



*Biblical Building*

*Sermon #10*

***'Be Honest about the Past!'***

***Ezra 5:6-17***

Sunday, July 13th, 2025

**Last Sunday in the Biblical Building Sermon Series:**

- Last Sunday, on patriotic Sunday we looked at Ezra 5:1-5.
  - I preached a sermon entitled ***'The Eye of God!'*** from Ezra 5:1-5.
    - I asked the question: ***How does this passage show us that God is watching over us?***
  - ***Truth #1: The Authorization of God. (v. 1)***
  - ***Truth #2: The Adherence to the Call of God. (v. 2)***
  - ***Truth #3: The Analysis of the Governor. (vv. 3-4)***

- ***Truth #4: The Authority of God. (v. 5)***
- Based on last Sunday's sermon, may we be reminded that the Eye of God is always on us.
  - ***To correct AND to protect.***

***'Be Honest about the Past!'***

***Ezra 5:6-17***

***Sermon in a Sentence:***

***Being honest about our past can be hard. Both individually and collectively as groups of people. In this text we find Investigatory Questions about the Past and then a response of Integrity from the Jews that was quoted verbatim.***

**Intro:**

- ***As I have taught many times from this pulpit as well as in many others, All Sins are equal in the eyes of God.***
  - 'For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.' James 2:10
- ***But, this does not mean the sins we commit do not cause consequences in our own lives. Including, those who come before us.***
  - Because of the consequences, we cannot erase the things that occurred due to our own personal sins.
  - ***There are consequences that our children and others in the faith who come after may have to face due to our personal sins.***

- ***Our passage of Scripture this morning is a great example of this in two ways:***

- #1: The sins of the older Israelite generation certainly affected the Israelites of Ezra 5.
- #2: They were open and honest with what had occurred in their past.

- ***Prior to Babylonian captivity the Jews were disobedient to God and just as Jeremiah prophesied a 70-year exile in Babylon, so it happened.***

- ‘Because you have not obeyed my words, 9 behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.’ Jeremiah 25:8-9
- ***The Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah made it clear that, ‘you have not obeyed my words’.***
  - The grandchildren and great grandchildren of these Israelites who were not faithful and obedient to the Lord would have to tell the Persian officials in our text this morning, hey, we haven’t always been obedient to God.
- ***This prophecy of Jeremiah occurred in 605 BC. Jerusalem was captured in either 597 B.C. or 586 B.C.***

- Most scholars are on the fence as to which is correct.

- It depends on your interpretation of 2nd Chronicles 36:11 and Ezekiel 33:21.

- ***Either way, the fact remains the same, the past of Israel had not always been pretty, but I pray we see this morning that we must be honest about the past.***

- ***\*Illustration\****

- One evening in 1925 a 21-year old college student, by the name of Ted, was in his dorm room at Dartmouth college in New Hampshire surrounded by his friends.
  - ***He and his friends had gotten a hold of a bottle of liquor.***
  - ***They knew that this wasn’t allowed because at the time the country was at the height of prohibition.***
    - Legally, no one was allowed to consume alcohol.
- ***Ted was a senior in college and getting ready to graduate with honors.***
  - ***This young student had also been recently named the editor-in chief of Dartmouth’s humor magazine, ‘Jack-O-Lantern’.***
- At this time, everything was falling into place for the aspiring writer and publisher. But, he

made a bad decision. Like all of us have done before.

- *Later that evening, two police officers come to visit the college students in the dorm room.*
- Ted and his friends all got busted. Ted specifically, was stripped of all of his academic honors and was no longer editor and chief of the school's magazine.
  - *He wasn't allowed to submit any articles or submissions to the magazine anymore.*
- So, he came up with a pen named Ted and was able to submit his work to the magazine and they had no idea that it was Ted.
  - *But, Ted's work kept getting published without the new editor and chief realizing it.*
- *Throughout the rest of Ted's life he would write and illustrate over 60 published books under the pen named he used during his senior year at Dartmouth.*
  - He would go on to win a pulitzer prize for his contributions to literature and education.
- *Theodore Guisal was his full name, and Theodore made a bad decision. He accepted the consequence, was always honest about his*

*mistake and his past, but all of us are familiar with him because his pen name, was Dr. Suess.*

- In a similar way, Israel made mistakes and were disobedient to God. Just like we do.
  - In both cases, there are consequences but God can free us when we are open and honest about our shortcomings.
- Imagine if Dr. Suess hadn't been honest and hidden what he had done and lived in Shame. He probably wouldn't have been, Dr. Seuss.

