

Ezra Ch 4:1-24

As you read the book of Eph you'll find that it divides right down the middle to form a basic outline demonstrating in the 1st 3 ch's of what the Lord has done for you, and all of the things that you have been blessed with *in* Him, what's been given to you in Christ. How that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, chosen by Him, having redemption *in* Him, the riches of His grace that's He's made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence. And on and on it goes just pouring over 1 blessing after the next with respect to what it means to be saved *by* Christ, and found *in* Christ.

But as we've mentioned around here several times, if you've come to know the Lord it's for a reason, God has a plan for your life that goes beyond your salvation, He wants to use you. We know that we're saved by faith and not works but at the same time saving faith *does* work. As a matter of fact it's in the book of Eph that we read, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*" Eph 2:10 Consequently when you get to ch 4 thru the remainder of the book you read of how it is that you should be responding to that which Christ has done for you, all that you have in Him and how that should spill out of your life in good works towards Him, and for His glory. How that we're to walk worthy of the calling with which we've been called, leading a lifestyle that reflects the person of Jesus Christ in our lives and what that lifestyle looks like in the practical.

And as the book begins to come to a close you find in ch 6 where the Spirit inspired Paul to write, "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day," Eph 6:10-13. And from there he goes on to share exactly what the armor of God is and how it's to be implemented in our day to day living. But the idea there is that as you come to know Jesus Christ and then out of that as you come into the awareness of what He's done for you, and you begin to avail yourself to Him, don't be deceived you're going to meet up with resistance. And it might surface in all kinds of ways, relationally (person to person), emotionally, or any # of things we might mention, but often times at the root it's *spiritually* based and that's where the battle lies. That's why to the Corinthians he spoke of how the enemy tries to take advantage of us through bitterness and unforgiveness but that we're not to be ignorant of his devices.*

Or to understand all of that another way, anytime you allow yourself to be set apart for the work of the Lord, or you commit to a work for the *glory* of the Lord, the enemy is going to come against that work and seek to *counter* that work. And we need to be spiritually minded men and women so that we might see that and wage the good warfare concerning that. And what you'll find is that the greater the work, the greater the opposition and resistance.

Remember when Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his work in Ephesus and he said, "...a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." 1 Cor 16:9 God's work, meeting satanic resistance is unfortunately like hand in glove, you can just expect it. We came up against all kinds of resistance in building this place, but don't think that just because we're in here that now it's all over. It's probably more accurate to say that the enemy is simply regrouping for a greater onslaught, why? Because he in no way, shape, or form wants you to be busy about your Father's business, so if he can somehow discourage, frustrate, or freeze you up so that you're somehow paralyzed, or immobilized, no longer about the work, that's exactly what he's going to do.

And there are a # of ways that he might seek to get in and destroy the work of God in your life, both individually, and the work that God wants to do in us collectively, a few of which are before us in our text tonight.

It's been a few weeks since our last visit to the book of Ezra, so if you need a quick refresher; it's been just over 70 yrs since the southern tribe of Judah/Benjamin have been taken into captivity, they've now been released *from* that captivity and commissioned by Cyrus the king of Persia to rebuild their temple. About 50,000 people returned to Jerusalem to commence the work, those who couldn't go physically for whatever reason got behind the work financially. God was guiding, God was providing and things were going well, they built the altar and had an awesome worship service, and in the 2nd month of the 2nd year they began the work on the temple and the foundation was laid. And man they began to celebrate, but the old men who'd seen Solomon's temple before it was destroyed were all bummed because they didn't believe that this temple's glory was near what the old temple was. And you don't have to be old physically to get sentimental and stifle the work of God presently, we need to be careful to not look back on the yesteryears with rose colored glasses. The bible says we're to forget that which is behind and press forward to that which lies ahead, God is always moving, always progressing, and we want to be found in stride with His Spirit. But that's where we left off, a great work has begun, and so what takes place now? Great resistance, notice with me.

Vs1-3

Now at 1st you read that and you think, "Well that was kinda rude..." But the key to this section is found in that single word up there in vs 1, "adversaries." The question is, "Who exactly were these guys, and did they truly seek 'your God as you do...?'" Because you'd think that if someone was truly *seeking* the Lord that they'd be welcome to take part in the *work of* the Lord. But when it comes to people using language that sounds good, you've got to be real careful so as not to fall into the snare of semantics that sound safe enough. The fact of the matter is that these guys were nowhere *near* to seeking God as *they* (that is Israel) did.

