

## A Word of Encouragement and a Hand of Help

*Ezra 4:23-5:2*

*23 Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.*

*24 Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

*Ezra 5:1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.*

*2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.*

1. Introduction

1. A positive word spoken during a negative situation is not wasted breath.
2. Even when the facts before you are not pointing in your favor, but appear to all point to certain ruin, there is a double-dose power of positive words of encouragement, and pitching in to lend a hand of help.
3. Do you know someone who is low and at a quitting point because of a heavy trial?
4. Is that someone you?
5. We can make a difference.

*Prov 12:25 Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop [weighs him down]: but a good word [an encouraging word] maketh it glad [brings him joy].*

6. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during a time of great opposition to God's work.
7. And their positive words and willingness to work helped turn around what looked like the end of the rebuilding of the temple and the end of their hopes.

- II. Return to Jerusalem
  - A. The work was started
    - 1. This historical background of this passage was when Cyrus, King of Persia, had given a command to the Jews living in exile in Babylon to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple that had been plundered of all the gold and then burnt to the ground by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
    - 2. But under the leadership of some courageous leaders and 42,360 Jews who made the long and dangerous trip from Babylon to Jerusalem, that work began and quickly the foundation of the temple was finished.
    - 3. They weren't empty-handed either, for they had returned to them 5400 items of gold and silver that had been stolen from the original temple by the Babylonians.
    - 4. They also had a 200-voice choir in training.

5. They had already built an altar and had reinstated the morning and evening sacrifices and had observed the feast of tabernacles.
6. The foundation of the temple had been laid and there was rejoicing and revival in their hearts:

*Ezra 3:12-13*

*12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:*

*13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.*

- B. The work was stopped

1. This was a point where things were looking pretty good for them.
2. But when anyone begins a good work for God, it is a predictable tactic of the enemy to raise up opposition to stop that good work.
3. When you were new in church, you soon discovered that not everyone was happy about you getting in church.
4. Old friends who used to be partying buddies may make fun of your new passion for God.
5. Family members who know of the skeletons in your closet ridicule you like you've been brainwashed by a cult.
6. That was the case in Jerusalem just as the temple foundation had been completed. Enemies sent letters to the new king making all kinds of accusations against the Jews:  
*Ezra 4:15... this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same*

*of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.*

7. The accusation of the adversary was enough to get the work stopped:  
*Ezra 4:21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me.*
8. At least the order was not a command to cease forever. The new king just needed time to research it.
9. Nonetheless, it was enforced **by threat of armed force:**  
*Ezra 4:23-24*  
*23 Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by **force and power.***  
*24 Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto*

*the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

10. They had come so far, and now a misunderstanding had stopped progress.  
...but

III. **Then came the prophets [slide]**

- A. Then came the word of the prophets
1. We learn from Ezra 5:1-2 that despite the command of the king to stop, and despite them being forced to stop for a time, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had a word of encouragement to give.

*Ezra 5:1 Then the prophets, **Haggai** the prophet, and **Zechariah** the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.*

2. Listen to what Haggai said to the discouraged workers:

*Haggai 2:2-4*

*2 Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of*

*Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying,*

*3 Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*

*4 Yet now **be strong**, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and **be strong**, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and **be strong**, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for **I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:***

3. They were looking at a house that was nothing but a foundation, but the prophet saw more than just a foundation:

*Haggai 2:7, 9*

*7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and **I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.***

*9 **The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD***

*of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.*

4. The people saw a bare foundation, a failed start, but the prophet saw a house full of the glory of God that was going to be greater than the first house! Jesus Himself, the King of Glory was going to walk into this temple!
5. They also had the words of the prophet Zechariah.

*Zechariah 1:16-17*

*16 Therefore thus saith the LORD; **I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.***

*17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; **My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.***

6. Zechariah spoke of God's mercies that would allow the house of God to be built.
7. God said He would comfort and prosper them and spread them into other cities.
8. The words of Zechariah sounded good, but Zerubbabel their leader needed to know how they could face the might and power of the adversary who had shut them down.
9. Zechariah said to Zerubbabel, "Listen up! *Zechariah 4:6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, **Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.***
10. Do you mean that even though a commandment had been given by the king to stop;
11. and even though they were stopped by force;
12. and even though the enemy was clever;
13. and even though their money flow had stopped?

14. Even though all signs were pointing against them, there was some hope of going ahead! The Spirit of the Lord was going to make this come to pass!
  
- B. Then came the help of the prophets
  1. These two men of God were like angels of God paying a visit to the downtrodden folks of Jerusalem during this time of discouragement, coming with a word of encouragement at the right time.
  2. But not only did they speak a good word, they actually **lent a helping hand** on the work.
  3. Haggai and Zechariah went beyond words: *Ezra 5:2 Then **rose up** Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and **with them were the prophets of God helping them.***
  4. Maybe the word of encouragement was enough to jump start the work of God, but

by taking that second step of encouragement, the prophets men of action working alongside the leaders.

IV. Our call

1. Let us be encouragers to people in need.
2. When you see someone who appears to be down, maybe you should ask how you can help.
3. Then when they tell you of their sickness, don't tell them of your aunt who died from that sickness.
4. Tell them of the Healer who can make a difference for them and relieve them from the suffering.
5. And do a good work right then and offer to pray for them.
6. When they tell you they are laid off from work, don't tell them of your brother-in-law who got laid off by the same company and lost his house and car, and then his wife took the kids and left him.

7. Pray that the Lord give you a word of encouragement to share with them.
8. Then do a little extra good work right then and slip them some cash.
9. Let us offer both encouraging words as well as a hand of help.
10. Let the words of the leader of the synagogue in Antioch to Paul and Barnabas be our guide:

*Acts 13:15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." NIV*