

Celebration

1/1/2023

Mortgage Burning Service

Ezra 6:13–18 (ESV)

The Temple Finished and Dedicated

¹³ Then, according to the word sent by Darius the king, Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what Darius the king had ordered. ¹⁴ And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; ¹⁵ and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

¹⁶ And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

¹⁷ They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸ And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

Introduction. Overcoming The ravages of exile.

A. The Book of Ezra tells of God's restoration.

1. For 70 years, God had judged Israel for her sin.
2. That judgment involved the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and their banishment.
3. Now, several generations later, the once grand Temple has been rebuilt.

B. Today, I briefly share from this passage for the purpose of helping is look backward and forward.

1. We look backward as we celebrate where God has brought us.
 - a. From a church that had the chance of being closed to a church of over 200.
 - b. We reflect upon where God has brought this body.
2. We also look forward to where God is taking us.
 - a. As we anticipate the days ahead, we must keep a few things in mind:
 - b. First, we must expect opposition.
 - c. Two, we need the ministry of truth-tellers.
 - d. Three, we need favor with both God and men.

1. The enemy attacks what is built for God.

A. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah both detail men of God leading God-ordained building projects.

1. The Book of Ezra is concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple.
2. Nehemiah is concerned with the building of the Wall of Jerusalem.
3. Both projects faced intense warfare and opposition.

B. **Nothing is built for God that the enemy does not oppose.**

1. Today, we celebrate the burning of our church mortgage.
 - a. But if you missed those early days, then you missed some of the opposition, the struggles, and the frustrations.
 - b. In the coming weeks, we start renovating and expanding the sanctuary to create more room for people.
 - c. I can assure you there has been spiritual opposition to this move.

2. What excites me most about 2023 is not moving this wall.
 - a. What excites me is the increased focus on the family for 2023.
 - b. What excites me is the people choosing to seek more of God's presence for 2023.
 - b. And I can assure you that this will not be easy.
 - c. There is great opposition when we start redeeming what we have given away and exercising spiritual authority in areas we have abdicated.

- C. Once you lose control of something, it's hard to reign it back in.
 1. When we start 'going to the enemy's camp and taking back what he has stole from us", I can assure you there is opposition.
 2. When you start telling your body you will NOT smoke that, or drink that, or watch that, there will be rebellion.
 3. When you look your kid, young or grown, in the eye and say "No," there will be opposition.
 4. So expect a struggle, and you won't be surprised.

2. Built and prospered...

¹⁴ And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

- A. The ESV captures this beautifully:
 1. They built and prospered "through the prophesying" of these two prophets.
 2. Coming up in our Ephesians series, we will briefly discuss what New Testament prophets do.
 3. But what was happening here, and why do we care?

B. #1 Haggai and Zechariah kept them focused on God.

1. The role of the prophet is to ensure that God's people are looking Godward.
2. When we take our focus off of God, we are prone to wander.
3. And wandering people get lost.
4. Thankfully, amid the opposition and the struggle, God had placed men who knew how to keep the people focused where it mattered.

C. #2. Haggai and Zechariah spoke truth.

1. There were lots of lies and rumors going around.
2. It was hard for the people to know what to believe.
3. Haggai and Zechariah were clear voices of truth in the midst of trouble.

D. Even today, we need God-ordained men and women who declare truth and keep us focused on God.

1. Only some people who claim to be prophets are true prophets.
 - a. This was true in biblical days, and it is true today.
 - b. Not everything declared "in the name of the Lord" is true.
2. But just because there are false prophets, that does not mean we do not need the genuine.
 - a. The enemy only counterfeits what has value.
 - b. Prophets are still for today.
3. As we press on into this new year, I declare that we need all of the Spiritual Gifts in order for us to build and prosper.
 - a. Spiritual gifts are not limited to preaching, teaching, or prophesying
 - b. They also include administration, serving, and even building.

c. It is my genuine prayer that what we are building and dedicating to the Lord will prosper.

3. The decree of God and other kings.

They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia;

A. We understand that for anything to be blessed, it must be decreed by God.

1. It makes sense for most of us that we want God to bless what we are doing.

2. We want God to bless our:

a. Families.

b. Jobs.

c. Church.

d. Nation.

e. Communities.

3. We struggle to obtain that blessing.

a. In other words, we want God's blessing, but we don't actually know how any of that works.

b. So, too often, we muddle through, hoping God blesses our efforts.

B. But notice that the Temple was built with the "decree" or the blessing of God and the ruler of the day!

1. **Could it be that God wants to do things in you, through you, and around you, but He is waiting for you to be on the same page?**

a. Jesus taught us to pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven..."

b. Jesus taught us to align our will, plans, and purposes with God's.

2. Perhaps, some of us are sabotaging what God wants to do in our life because we and God are not on the same page!

a. The good news is that we can start praying, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

b. January 1st is the BEST day to start living, building, and loving like Jesus.

4. Celebrate the dedication of the house of God with joy!

A. When it was time, they celebrated with joy!

1. Their celebration involved every part of their being:

a. They worshipped.

b. They sacrificed from their possessions.

c. They cried and cheered, and they thanked God for what He had done.

2. It is exceedingly good for us to pause and thank God.

B. Today, we have heard of God's grace and power in the lives of Barbara and Dollie.

1. These are merely a few of the testimonies of what God has done.

2. In just a moment, we will celebrate the fulfillment of our mortgage.

a. Last year, \$149,627 was paid!

b. The majority of that came through your tithes and offerings.

3. That's why, when you came in this morning, each one of us received a piece of paper.

a. While I'm going to have the deacons join me in a few moments to ceremoniously burn our note, each one of you gets to be part.

b. Please, do not light yours on fire.

c. But in just a moment, I want to invite you to tear that apart and throw it up in the air like confetti.

4. Why? Because we all had a part to play in making this possible.

Prayer of Dedication for 2023!

Mortgage Burn:

1. Deacons,
2. Bill and Brenda Link and Don Lotz
3. Give every person a paper to shred and tear!