

The Men of God Rose Up

Ezra 5:1-17

Fifteen years passed. Fifteen years since the work on the temple stopped. Fifteen years since the Persian King Artaxerxes ordered the people of Israel to stop building the temple in Jerusalem. That King had come and gone, and a new king named Darius was in power. Fifteen years, and the work lay in ruins, the foundation just begun was unfinished. The building was non-existent. And God decided that it was time to tell his people to get back to work. And so in our text this afternoon,

I. GOD SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLE.

The message came from the mouth of the prophet Haggai, and then Zechariah.

v.1

Let me read exactly what Haggai said.

Haggai 1:1 “In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: 2 “Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” 3 Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, 4 “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? 5 Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 6 You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. 7 “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may

be glorified, says the Lord. 9 You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. 10 Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors

What a devastating rebuke. “Consider your ways.” “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” So God was disciplining his people, causing their food to be scarce and their wages to disappear. God had brought a drought upon his people to discipline them, to drive them to repentance. And to obedience.

Haggai explains the Lord’s actions so clearly. The hardships they were enduring were “because of my house that lies in ruins.”

A. When God speaks, he often rebukes his people.

And that is a very appropriate thing to do. For his discipline was not the judgment of his wrath. He was not casting away his people. He was not forsaking or abandoning them. He was not condemning them. He would still be their father. And they would still be his children. So he disciplines them, bringing hardship upon them designed to bring them unto repentance, and in that discipline, he brings his word of rebuke.

That’s precisely the pattern we are given for the raising of our own children in the Lord,

Eph. 6:4 “And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Discipline and instruction. Or the original king James, nurture and admonition. So the Lord has been disciplining them, chastening them. Now he brings the word of rebuke. The word of admonition. The word of instruction. And it is a simple word, “Get back to work!”

Before I move on, let me say quickly, God is still a father and we are still children. Therefore, he still rebukes us as his people. His word continues to be a word of rebuke and admonition, calling us to get back to work, the work of godliness and righteousness and personal obedience.

Indeed, 2 Tim.3: 16 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

So what should you do when the word of God rebukes you? What should you do when the word of God tells you that what you are doing or how you are living is wrong? What if that word tells you, as it told the Israelites, that there is something you are not doing? Something that you should be doing? What if that word tells you that you are not working hard enough to build the house of God and to extend his kingdom?

What did the men of Israel do? They rose up. The men of God rose up. They rose up to obedience. They didn’t get defensive. They didn’t get angry. They didn’t offer excuses or even try to make up for their failures. They just rose up to the occasion.

B. When God speaks, his people should rise up in obedient submission.

v.2

When God said, “It’s time to get back to work,” they rose up and got back to work. They “began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” I have to let these words resound loudly this morning, for in some way or another, it is time for every one of us to rise up. To rise up in obedient submission.

That begins with the men, for as men, we are given leadership in our own homes, and if there is something that is so desperately needed in our day, it is this, for men to rise up. Rise up unto obedience to accept the leadership role which God assigns to us in our homes. It’s time for men to rise up to love their wives as Christ has loved the church, to nurture and cherish them.

And in the church, it’s time for the men to rise up unto the proper roles of leadership which the Scriptures assign to us. Surely one of the main reasons why women assume positions of leadership and authority in liberal and mainline churches is because there are no men rising up to the need!

So men of God, rise up and do the work which God has given to us. Rise up to the call to godliness and spiritual strength defined for us in Scripture. That exhortation, however, is certainly not limited to me, but applies to everyone. So people of God, rise up in obedient submission. Whatever the issue might be in your own life, whatever the negligence or spiritual shortcomings that exist in your own life, however it can be said that you are more concerned with your own lives than with the work of God, wherever that exists in your life, rise up. Unto obedience.

In the history of Israel, when God rebuked the people through the mouth of his prophet, the men of God rose up. So it must be for every one of us. Rise up. But notice something important in that. God doesn’t call us to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. He doesn’t call us to sustain ourselves by our own

strength. He doesn't call us to obedience which is sustained merely by the faithfulness of our own efforts.

No, the call to rise up unto obedience is given in the context of God's promise of help. For,

C. When God speaks, he helps his people with the strength of his presence.

v.2

The prophets weren't just there to issue the rebuke. They weren't just there to tell the people how horribly negligent they had been. They were there just to chew the people out for their failures. No, they were there to help.

Now, if you ever find yourself in the position of giving a rebuke, you also better put yourself in a position to help. That's true in disciplining children, it's also true if you are faithful to rebuke others who are caught in sin. Get rid of all self-righteousness and proud arrogance. Get rid of any sense of spiritual superiority or pious pride. When you offer rebukes, and you should, when you do, you had better be willing to help.

v.2 "...the prophets of God were with them, helping them."

That word for "help" means sustenance, sometimes translated "support". The prophets were there to sustain the people. To hold them up. To support them. But it really wasn't the prophets who were doing the helping. It was God. It was the strength of God's presence. Notice,

v.5

They were still in trouble, but God was watching over them. Now, we all know that God does not have a body like man, that he is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

We know that. We know that he doesn't have eyes, like you and I have eyes. But that language properly communicates to us a very important truth. God is watching over us.

God is listening to us. God is sustaining us. God is directing us and guiding us. God is doing all those things, things that are adequately described in terms of our human bodies, "His eye is upon us."

Look ahead,

Ezra 7:6 "...he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him."

Ezra 7:28 "I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me."

