

Message over Method

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

How you do your work is more important than how your work is done.

God restores his people using human partners in their work.

Our work principle for today: the message is more important than the method.

The Life of Ezra

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. ²² For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." ²³ So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty. Ezra 8:21–23 (ESV)

The Life of Nehemiah

And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. ⁷ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. Nehemiah 2:6–8 (ESV)

So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem... ¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. ¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" ²⁰ Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." Nehemiah 2:11–20 (ESV)

1. Nehemiah did not believe that trusting God meant he should not seek the king's protection for his journey.
Nehemiah is a man of "Pragmatic Faith"
2. Ezra believed that trusting God meant he should not ask for royal protection.
Ezra is a man of "Idealistic Faith"

This disagreement demonstrates how easy it is for godly people to come to different conclusions about what it means to trust God in their work.

What unifies their stories is that they were both seeking to be faithful workers.

The Life of Esther

“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.” Esther 4:11 (ESV)

And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³ Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Esther 4:12–14 (ESV)

My professor at Fuller says,
Ezra is a man of “Idealistic Faith”
Nehemiah is a man of “Pragmatic Faith”
And Esther is a woman of “Clever Faith”

Two arguments: self-preservation and appeal to destiny.

Past hypocrisy is no excuse for failing to heed what God needs from you now.

What does all this mean for us tomorrow? The words of Jesus

“Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:1–5 (ESV)

“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9–10 (ESV)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9 (ESV)