Turn back quickly to, 2 Kings 17:24-34, the northern kingdom of Israel has been taken into captivity and rather than let the land lie desolate the king of Assyria repopulated the land with peoples from other nations. And what happened was they began to mingle and marry with the poor and those few who were left in the land to ultimately make up the Samaritan race, but we read here. (Vs24-34)

And so you realize that when back in Ezra ch 4 they come to them and say, “We seek your God as you do” that couldn’t be farther from the truth. They were apart of an ecumenical movement of sorts, “Every religion is a good religion, we’re all ultimately aiming the same direction we can all join hands and do this thing together. Let’s just bind together in love.” But to compromise the truth for the sake of unity isn’t love at all, its just compromise, love *speaks* the truth and *stands* for truth, it doesn’t compromise the truth. The bottom line is that they were placed there, just kept going about business as usual but when they began to be devoured by lions they (in their territorial mindset) thought, “The God of this land is angry with us because we don’t know how to worship Him.” So they requested a priest who used to dwell there to come and show them how to sacrifice to the “God of the land.” They didn’t quit serving their own gods; they just added the Lord to the list. When you get to John ch 4 Jesus clearly tells the Samaritans that they’re worship of God was messed up. He said, “You worship what you don’t know.” In other words, “You’re not right in your approach to God.”

And here they feared the Lord, didn’t want to be judged *by* the Lord, but they still served their own gods, much like what we have happening in our own land today. People not wanting to be judged by God, so in that sense they fear God.

But they’re still serving the gods of their own pleasures, their own lusts, there’s no real sense of relationship that they have or demonstrate between them and God, but we live in America and so, “In God we trust” right?

And this happens today in the “religious” world, how long have the Mormons sought to be viewed as an evangelically based religion on par with Christianity? “We seek your God as you do.” No you don’t, you don’t serve the same God, we’re not talking about the same Jesus, therefore we won’t lock arms and call you brother. I have nothing against the Mormon as such, God loves the Mormon, just like He loves the Muslim, or the J.W. or the Hindu, or Me, but we’re not all serving the same God and I can’t pretend we do. The unity churches, (homosexual churches) that are teaching diversity/love/tolerance want to be seen in the same light you bible believing, God fearing, Jesus loving believers, but they’re not seeking our God as we do. (They may think they do, but they don’t). They’re what the bible calls, “False brethren,” they’ll use popular buzz words, and speak in the same semantics, but when they use the word “God,” or “Jesus,” they’re speaking about an all together different person than my bible speaks of, and it’s important that you distinguish the difference. Paul spoke in the book of 2 Cor about false apostles and how that even as Satan transforms himself into an angel of light even so his ministers will put on a façade of righteousness in order to deceive you.

He spoke of false brethren in Gal coming in and spying out your liberty, of course Jesus spoke of wolves in sheep's clothing and knowing them by their fruits. Not by their words, or even their initial witness, but the results of their presence in your midst, is it righteousness, love and joy in the Holy Spirit, or confusion, scattered sheep, and personal hurt in the wake of their coming around? We're to use wisdom in our dealings with people and not just immediately let our guard down the moment people start speaking Christianese, because it's not a difficult language to learn. "We're all serving the same God." You may think so, but you're not at all acquainted with my God, or else you wouldn't think that Jesus and Lucifer are brothers, or that Jesus is Michael the Arc angel, or that God made us the way we are so homosexuality is accepted by Him or whatever. You'd know that Jesus *is* God, He's the *only* begotten Son of God, He's not a created being such as an angel, and though God did create us, we've fallen from that state so that as the bible teaches, homosexuality is a sin just as any other sin and it's no more accepted before God than any other sin is. God loves the homosexual, isn't willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, but the bible doesn't advocate the "alternative" lifestyle. So if you're worshipping a "god" who is ok with a certain type of circumstance of which the bible says in no uncertain terms that will not inherit the kingdom of God, than you're worshipping a different God than I do.

But this is 1 of the ways that the enemy seeks to hinder the work of God in your life, through compromise. He wants you to let him into your life through various means of tolerance and through that he'll sterilize, or immobilize, render ineffective the work of God in your life, or in a corporate body of believers. So both Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the politician and the priest said, "No way, you're not going to have any part in this, we're not going to compromise our commission." God has called you to lead your life set apart to Him; you're not to compromise that commission.

Vs4-5

What just happened? They came in like they were all on the same page, talked about how great it would be to work together, and then when they were told "no" now they're no longer for them, they're against them, they're true colors come out.

If they were all really on the same page they'd have said, "Hey no problem, we just wanted to avail ourselves, but either way we'll rejoice in what God's doing. If you ever need anything just get a hold of us and we'll be there for ya in any way we can." But instead when they discovered they couldn't help, they opted to seek to destroy the work. So if the enemy can't ensnare you through subtle compromise, he has no problem resorting to an obvious destructive agenda.

The proverbs tell us, "*He who hates, disguises it with his lips, And lays up deceit within himself; When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart; Though his hatred is covered by deceit, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.*" Prov 26:24-26 They seem so friendly at 1st, but when they discover that you're not on the same page, they turn hostile.

And we see here, at least 3 other ways that the enemy seeks to destroy the work #1 Discouragement, #2 Trouble (or fear) and #3 Frustration. He wants to discourage you and frustrate you, or grip your heart with fear in some way so as to keep you from finishing the work God has committed to your trust.