God doesn't have hands, either, does he? But he is described, and his works are described, in the language of a human body so that we can understand and comprehend a little bit about God. God's hand is upon us, so we do have strength. God eyes are upon us, so we do have protection. And the real meaning of those words is this, the strength of God's presence is with us.

Psalm 18:35 "You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great."

How many of the Psalms say the same thing. God is our strength. His presence with us is our strength. He is our fortress, our bulwark, as we sang from Psalm 46, in the words of Martin Luther's familiar hymn. A mighty fortress is our God!

So people of God, rise up. Rise up unto obedience, obedient submission. Rise up and be counted. And do so in the strength of God's presence. And the eye of God was upon them so that their work could not be hindered.

May it be so for us! May that be true for our church. May God's eyes be upon us, so the work which we have for the kingdom of Christ will not be hindered. And may the work God has given us as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church be accomplished.

Rise up, O people of God. Even in the face of trouble and opposition, as we see here in Ezra 5,

II. GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD REMAIN FAITHFUL IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION.

And there was opposition. Their enemies again appealed to the King. Now it was King Darius.

v.6-7

Notice how personal it was. Their enemies wanted the names of the people listed.

v.10

That's where a lot of people would fall short today. They wouldn't want their names listed! They might pretend to be faithful, they might faithfully go along with the crowd. But when the time came for all the names of the accused troublemakers to be written down and recorded in a letter to the governing authorities, well, that's a different story.

The names of the people were recorded, in an attempt to give the king a list of names of those who deserve his justice. And evidently the people gave their names willingly and peacefully.

They were faithful, despite the presence of this opposition. And regardless of the consequences, which in this case turned out to be good as we'll see in chapter 6, regardless of those consequences, they would have their names be included in the letter to the King. A letter designed to bring an end to this construction once and for all.

v.17

So there was opposition, as there is still now. But these people of Israel, at this stage of their life and history, gave a good and proper accounting of themselves, and give us a very worthy example. In the face of opposition, what was the reputation of the people of Israel? What were they known for?

v.8

Isn't it great that their work was being reported truthfully, even by their enemies? Their labors were so faithful, that even their enemies had to recognize it.

You ought to make it our ambition to earn a good reputation with outsiders, especially those we might call our enemies. And part of that good reputation, an important part, is this testimony of the Israelite workers in verse 8. It is reported to the king that their work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.

A. God's people should be known for their diligent labor.

"This work goes on diligently." The idea is of being thorough and complete, working hard and faithfully. And that was their testimony!

That ought to be our witness as well. That should be the reputation and the testimony of your life, and of our church. You should be known for your diligent labor on behalf of Christ and his church. And the church have that same reputation.

So think about your own reputation, and think about what you need to do to be sure that it is a good and proper reputation. May we be known for our diligent labor! Secondly,

B. God's people should be known for their commitment to God.

Notice the question which was posed to them the people,
v.9

Notice their answer. A faithful answer. The reason for the hope that they have.
v.11

What a marvelous response. "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth."

They identified themselves with God, but not just any God. Not just a higher power. Not merely a divine being. They weren't claiming merely to be religious, they were claiming allegiance to one particular God, the one and only true God, the God of heaven and earth.

That answer, in itself, would have been somewhat offensive to many people then, as it would be now, because there is a clearly implied identification of truth, one that, by definition, defines error. Identifying themselves with "the God of heaven and earth" is a clear way of saying, "He is the only God." "There is no other."

And we must be known by such a commitment today. It's good when people know that you are religious, and that you are serious and sincere in your religion. That's a good start. But your reputation ought to be even greater than that. People should know that you are the servant of the living God, the one true and living God. The God of heaven and earth. And the God and

father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice how that commitment to God is recognized. It is the commitment of servanthood. The commitment of becoming a bondservant.

v.11 "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth."

What a great way to give your own testimony. "I am a servant." Usually we talk in terms of what God has done for us, don't we? God saved me. God has forgiven my sin. God has given me eternal life. And all those things are true. But your testimony should also be this—"I am the servant of God."

Paul begins the book of Romans with these words,

Rom.1:1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God."

That should be your introduction as well. You should identify yourself as a bondservant of God. And one committed to his work, as were the people of Israel,

v.11

And with that, we have the great example of these people of Israel showing that,

C. God's people should be known for their understanding of God's work among them.

The people of Israel knew what God was doing. They understood his ways. They understood the importance of rebuilding the temple. They understood why the first temple had been destroyed. They understood why they had been in exile all those years. It was God's discipline inflicted upon them because of their sin. They understood that. And accepted it. It was their own fault! They understood God's discipline. His fatherly

discipline.

v.12

And they understood his grace.

v.13

They understood the richness of God's goodness in restoring to them all that they had lost.

v.14-15

And they understood that they had a job to do.

v.16

How does that apply to us? A very simple answer. We need to understand God's work in his church today. And what is that work? According to the Great Commission in Matthew 28, it is to "go and make disciples of all nations." That work is not finished. The foundation is laid, to be sure. The work is begun. But it is not finished. And we must define the very reason for our existence in terms of that work that must be finished.

We must see the work of the church as a mission, a mission to the world. We must understand God's work in the world, as the building of a kingdom. And the temple that is to be built? That temple is the church. And so our first priority, our highest priority, our greatest purpose in life, is to build that temple, that church.

Our mission as a church, as we studied this morning, is to be a witness of the gospel to the end of the earth. And we have received power to do so, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."