

Overcoming Discouragement

As we study the rest of chapter 5, let's keep in mind that the tool satan uses the most to get into our hearts when other tools he uses like hatred, envy, lust, deceit, lying and pride fail - **discouragement**. Once inside, it's easy for him to get us to do whatever he wants. And what does he want? *To hinder God's work.*

First, let's look at the two, nearly identical letters from chapter 4 & 5.

Ezra sets these two letters that have quite a bit in common, side-by-side, the first after the second one, so he can say to his generation:

The first letter, in Ezra 5, was a truthful letter on behalf of the governor and his officials, stating the facts of the situation and asking for verification.

The second letter, in Ezra 4, distorted the truth in order to make the Jews look worse than they were.

“Look back! Remember God's providence! He will continue to be faithful no matter what!”

A much needed reminder and encouragement for them of the God they serve as they struggled to rebuild the city and its walls, **God will make them victorious**, just as He caused the effort to rebuild the temple to succeed.

For us at Calvary Arvada, this is something we need to remember. **God will have His glory, He will build His church.** The question is, do we believe that?

It's easy to look around our half empty church and conclude that it's dying and so maybe we are nearing the end. After all, we left the Apex center and it seemed a bit more full, didn't it? **STOP! LOOK BACK!** Even then it started small and God still grew it and used us to bring the hope of the Gospel. God will cause the efforts, to start in a larger location, and accommodate more people to succeed, just as He is causing the efforts of building the new temple for the Holy Spirit, the church and by association us, to succeed.

Let's look how the Jews fought discouragement as they were rebuilding the city and its walls.

To overcome discouragement, we need a fresh encounter with God's Word.

In the last study, verses 1-5, we saw this principle in action.

1. God's Word **confronts our sin** ~ through Haggai's letter.

2. God's Word **confirms His grace** if the Jews' would repent - through Zechariah's letter.

3. God's Word **reorients our priorities** under His Lordship - V. 1, "speaking in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them."

4. God's Word shows us **how to live** in order to please Him - the result of the prophets letters: to please God they needed to commit themselves to rebuild His temple.

To overcome discouragement, we need to get back to work for the Lord!

In chapter 4, we saw discouragement lead people to abandon work on the temple for 16 years! Then the prophets called them back to work through the Word of the Lord. There is something encouraging about serving the Lord, especially if you've been on the sidelines for a while, that He can even use me, in spite of my previous failures. What an encouragement!

Whether it's physical labor or being used spiritually in someone's life, there is joy in knowing that you are laboring for God's eternal kingdom, and that someday you will hear Him say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*"

In verses 6-10, we see the Jews continuing the work rebuilding the temple in the governors letter to the king, "And this work goes on diligently, being accomplished and prospering in their hands." Instead of becoming self-focused, like they did in chapter 4 which halted God's work, they fought discouragement with serving the Lord!

Self-focus generates self-pity and self-justification for why we quit serving the Lord.

Try it out and ask/find ways to serve the Lord at church, where you work or go out of your way to volunteer somewhere serving others. It will do wonders for your discouragement.

Get back to work for the Lord!

To overcome discouragement, we must persevere in the face of opposition.

In other words, **DON'T STOP! Continue persevering in your testimony!** In verses 11-12, the Jews gave a strong testimony to Tattenai and his colleagues of God and His ways.

- They told them they were servants of the God of heaven and earth. They didn't shy away from Whom they were serving, instead they unabashedly, admitted they serve THE Creator!
- They gave a brief history of where they worshipped, a temple that King Solomon had built. They included this in their testimony to give validity to their previous statement mentioning Solomon, the wisest king to have ever lived, who worshipped their God, giving further weight to their testimony that their God wasn't a newly made up god, but THE God of all the amazing things recorded in the annals of history.
- They admitted that their sin was why God gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the temple and deported the people to Babylon. Admitting their wrongs went along way with the governor and the king, dismissing their pride, being vulnerable and at the same time making it apparent their trust in the God of Israel!

