

THE GOOD HAND OF GOD

Ezra 7-8

4/24/16

What causes God to bless a particularly man or a woman?

Six times we see in Ezra 7-8 that Ezra succeeded because the good hand of God was upon him. Cf 7:6,9,28; 8:18,22, 31

But why?

In our passage this morning we will see the reason.

In 586 BC the Jews had been taken captive to Babylonian.

In 536 BC 50,000 Jews returned to the promised land under the leadership of Zerubbabel to rebuild the Jewish temple. (Ezra 1-6)

They completed the rebuilding of God's temple in Jerusalem in 516/515 BC, 70 years after it had been destroyed.

1. Ezra and most of the Jews were still in Persia. Ezra 7:1-6a

Our passage this morning takes place in 458 BC, 58 years after the temple is completed.

- Ezra leads a second group of Jews back to the land of Israel.

7:1-5 Ezra was of the priestly lineage

7:6a He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses

- While Zerubbabel had rebuilt the temple, Ezra returns to rebuild the people.

2. The Good Hand Of God Was Upon Ezra. Ezra 7:6b-28

a. God granted Ezra favor in the eyes of the king. 7:6b, 11-28

7:6-10 It was not by Ezra's shrewd leadership skills, but by God's sovereign hand that the Jews returned to the land.

7:11-28 The king's letter contains 5 stipulations.

11-14 It authorizes Ezra and others to return to Jerusalem and see that God's law is observed..

15-19 It authorizes the return of the temple vessels as well as money to buy animal sacrifices.

20-23 It commands the treasurers in the provinces to give supplies to Ezra.

- ◇ 600 bushels of wheat
- ◇ 600 gallons of oil
- ◇ 600 gallons of wine
- ◇ Plus other valuable supplies such as salt

24 It frees temple officials from taxation.

25-26 It authorizes Ezra to set up a judicial system to see that the Jews obeyed these laws

27-28 All of this happened because God had granted Ezra favor in the eyes of the king.

b. God provided Levites to assist in the work of the temple. 8:1-20

8:1-14 1496 men plus their families volunteered to return with Ezra

8:15 No Levites had volunteered to return

8:18-20 God worked in the hearts of people.

◆ 38 Levites and 220 temple servants

There was still a problem however.

They had a long, hot, dangerous, 900 mile journey ahead of them.

◇ It would take them 3 ½ months to get to Jerusalem from Persia.

The Jews were carrying about 25 tons of silver and 4 tons of gold. (8:26-27)

◇ There was the danger of thieves and hostile nomads along the route.

c. God granted them a safe journey. 8:21-31 cf 7:7-9

8:21-23 They humbled themselves and fasted and prayed for God's protection for their journey.

8:31 The hand of God was over them

d. God blessed them after they arrived. 8:32-36

But why was the good hand upon Ezra? Cf 7:6,9,28; 8:18,22, 31

We are told in 7:9-10

3. God blessed Ezra because he had committed his heart to the things of God. 7:9-10

a. Ezra set his heart.

- He committed himself to follow God.
- He was a determined serve God with a whole heart.

2 Chronicles 16:9 "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

- The heart of the matter is that it is your heart that matters.
- How do you know if your heart is completely His?

◆ You know that your heart is completely God's:

◇ When you choose to follow God rather than your feelings

- ◇ When you spend most of your spare time learning about God rather than indulging in various forms of entertainment
- ◇ When you can pray, “Not my will, but Thy will be done,” in every area of your life (Health, finances, job, dating relationships, marriage)

b. Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord.

- To seek, consult, inquire of the scriptures.
 - ◆ This required determined disciplined study
 - ◇ He was not reading the Bible for a feeling of peace or some personal hidden message.

c. Ezra set his heart to practice the law of God.

- To obey it, to do it
 - ◆ He approached God’s word saying, “What would you have me do, Lord?”
- There is no benefit on reading your Bible or coming to church if you are not going to do what God says in His Word.

Hebrews 5:11-14

Luke 6:46 "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

d. Ezra set his heart to teach the law of God to others.

- Not just for knowledge as an end in itself
- Not for some spiritual experience or blessing
- But for transformed lives and behavior

e. Ezra led the people in fasting and prayer. 8:21-23

21 Ezra recognized the need for God’s protection so he proclaimed a time of fasting and prayer

- ◆ Fasting is a *humbling* of ourselves before God as we draw near to Him in repentance and prayer. (As we seek His guidance, protection, and provision)

Psalms 35:13 . . . I *humbled* my soul with fasting, And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.

22 Ezra was concerned for God’s reputation.

23a Ezra realized the importance of prayer.

James 4:2 . . . You do not have because you do not ask.

23b God listened to their entreaty.

Psalm 34:15 17 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are *open* to their cry.. . . *The righteous* cry, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles.

Truths That Matter

1) God blesses the person whose heart belongs to Him. 8:22b

2 Chronicles 7:14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Jeremiah 29:13 'You will seek Me and find *Me* when you *search for Me with all your heart*.

God is opposed to those who are half-hearted followers.

Revelation 3:16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

2) Set your heart to study God's Word.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

3) Set your heart to do God's Word.

Psalm 119:2 How blessed are those who *observe His testimonies*, Who seek Him with all *their* heart.

4) Set your heart to teach others God's Word.

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."