

The Work that God Blesses

God blesses the work that seeks to honor Him by humble faith, scrupulous integrity, and Christ-centered worship.

Isaiah 11:12, “He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” (ESV)

With such a valiant “call to arms” you’d think many more Jews would have lined up to jump at the chance to make the return and “*Awake O Zion, put on your garments... shake yourself from the dust and arise... loose the bonds from your neck...*” in **Isaiah 52:2** (ESV). But many did not. Perhaps they loved the ease of Babylon (*our lives here on earth*), more than their religion and didn’t believe Jerusalem (*salvation*), would improve their condition

While it’s easy to say they were making a bad decision and more should of gone; stop for a minute and **reflect on our own choices**, especially when it comes to changing our old ways that are sinful. *It’s much easier to stay in our old habits than to trust that God has better things for us.* But once we realize that if we have a humble faith to trust Him; God will grow us from faith to faith. As it says in **Romans 1:16-17**, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.””

Ezra, a man of God who studied God’s law, carried it out and taught it, **put His faith into action** for the trip to Jerusalem by seeking volunteers & the correct ministers, looking to God for their protection along the way, entrusting the right people with the resources God had provided and finally, leading them back to Jerusalem to worship God the right way.

Verses 1-20: God blesses the work that seeks to honor Him by humble faith.

We see in **verses 1-20** that while many Jews didn’t join Ezra by faith in his return to Jerusalem, Ezra knew that God would be honoured by trusting Him to raise up Godly, qualified leaders and people for His work. Here we are told that:

1. Some offered themselves willingly to go with Ezra. And for their faith, they are honoured by being named and numbered in the Holy Scriptures. In verse 2, it seems a few still came without their families (Several of the families named here can also be found in chapter 2). Maybe they didn’t quite believe God had the power to deliver them, like most of us think at times, so they left families behind to “check” it out? Most of us start out by trusting Him with a little and as we see God come through again and again; we trust more and more. He’s growing us faith to faith. And if God still saves those of us who take longer to fully trust Him, **how much more the rewards for those who start off trusting Him?**

Just like the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-6, some come to faith early on in life and some much later **BUT God**, “being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...” gives all the same reward of heaven as long as they come to faith in Christ Jesus. *The only difference being the rewards given for our labor for Him (1 Cor. 3:8 & Rev. 2:23).* We can have confidence, knowing He is coming quickly, to give a reward to everyone according to their work (**Rev. 22:12**).

And yet, some left families in the first return like the family of Adonikam. In verse 13, *the last of the sons of Adonikam came and now none were left behind*. Perhaps God stirred parts of that family early on too respond, and the rest of the family in Babylon seeing they were prospering, decided to take a leap of faith and follow. Is this the story of your family? *Have some in your families responded to the Spirit's stirring early on, even being ridiculed for it perhaps? Then seeing them living in the blessings of the Spirit, the rest of your family responded in faith later? God blesses people that 'go' for their faith!*

Remember, no matter which situation we find ourselves in, God uses each for His Glory. He is a great God who chooses to unveil His plan of mercy and grace in many ways, but the bottom line is that for those who respond in faith He will put His good hand upon them so they will give Him all the glory!

2. The Levites that to Jerusalem with Ezra were, in a manner, pressed into the service. In verse 15, Ezra gathered everyone together on the first of the year and found there were no sons of Levi among them. Even though God had provided for them in Babylon like the synagogues where they were allowed to pray, preach and keep the sabbath, yet the attitudes of their hearts still preferred Babylon over the gates of Zion. So Ezra chose 11 men to fill this lamentable vacancy. **We are told in verses 16-20:**

- **Of Ezra sending the men to the proper person** Iddo, who was the head of the college of Levites, the place Casiphia, for ministers for the House of God. (**verse 17**)

Leaders must be both godly in character and qualified by gift and training. The qualifications for elders in **1 Tim 3 & Titus 1**, are primarily character traits, except for "able to teach" which requires both gift and training. While no man perfectly matches the high standards for elders, we should never put men into that office whom glaringly lack any of these qualities. **God will bless the work that honors Him by trusting Him to raise up godly, qualified leaders and workers.**

Ezra didn't just throw money at the situation or allow just anyone to serve in the place where God had Levites work; he took care to find the right people, who've been in training (discipled), so the service in the temple would be done the way God said.

Do you take the steps necessary to grow, like seeking discipleship in order to grow in the knowledge of who God is? We have to take this seriously if we are to serve Him well. We don't want to teach incorrect theology or teach from a hypocritical stance otherwise we bring destruction down upon us and the very work we seek to further will be hindered!

