

A Worship Study Guide for Individuals, Groups and Families for the week of February 23, 2020

The Eye of Their God

This week, Pastor Steve Shelby preached from Ezra 5:3-17

³ At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus: “Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?” ⁴ They also asked them this: “What are the names of the men who are building this building?” ⁵ But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

⁶ This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and his associates, the governors who were in the province Beyond the River, sent to Darius the king. ⁷ They sent him a report, in which was written as follows: “To Darius the king, all peace. ⁸ Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built with huge stones, and timber is laid in the walls. This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. ⁹ Then we asked those elders and spoke to them thus: ‘Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?’ ¹⁰ We also asked them their names, for your information, that we might write down the names of their leaders. ¹¹ And this was their reply to us: ‘We are the servants of

the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. ¹² But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia. ¹³ However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. ¹⁴ And the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem and brought into the temple of Babylon, these Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; ¹⁵ and he said to him, “Take these vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site.” ¹⁶ Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been in building, and it is not yet finished.’ ¹⁷ Therefore, if it seems good to the king, let search be made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus the king for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. And let the king send us his pleasure in this matter.”

- What is it like to live as a subjugated people? What is it like to live under the whims and shifting fortunes of rulers who have no accountability? The work of the prophets is bearing fruit and the people are rebuilding the Temple. This story serves as an encouragement to the people.
- The preventive providence of God: “But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews” (5)
- “The word ‘stop’ in verse 5 is an example of God’s providence preventing something from happening that would otherwise happen. We are familiar enough with the idea of what God sends our way as his providence, but there is also an equal oversight of prevention. Things happen because God orders them to happen, orders them to happen before they happen, and orders them to happen in precisely the way that they happen. But there is equally a controlling superintendence over the affairs of the world and our lives, ensuring that certain things do not happen.” (*Derek Thomas*)
- God prevents as well as executes: “If it had not been the LORD on our side, let Israel now say—if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth! We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped! Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (*Psalm 124*)
- Humble defiance based on identity.
- “We are the servants of the God of heaven... we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago” (11)
- “But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven” (12)
- The humble courage of knowing who you are and where you come from.