that He alone is worthy of all power, glory, honour, and praise. When we truly understand and acknowledge this, we will humbly offer our lives to God, to be used according to His will. We rely on God's wisdom and submit to his direction of our lives. Proverbs 9:10 teaches us that:

***10 Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom.
Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.***

What about having "hope in His mercy...?" We really need to understand what "mercy" in this context is. It is far more than "throwing ourselves on the mercy of the court!" The Hebrew term used is "hesed." It has the understanding of entering into a relationship with God. The Old Testament would call it a "covenant relationship." It is a formal contract between God and His children. We bring our obedience and God brings His loving faithfulness to us. Simply, God watches over those with whom He has a relationship.

God always keeps up His side of the relationship! We need to search our hearts and see if we are keeping up our side! We have a bad habit of wanting God's presence and intervention when it suits our purposes and needs. When life is good, and easy, and smooth, we tend to shoo God away. We stop praying, we stop following, we stop obeying. Then trouble hits and we become "facebook" Christians. When trials come, we go on Facebook and ask for prayers. When trials cease, we cease needing God until the next trial rears its ugly head.

In our ministry together and as we live our individual lives, may we be faithful and obedient to all God wants from us. May it be said of us that "God's eye is upon us." May we continue obediently so that we may end successfully! **Let's pray...**