That word “Discourage” if you have an OKJV it says that they “weakened the hands of the people of Judah.” It means they sought to take away their will to continue on, they tried to get them to give up, to dishearten, or discourage, to weaken their hands in the work. How often the enemy uses this tactic, seeks to dishearten us from going on, one obstacle after the next, what’s the point, may as well give up. Look at Neh 6:5-9

I love that, Nehemiah refused to succumb to the discouraging tactics of the enemy, he just cried out to God, “O God, strengthen my hands.” It’s like when all the people were prepared to stone David when all their wives and children were taken by the Amalekites and we read that David “Strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” We spoke Sunday morning of how the Lord stands beside us and is there with us in those dark times of discouragement and will refresh us and renew us, restore us into His service. But the enemy will use this strategy of disheartening the workers, and discouraging you from the work that God’s seeking to do in your life.

The 2nd word we see there is the word “Troubled.” They “troubled” them in building. The word there is more literally to “make afraid” or “anxious,” they were using fear tactics. Your enemy has no problem resorting to fear tactics if that’s what it takes to immobilize you, or to keep you from finishing a certain work. Of course the bible says, “*The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.*” Prov 29:25. And again, “*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” 2 Tim 1:7 So these are just little tools to make for our discernment. If you’re being discouraged *from* the work, or disheartened *in* the work that God has committed to you, or is seeking to establish *in* you, than you know that’s not the Lord, reject it, carry on. If it’s a matter of anxiety, or fear for any # of reasons, that’s not the Lord, cry out to Him, strengthen yourself *in* Him, and carry on.

This final word, “Frustrate” speaks of division, the old “divide and conquer” routine. Frustrate the work by setting the people against one another. “Well who decides if you’re going to use stone, or cedar there to wrap that?” “We want red chairs,” “We want blue chairs” and so church chairs split the church, divide them, frustrate the work. Jesus said that no kingdom divided against itself could stand. It’s the “United we stand, divided we fall” effect. God hates division and discord in the body, so when something is bringing about division, somewhere in there odds of the enemy being at work are pretty good.

Of course sometimes our own flesh can bring about a divisive demeanor to a situation, but these are tactics of the enemy, don’t be ignorant of that, be aware of it that you might wage wise warfare.

Now we're coming up on a # of names here or titles of various rulers, some believe that they're the same guys called by different titles, some believe that it's a parenthetical statement by Ezra documenting the fact that they had resistance all the way through this thing. Either way the point remains the same, and that is that when God is doing a work, the enemy will always resist it and seek to destroy it.

Vs6-13

Here's another weapon of our enemies warfare, mingling fact with falsehood. It's a fact that Jerusalem had been in times past a rebellious city, throwing off various rulers, and all the rest. So the King could dig in the chronicles and see that that much was true, and now that his attention is drawn to that fact, they can embellish their perspective with falsehood. "They finish this thing and they're not going to pay tax, tribute, customs or any of that and your revenue will be diminished." That was complete conjecture, they just made it up, but when filtered through the lens of their history of seeming rebellion, its an ez transition to make. Now they go on to make themselves look good so as to add to the negative light that they're showing Judah in.

Vs14-16

Again, vs 15=fact, vs 16=fiction/falsehood, they have absolutely no way of knowing what's going to happen when they finish their work. Now they may be reasoning in the practical, but the bible is clear that only God knows the heart of a man. And so often people will begin with the fact and then based upon that they'll draw a conclusion that has nothing to do with the intention of the individual they're speaking of. The bible says, "*The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.*" Prov 18:17 Be careful about drawing conclusions concerning someone if you haven't heard the facts from the person themselves. Now with this situation there was definite malicious intent, but that's not always the case. Sometimes you can be lying about someone with no ill intent, you don't know the facts, you're just assuming based upon what you do know. Be very careful, the enemy will use those kinds of things against us, mingling fact with falsehood to bring the work to an end. Or to lead people astray.

Vs17-24

So the enemy is hard at work and is temporarily successful at stifling the work, but God will see it through, and Artaxerxes *will* give the command to rebuild and restore in the days of Nehemiah in the not too distant future. But the enemy is hard at work seeking to stifle the plan of God for you life as well, or this fellowship as a whole, and perhaps with you or in certain ways he's seen a measure of success, but rest assured God will see it through. He who started the work in you, will be faithful to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ

Prayer Points: Lord I pray for anyone here or who maybe here's this on tape or cd, who has maybe fallen prey to the tactics of the wicked one. That you might help them to discern that and wage wise warfare concerning that. Thank You that we can trust You to complete whatever work You've begun, help us to press forward of one heart and one mind as to what You have for us as a fellowship. That we not be anxious or fearful, but bold in our commitment to You,

that we be not disheartened, but that You would strengthen our hands that we might finish well the work You've committed to our trust.