Give a strong witness of your faith in Jesus Christ by your actions as well as by your words. People will always be watching us in some capacity; so be truthful in what you speak so your testimony isn't ruined. It also **gives us confidence** that *if* we are bold for the Lord, we can know that His eye is upon us in whatever response our enemies come back with.

To overcome discouragement, we must trust in God's sovereignty.

Verses 13-16 demonstrate their trust in God as they explain how God had been sovereign in everything that happened. The reestablishment of the **covenant community** was the result of **a continuing series of God's providential acts**. God used and coordinated this series of actions over the course of decades to fulfill His purpose, including:

1. The decisions of 'pagan' government officials that not only included releasing them from captivity (v.13) but also gave them everything they took from the temple in Jerusalem (v.14).
2. The determination of the whole community to rebuild on the original site where the temple stood (v.15).
3. The work of the leaders that not only coordinated the rebuilding but also worked alongside the people to rebuild the foundation of God's house (v.16).
4. The fact that they were allowed to continue the work while the governor traveled back to deliver the message to the king as well as the prophets sent to chastise & encourage the people by reminding them of their future waiting for them from God also demonstrated God's sovereign hand.

If you choose to continue your walk with the Lord through your failures, oppositions and mountain tops, do it all in truth, not lying about anything.

As we see in verse 17, the returnees implore King Darius to search the archives to see if what they said was true about King Cyrus and why they were rebuilding. Here, the opponents to God's program in the world do just as they ask. We can always count on the world to hold us under the microscope looking to trip you up and call you on your lie's, even the ones we perceive as tiny ones.

God's Word calls us to tell the truth for a very good reason. When we obey by telling the truth *God causes those who keep His Word to prosper in whatever they do!*

As Numbers 32:23 reminds us, "...be sure, your sin **will** find you out!

The Jews' stand on God's sovereignty influenced their behavior - they were able to persevere in their work and have confidence in their God's hand over their lives.

To overcome discouragement, we must choose obedience.

This brings me to the last point. We also need to make sure we aren't lying to ourselves as to which god we are serving if we want to see the true God's power work through us. We need to consistently check our spirits as to which god we are currently serving. There are so many of them at work in our culture and they seem to offer much:

- financial security
- physical pleasure
- psychological relief
- and even intellectual satisfaction.

When we give into any of them and hold them up as our *god* we are basically saying that the gods of money, sex, influence and knowledge offer something God can't.

In my own life, God has allowed me to taste the joy of obedience. So much so that when I *choose* disobedience I *notice* the joy of the Lord just *isn't* there in abundance like it was, instead there is anxiety, anger, depression & it's harder to say no to temptation. Disobedience is like stepping on a water hose, resulting in a slow, almost non-existent flow of water. When you disobey, the Holy Spirit's power through you wanes. I'm not saying He doesn't have any power at that point but your focus on your own desires takes it off of Jesus and therefore dulls your sensitivity to what He may want to do in and through you.

Ask Him to show you how your disobedience is affecting your walk with Him so you can grow in experiencing God's grace and mercy in your life as you choose obedience to His Word.

Temptation is all around us and so we must **immediately call on the Lord** to satisfy us with Himself in those moments.

~ He will always listen to you (1 John 5:14-15) ~

~ He will be your refuge (Psalms 46:1-3) ~

~ He will provide for you (Psalms 84:11) ~

~ He will give you pleasure and joy (Proverbs 10:28) ~

~ He will satisfy you (Isaiah 58:11) ~

Trust in His sovereign hand over your life and continuing sanctification! (Phil. 1:6)

If you don't quite believe that, follow the command of Matthew chapter 5 and **put Him first** in everything you say and do, **walking in obedience**, and then **experience these truths!**

It's there you will find joy you never knew you could have, unbelievable peace through anything life throws at us and a grace once thought impossible to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12-13)