#### **Question to Ask:**

*How does the open and honest response of the Jews when asked hard questions by the Persian Government 'free' them to move forward with the rebuilding of the temple that God had called them to do?*

#### **Truth #1: Investigatory Questions. (vv. 6-10)**

- Based on last week's sermon, we know that Tattenai and his 'associates', inspectors, came and looked at the structure the Jews were building and had some questions, as was their job.
  - *Based on the response from the Jews that we will read about in a moment, I don't think the Jews thought the Persian officials were trouble makers or anything of that sort.*

- At this point, the Jews knew what they needed to do and that the Eye of God was upon them.
  - *So, after the questioning, Tattenai writes a letter to King Darius about his findings. It begins in verse 7, but Ezra does give us an editorial comment.*
- ‘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.’ Ezra 5:6
  - *The Chronicler (Ezra) lists all the Persian officials who were responsible for this inspection and that they wrote a formal letter.*
    - *A copy of the letter was included, as it was back in Ezra 4.*
- In verse 7 the letter begins which is described in terms of a report.
  - *This is exactly what it was, a report. A report of gathered information of what the Jews had been up to.*
  - *‘They sent him a report, in which was written as follows: “To Darius the king, all peace.”*
    - This report was formal, well organized, official and would be gladly accepted by the King (Darius) and his officials.
  - *The Four Components of this Report:*
    - #1: An account of the Inspection of the work. (v. 8)

- #2: The questions that the Persian officials asked the Jews. (vv. 9-10)
  - #3: A lengthy account of the Jews’ answers to the questions. (vv. 11-16)
  - #4: A request is made that King Darius check the records concerning Cyrus’s decree and that he, King Darius, make a decision on whether or not the Jews could continue in rebuilding the temple. (v. 17)
- *We are given more information in this attachment of the report than originally given last week (hence why Ezra included a copy of the letter).*
  - I find 2 important things to point out concerning the Investigatory questions that were asked.
- *Something Different. (v. 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.’
  - *As followers of Christ, when God is moving and working in our lives, folks can usually tell if there is something different.*
    - I think that as the Persian officials looked at what the Jews were doing and

materials they were working with, they realized something was different.

- *Notice what the report says:* ‘This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.’
  - *When a body of believers do a large project, such as constructing a building for the people of God to worship in, people will take notice as God’s blessings are upon them and their work.*
- Notice that the persians include in their report, ‘the house of the Great God’
  - *This does not mean that they had surrendered to the God of the Hebrews, it simply means that they were using language of their subjects to be courteous.*
- *The materials that they were using also to point to something being different about these Israelites...*
  - *‘Large Stones’*
    - This phrase here is elsewhere in the OT translated as ‘smooth’ or ‘polished’ stones.
    - *While the foundation that had already been laid was small, the stones indicated that they were*

*certainly trying to build the temple so that it would be able to stand for a long time.*

- Some historians argue that the large stones at the bottom of the wailing wall were used in the second temple.
- *‘Timber laid in the walls’*
  - As the persians had questions about the timber being used, many Bible scholars have through the years as well.
  - Some argue that these timbers were used as rafters to protect against earth quakes.
  - In *1st Kings 6:15-18*, there was a system called interior wainscoting which alternated logs to brick/stone layers in the walls.
- *Either way, the persians looked at the materials and how smoothly the building was going (because the Eye of God was on them), and may have thought ‘this looks more like a fortress than a temple’.*
  - Either way, something was different with these Jews in Jerusalem...
- *Some Details. (vv. 9-10)*

- ‘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.’
- Tattenai wants Darius to know that they have followed all the King’s protocols and asking all the right ‘legal’ questions.
- *Now to the defense of the persians, they had a right to ask the Jews these questions and I believe the Jews knew that they had this right.*
  - *Afterall, the materials being used and the smoothness of the project certainly caused question for concern.*
- Have you noticed how kind Tattenai has been through this entire encounter even in last week’s text?
  - *I think Tattenai’s kindness is in direct response to the honesty and integrity of the Jews who were rebuilding.*
- Tattenai did not have to be as kind as he was being, as we discussed last week, he could’ve ordered them to stop while they waited for the letter to come back.
  - *Again, the names are asked for legal purposes. The more information that Tattenai gave, the quicker this problem could have an answer...*

## Truth #2: *Integrity Quoted. (vv. 11-17)*

- Now comes the point in the report where Tattenai shares the information with King Darius that the Jews provided him.
  - *When we are embarrassed about our past, whether it be our own personal past or that of our families, nations, ancestors, and our Church’s it can be easy to lie, and not tell the whole truth.*
    - *I remember quite vividly as a child how hard it would be for me to respond when someone asked me questions about my dad.*
      - It was often teammates, friends, classmates and teachers who didn’t know my dad, but when they asked about him (while he was actively in his addiction) it was super hard to tell the truth. At times, I didn’t.
      - But once I owned the past, realized what had happened and that God’s forgiveness was real and that I could personally choose to obey God, I felt such freedom.
  - *The Israelites here, could have done what I did so often as a Child. Lie about their family history and past sins.*

- The israelites would have blamed their past leaders, or their family members, but they didn't.
- *They took full responsibility that the people of the nation sinned against God and were therefore responsible in returning to the land and rebuilding the temple that had been lost.*
  - Their integrity is quoted in the pages of Scripture. Their integrity was written in this report which Ezra decided to include in his book, and God ultimately led Him to do so... Such a powerful text...
  - I believe there are **3** things to point out here with the integrity of the Israelites that is quoted...
- **Identity Defined. (v. 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.'
  - *Look at how the Israelites carefully identified themselves:*
    - 'We are the servants of the God of Heaven and earth,'
    - The usage of 'Heaven and earth' emphasizes the stature of the God they humble GET to work for, and the Divine

authority that is commissioning their work.