- **Of their success.** They didn't return without ministers for the House of God. Even though it was a short notice, their obedience brought back 40 Levites to help Ezra. Again we see the good hand of God upon them in finding right ministers (**verse 18**).

When ministers (servants) are lacking and God fills those vacancies, let all the glory be to God by praising Him for inclining their ears and opening the door of opportunity to serve Him alongside us!

In verses 21-23, puts his faith into action once again by:

1. **Holding steadfast to his confidence** in God and His gracious protection. He told the king in **verse 22** by what principles he would take the journey. That those who seek God are safe under His wings and those that forsake Him incur His wrath. Basically, it was time for Ezra to "*walk his talk*" that he spoke to the king.

God's servants have His power engaged for them, whereas His enemies have it engaged **against** them. If we say we trust in God then we should be ashamed to seek protection from anyone else! This doesn't mean that we can't use any means for protection, rather *it means to seek God first* with your whole heart *believing He will supply any protection* we need. **But in this case, where God's honor is concerned**, we should value that more than our own lives. And that is humble faith, knowing we have no power to do anymore than God allows, so why make plans without Him? Allow Him to show up in big ways, and make no mistake, God will when our hearts are in the right place!

2. **Applying that confidence** by proclaiming a fast in **verse 21**. Remember, Ezra was returning to Jerusalem because the people there needed to be taught how to worship God the right way - the way He outlined in the Law. One of these ways was to marry prayer with fasting. Public prayers for the journey were necessary to teach the people how to properly worship God with humble hearts willing to seek God in prayer &

We are strangers in this world, marching through our enemies territory who is waiting to devour those with no Hope! We may not have a visible pillar of cloud or fire to lead us through this desert, but we have someone greater - the Holy Spirit! He is here, helping us in our journey through life by pointing us back to Jesus every time we stumble or take our eyes off the prize. It is so easy to stumble because we were comfortable in our old ways and there are so many distractions that seem so wonderful but in reality are empty pits of despair. So as we travel through this world it is wise to commit our concerns about ourselves, families and estates to Him

3. Reaping the success of seeking the Lord first by prayer and fasting. **Verse 23** says "...He listened to our entreaty." There is obvious comfort in seeking God the right way and the fact that they made the four-month journey safely through enemy territory declared the promise **that anyone who seeks God in earnest, never seeks in vain!**

We desperately need "God's hand over us" protecting us. The enemy is seeking to destroy us and our little ones by tearing apart families and by bringing down church leaders. Knowing there are enemies and ambushes along the way, we need to humble ourselves and seek God's protection through prayer. And in special times of need, through **fasting**. We serve a God who always blesses His work through us when we seek to honor Him in humble faith and following through with obedience!

Verses 24 - 30: God blesses the work that seeks to honor Him by scrupulous integrity.

At first glance, verses 24-30 may seem like minute historical details, but remembering that **all scripture is breathed by God and profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (**2 Tim. 3:16**), so that is never the case.

The sheer value of the gold and silver mentioned here would be worth millions in today's currency, if not more. How many times have you heard of leaders in the church being taken down by Satan because he was able to get to them by greed and corruption, embezzling money from God's church? Here, *Ezra had to report back to the king that the entire amount was delivered to Jerusalem.* He **weighed everything** before the king's officials in Babylon **and** would do the same **before the priests in Jerusalem.**

Ezra was a man of integrity and of high moral character. Which is another reason the **good hand of God was upon him.** He took steps to ensure the convoy's and its financial integrity by entrusting men of repute. Since Ezra was concerned with being faithful in everything, big and small, God's honor and interest were his top priority and in return their lives and comforts would be God's priority.

1. **First**, Ezra appointed proper persons whose business it was to watch over the gold and silver. **Verse 24** says, he set apart twelve of the leading priests for this job. **Set apart** is a term of note here because it means '**Holy**'. God asks us to be holy because He is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Ezra tells them, after he weighed out everything in front of everyone (**verses 25-27**), that they and the vessels are holy to the Lord, because it is all an offering unto the Lord.

