

Chapter 1

Chapters 1-3 illustrate the providence, the protective care both physically and spiritually, of God. The restoration of Israel to their land was not only God fulfilling His promise to them but also His way of growing them, a long and difficult process as we will see, BUT it was for their good and His glory.

In Oswald Chambers devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest* he said, **“Thank God He gives us difficult things to do!”**

Without difficulty we don't learn. God grows us by giving us opportunities to do difficult things that will point out our need for Him. We can be sure **God's providence in our life is for our good!**

Israel needed to learn how to be His people again. So God provided an opportunity by bringing them out of captivity once again. He called them to do a difficult job: to rebuild the temple, city and the Jewish community - a monumental task that would entail:

- physical** rebuilding
- social & political** rebuilding
- most importantly, rebuilding an **atmosphere of proper worship**

I believe this is what God is doing for us at Calvary Arvada.

1. He moved us to a new physical **location**
2. He is teaching us how to love those whom He will bring to our building through **Serving**
3. He is giving us time, instead of growing larger right away, to learn how to **worship** Him in spirit and through our actions

How is God doing this in your personal life, teaching you through adversity, trials, or tasks that are just too big for you to do without leaning on Him for strength & guidance?

Sometimes we ask God, “If only you would lead me here or take care of this in my life, then it will be easy.” Or “If only you would bring us more people then...” But even after the Jews were out of captivity and back in their homeland life didn't get easier, it actually became harder.

So instead of looking for an easier outlet or asking for more people lets **start learning how to obey Gods call in our life**, personally and at Calvary Arvada, so He can show us how trusting in Him gets us through anything this life and/or this community throws at us.

Remember, **it's not about us**, its about what God wants to do in our lives & the lives of those whom we come in contact with - **it's about REDEMPTION!** We need not despair through anything we go through, “What shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

God's kingdom in our lives and in Arvada will succeed with our without us. He is omnipotent! He doesn't need us; He wants us. What a privilege it is to be used by the God of the universe for our benefit and those who don't know Him yet!

1. Let's be in prayer for own commitment to Him
2. Let's be in prayer and teaching our own families the importance of serving God
3. Let's be vigilant of God's providence in our lives and at Calvary Arvada and proclaim it!

As we begin chapter 1, lets look at 2 key events where the providence of God was manifested.

Ezra 1:1-4 (read) - The release of the captives.

- More than a century ago, Isaiah warned the Jews that Judah would be taken **captive** by Babylon & punished for their sins (Isaiah 6:11-12, 11:11-12, 39:5-7)
 - fulfilled in 605 b.c.
- In 538, Cyrus conquered Babylon and then made a decree that permitted the Jews to **Return** and **rebuild** their temple.
 - prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28)

1. God is faithful to His Word

- A. Whether He promises **chastening or blessing**; He is always faithful.
 - i. In Joshua 23:14 & 1 Kings 8:56 God promises that not one of His words will fail.
- B. **He stirred a heathen rulers' heart** to do His bidding in His time. (v. 1)
 - i. He engages heart's, will's & passions to fulfill His plans (v. 2)
 - ii. The word "**stirring**" is a picture of the Holy Spirit quickening the spirits of men to speak of Him. (v. 3)
- C. How has He stirred your heart lately?
 - i. **By chastening?** In 1 Chronicles 5:25-26, God stirred up the spirit of the king of Assyria to take them into exile. Where have you felt God's chastening in your life when you've become spiritually lazy? Remember, **He only disciplines those whom He loves.** (Heb. 12:6)
 - ii. **Too worship?** In Haggai 1:13-15, Zerubabel was stirred to lead the 1st return from exile and work on the house of the Lord. How has God stirred your heart to be apart of worship at church? Or serving to be apart of bringing others into God's presence?
 - iii. **Too grieve?** In Acts 17:16, Pauls spirit was grieved by idolatry. Do our spirits grieve about what grieves the heart of God?

2. God is faithful to His covenant

- A. In spite of their sins (breaking the covenant God made with them, these exiles were God's chosen people (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - i. As necessary as it is, we can be sure that God's punishment is never punitive! It is for redemptive purposes. (Isa. 29:10)
 - ii. And God is faithful; He called the Jewish nation to bring blessing to all the earth, and He would see it through. John 4:22 says, "Salvation is of the Jews."
- B. Our salvation isn't to be squandered. We are called to be the salt and light of the earth. (Luke 8:16-18)
 - i. How are we living that out?
 - ii. God will use us either way.

3. God is in control of the nations

- A. God raised Nebuchadnezzar to chasten Judah.
 - i. Nebuchadnezzar was called "My servant" in Jer. 25:9, 27:6 & 43:10
- B. God raised up Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians (Isa. 41:2)
 - i. Cyrus was called "My shepherd & My anointed" in Isa. 44:28 & 45:1
- C. **God does as He pleases with the rulers of the earth** (2 Chron. 20:6)
 - i. People don't have to be Christian believers for God to use them.
 - ii. This is why we should pray for those in authority over us; **for His will to be accomplished.** (1 Tim. 2:1-8)
- D. **BUT GOD! steps into the most distressing situations and ministers peace and hope through His mighty strength.**

~ Where have you seen God work through someone or yourselves unsuspectingly? ~

~ As God stirs those in authority over us or us to do His work, what should our response be? ~

Ezra 1:5-11 (read) - Obedience and Provision

- A. God's grace will sustain us no matter where the will of God takes us. (v. 5)
- i. Our acceptable obedience is simply **our response** to the prompting of God.

- **We are not to be fearful but full of courage and willing to stand in the gap!**
(2 Tim. 1:7)
- **We are servants of the Most High so we can be sure He goes before us!**
(Deut. 31:8)

- ii. His grace stirs some to go and others to support them. Both are equally important for ministry. (v. 6)
- iii. Spiritual Christians should not look down on help from carnal Christians thinking we are better because we do "more"

- **We are to expect God provision for what ever He calls us to do!** (Gen. 22:8)

- B. God will restore His temple of worship (Today this is us! Our souls!)
- i. At one time all the vessels and articles in the temple were set apart for the Lord but then they were associated with other gods under Babylonian rule. Now they were once again to be used for God. (v. 7-11)
 - ii. If we don't purge ourselves of the vessels of dishonor, like Cyrus did of all the all the articles not meant to be in his possession, we are not fit for the Master's use. (2 Tim. 2:21)

- **We are to prepare ourselves, as a bride does for her groom, for the Holy Spirit to empower us!**

But how?

1. **Get serious about putting out "sin" from our life.**
 - Live as a new creation, our old self is dead, not a slave to sin anymore!
 - Give our carnal desires to Jesus. Ask Him to answer the door when they come knocking.
 - This will be a life long struggle but we can get better at going to Jesus right away.
2. **Realize the Holy Spirit is always speaking to us, but will we hear?**
 - Are we in His Word everyday?
 - Are we taking everything to God in prayer?
 - Are we repenting daily, not only for the "big" sins, but the little ones as well?
3. **Eph. 5:18 (command) + 1 John 5:14,15 (promise) + faith = Holy Spirit's power in your life!**
 - The Holy Spirit - your Source of power for living - is "included when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord!"