- *They don't credit Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai or Zechariah and they shouldn't.*
    - It's about God and His authority.
- *How do we define ourselves?*
  - Hi, I'm Brady and I'm a Pastor who loves sports and his family.
  - Or, do we define ourselves I'm a servant of the Most High God and my name is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - *Notice that in the Israelites response, they don't claim that God is a local or nationalistic deity, but One who ruled and reigned over all the created order of the earth.*
  - Remember, the returnees aka remnant, were very small in number.
    - *But they are claiming, boldly, that their God is universal.*
  - What a testimony and one we ought to adopt!
- *Not only do they give their identity, they also explain briefly why they are doing what they're doing:*

- *‘and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.’*
  - Not only did they express their allegiance to the God of Heaven, they also state why they are doing this.
  - *To continue something that was done nearly five hundred years before them by King Solomon.*
    - *As believers we do have an obligation to continue to share the battle cry of many Christians who have gone before us, those who have given little and those who have given lots including their lives...*
  - Their identity, defined.
- *Incidents of the Past Declared Honestly. (vv. 12-16)*
  - ‘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.’

- *Wow, these Israelites plainly, clearly, openly and honestly share what had happened in the past!*
  - That their fathers (ancestors) had angered God! This was true!
- *Verse 12 is really important. The returned exiles see the relation between history and theology.*
  - They realize that what their ancestors did determined their history.
- One scholar said:
  - *‘The Christian faith is tied to the fact that God made promises and fulfilled them in his-STORY, exemplified by Jesus, who actually came, died, and rose again.’*



- Church, we know that God is sovereign and in control. But it is true that the decisions we make do affect history!
  - *To accurately define history would be to say it is a dialogue between God and humankind.*
- What is verse 12 referring to?
  - *The prophets in the OT (God's messengers) had long warned God's people that if they did not turn back to God, Jerusalem would be destroyed and they would be carried into captivity.*
    - When Jeremiah and Ezekiel made these decrees from God, they were disrespected by Israel. Many of the Jews trying to take Jeremiah's life.
- *Now, these Jews understand the theological reasons for their calamity.*
  - They now understood that the prophets were right. They understood their consequences.
- Notice that they don't say it was Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian king of the Aramaic tribe of the Chaldeans) as to why the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., but that God gave the Israelites into Nebuchadnezzar's hand.
  - *No excuses are made by these Jews in their explanations, they've accepted the*

*consequences of the actions of their ancestors.*

- These Jews do not hesitate in telling their neighbors why they had to suffer through the exile years.
  - *We can learn from this as to why we need to understand why we believe what we believe. We must understand the History of the OT, but also Church history. As to how we got here.*
- In verse 13, the Jews reveal their legal reason for being able to build, Cyrus did in fact make a decree.
  - Then in verse 14 the resources that were given by Cyrus back to the Jews is also explained.
- Verses 15-16 and explain how the foundation was laid and the leaders at that time.
  - *Notice that they do leave out the 15 year hiatus that they took in building the temple.*
    - But they probably felt it wasn't required to include that since Tattenai didn't ask if they had ever taken any 'breaks'.
- *Interestingly enough, verse 12 is gone into detail with the books of 1st and 2nd Kings. It describes Israel's defiance and disobedience in depth.*

- Verses 13-16 seem to describe Ezra chapters 1-4.
    - These are brief summaries the Jews are giving to the persian officials.
- ***Inquiry Desired of Cyrus's Decree. (v. 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.'
  - ***Now that Tattenai has given the information to Darius, he asks that Darius check and make sure Cyrus's decree was a real thing. Essentially that it wasn't made up.***
    - It seems here that the Jews did not have a copy of Cyrus's decree or they would have sent it to Tattenai.
  - It seems that Tattenai is confident that the Jews are telling the truth, and knows that Darius had access to the legal documents and that ultimately darius had to make the decision on this matter.

**Conclusion:**

- Have you ever made a mistake in your personal life?
  - ***I know that I have.***

- While we do sin, and all sin is equal we know our sin can have different varying consequences from time to time.
  - ***But, let's be honest about our pasts. Like the Israelites, admit when either we or those who came before us messed up, dropped the ball, and maybe even disobeyed God.***
- ***There is forgiveness and freedom when we admit that we have made a mistake:***
  - 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' 1st John 1:9
- ***I believe one of the reasons the Jews here were able to keep rebuilding and that God blessed their efforts, is that when asked by the persians about the past, they didn't run from it and they didn't hide.***
  - They owned it.
  - Learned from it.
  - And moved on so that the temple could eventually be completed.
- ***This morning, don't be held in chains by events from your pasts or things your parents or their parents may have done.***
  - ***Even in the history of our own Church and the body of believers who gathered here at the once Sandy Run Baptist Church which is the present day FBC Gaston, may we own our faults and shortcomings. Being honest, so that***

*God may free us from what satan desperately  
wants to keep us in...*

- Truth #1: *Investigatory Questions.* (vv. 6-10)
- Truth #2: *Integrity Quoted.* (vv. 11-17)