

The Long Way Home
“Putting First Things First”
Week 19

(Ezra 1- 6; Haggai 1-2, Zechariah 1; 8)

25 ““Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life

28 ““And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you— you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:25-34)

1. The opportunity to return was a result of the faithfulness of a small group to the God of the Scripture
2. A pagan king fulfils a divine prophecy

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

2 ““This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

“““The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. 4

And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.''''' (Ezra 1:2-4)

- a. God can accomplish his plan even through the most unusual means
 - b. A pagan king acknowledges the reality of the God of Scripture
3. Why rebuild the temple?
- a. It is a symbol of Gods' desire to enter in the presence of humanity
 - b. The temple was a place where visual, olfactory and tactile experiences pointed to an invisible but knowable God.
 - c. The temple stood in the middle of the capital city as a reminder and symbol of God's covenant with a people—Israel
 - d. The temple reminded people of the penalty of sin was to be paid in a blood offering of an innocent animal
 - e. The temple provided identity to the Jews
4. The people go on a mission
- a. 50,000 take the 900 mile trip
 - b. They know that they are going on the trip to rebuild the temple
5. What happens when attempt something big for God

a. The people have a flood of enthusiasm and start

well—the rebuilding is their focus

- b. Opposition rises up from outside and apathy from inside
 - i. Bribes, fear, frustration, and work against them from the outside
 - ii. Complacency and routine displace passion on the inside
- c. The grind of everyday life, ordinary needs, and typical responsibilities push back on the enthusiasm to do God's work
- d. People fail to understand the reality of doing big things for God.
 - i. It takes longer than you expect
 - ii. Its far messier than you imagine.
 - iii. Its costs more than you thought you would have to pay.
 - iv. It is never done!
- e. Everyday life crowds out divine mission and the work on the temple stops!

f. For sixteen years work on the temple is idle and the

people settle in to everyday life

- i. Do you wonder as the past the unfinished temple did they say, “That’s a shame, someone should do something about that?”
- ii. Things that are everybody’s responsibility tend to become no one’s responsibility

6. When the ordinary crowds out the divine mission God has given to you the sweetness of life turns bland, flavorless, and unsatisfying.

2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: ““These people say, “The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.’””

3 Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: 4 ““Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?””

5 Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: ““***Give careful thought to your ways.*** 6 You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.””

7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: ““Give careful thought to your ways. 8 Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,”” says the LORD. 9 ““You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?”” declares the LORD Almighty. ““Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. 10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. 11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”” (Haggai 1: 2-11)

7. The exiles didn't deliberately or defiantly walk away from

God like their ancestors, but they allowed their relationship to drift and forgot to “Seek First the Kingdom of God...”

8. God’s prophets deliver the message and the people respond! Ya!!!!
9. The opposition returns in greater force
10. The opposition is confounded and their attempt to destroy the work set the stage for an amazing outpouring of unexpected resource
 - a. They use the fear factor
 - b. They attempt to manipulate the King
 - c. The amazing turn in events
 - i. The unbreakable law of the Medes and Persians is reaffirmed.
 - ii. The detractors are ordered to materially support the building they oppose.
 - iii. The detractors are told to back off and let the Jews self govern

11. The Lower Story Exposed

a. We need to occasionally step back from our lives

and “Give careful thought to our ways.”

- b. People are far more responsive to the start of a grand project than they are to the daily grind of doing completing it
- c. Great projects of God encounter great human opposition.
- d. God can use Pagan Kings to bless his people .

12. The Upper Story:

- a. God will forcefully remind us that we need to “seek first his kingdom.”
- b. God will turn the tables on the opposition to make miracles out of their mischief
- c. God wants to make his presence among his people.
- d. The temple was a foreshadowing of the temple that God would build without human hands—a relationship with Jesus Christ
- e. God has given prophets to turn our hearts back to himself