Why was all of this a holy offering for the Lord? I mean why couldn't they just give a portion and use the rest for other needs? All of it was to be used for the God's works in the temple to further His kingdom. I see this as an in-your-face kind of offering that cannot be mistaken for anything other than to say to God, "**You are our true provider, able to provide all we need and more than this offering ever could.**" This offering also shows us that God is extravagantly abundant in every aspect: His love, mercy, grace, justice, wrath, and compassion, just to name a few. *Why wouldn't a God like that expect beautiful things from us when He gave himself in the most beautiful way imaginable and continues to show us His beauty as we worship Him with our lives?*

God expects faithfulness from His people. Thankfully, He doesn't expect us to be perfect but **He does expect us to grow in it.** God starts us off with small things and responsibilities. "He who's faithful with little is also faithful with much..." (**Luke 16:10**) and in the next verse He lays out that if we are faithful in money matters, then the Lord will entrust **true riches** to us, which in the context, are the souls of people. Why? **Because only the souls of His people can give Him glory in their proper worship of Him in everything they do!**

2. **Second**, Ezra entrusted these men with extreme exactness. Unlike in Zerubbabel's time when they measured everything out by number, Ezra **weighed it all out.** This is more exact than by number because certain items could be reproduced with inferior materials and overlaid with gold or silver, thereby reducing the value of the treasure. Ezra expected to have it all back by weight when they reached Jerusalem, so he expected them to be punctual, and preserve an accurate record (as all of us should be who are stewards of the mysteries of God) of everything God put in their care.

3. **Lastly**, the charge Ezra gave them over these treasures intimated to them how much they were to be concerned with the care and faithfulness of their handling of the treasure and how much it would be to their honor to do so.

It is to our honor, as sons and daughters of God to be faithful with the little and much that God gives us. Nothing in this world is ours, NOTHING! It all belongs to God and we will give an account of how and what we did with it one day. In **2 Timothy 4**, Paul charges Timothy with the **gospel treasure**, bidding him to **keep it** until the appearing of Jesus Christ, where he **will appear** before God to **give account** of his trust, where his fidelity would be rewarded with a crown! **That, my brothers and sisters, is our charge too!** We are to not only hold onto this treasure within us but to cultivate it, tender it, share it, and use it for God's glory! Our salvation treasure, **Jesus**, is too great to keep to ourselves. But if we are faithful, tending to our soul by drawing near to Him, trusting that Jesus has already done everything needed for salvation and in gratitude and faith, obey His Word, spreading it to

all the corners of the earth; we will be honored greatly in heaven with crowns of righteousness and glory that will outshine the sun (**1 Cor. 3:8**)!

Verses 31 - 36: God blesses the work that seeks to honor Him by Christ-centered worship.

Finally, we see the journey they took lasted around 4 months and when they arrived in Jerusalem they rested for three days. The phrase, "**the good hand of our God was upon us**", is yet again a beautiful privilege that the believer can count on again and again.

1. **We see that even though enemies laid in wait** for them to do them harm; they were preserved and kept safe in their journey, in **verse 31 & 32**. Throughout Ezra we see the phrase, "The hand of our God was upon us." In the CSB it uses a more intimate phrase, "...We were strengthened by the wording here, "...We were strengthened by our God." I love the way it says, "Our God"; He is a very personal God who intimates Himself to us as we draw ever so nearer to Him, protecting us and giving us the strength to make it through and keep going back to Him for our needs. **Real strength is acknowledging our lack of it and His abundance of it and asking Him for it.**

2. **We also see that the treasurers were faithful with what they were entrusted with** and after weighing everything out on the fourth day in Jerusalem; they were acquitted in full (verses 33-34). There is something of a great easement in ones mind when found to have been faithful with what has been entrusted to them. What a glorious ending to the tumult of this life to hear the words, "**Well done, good and faithful servant.**", when we stand before Jesus one day. Let's be sure to be found faithful with the little, our short life on this earth, by **tending to our souls, seeking the Lord** in everything we do, **accepting His Lordship, being more concerned** with His kingdom than ourselves and desires, and **spreading the gospel** to those God brings into our lives!

3. Lastly, **we see the devoutness of their behavior** by offering the sacrifices needed to cover for the sins of the people while in Babylon and the journey, in **verses 35-36**. The sin offerings for them and Christ's sacrifice once and for all for us now is an atonement that sweetens and secures every mercy to us offered by the Father who provided a way for the iniquity of us all to be laid upon His Son. This provides us one last insight to our spiritual growth along our journey. Our faith in the salvation that God offers (Rom. 10:9-10) is to drive us to obey His commands (**James 2:26**), *for it is the fruit of our faith. We are desperate, deprived men and women, tainted by sin who are broken and in desperate need of our Savior every single day.* Honor Him for all He has done and is doing to save us once and for all!