

5, beginning in verse 1 and going through chapter 6, verse 15. We're going to find out if indeed I can cover this much ground in one sermon. Lord be with us. As you turn there, though, to Ezra chapter 5, let us remember what we have just seen in the previous chapter.

Ezra chapter 4 covers roughly 100 years from 536 BC to about 450 BC. And over that 100 years in Ezra chapter 4, it was showing us that God's people continue to face opposition. But even though God's people continue to face opposition, which is what Ezra chapter 4 was all about, When you come to Ezra chapter 5, you see that God is with his people. So there are these two truths side by side from chapter 4 into chapter 5. Chapter 4, God's people are facing opposition. Chapter 5, God is with his people. And Ezra is wanting you to understand that though you face opposition in this life, and that can take a myriad of forms, God is with you. If you are his child this evening, though you do indeed face opposition, God is with you.

Well, with this in mind, let us pray that God would bless the reading and the preaching of his word. Our Heavenly Father, we praise you for giving us a Bible. that we don't have to wonder or speculate about who you are or what you require of us. We simply open up your word, and when your spirit works through the reading and preaching of it, we receive it, and so we know. To you be the glory, blessed now, even now, the reading and preaching of your word, in Jesus's name, amen. Ezra chapter five, beginning in verse one.

Now the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah, in Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the son of Josedach, arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

At the same time, Tetani, the governor of the province beyond the river in Shethar-Bazoni, 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?' They also asked them this, "'What are the names of the men who are building this building?'

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. This is a copy of the letter that Tatenai, the governor of the province beyond the river in Shethar-bozenai, and his associates, the governors who were in the province beyond the river, sent to Darius, the king. They sent him a report in which was written as follows. To Darius, the king, all peace. 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 goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. Then we asked those elders and spoke to them thus. Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure? We also asked them their names, for your information, that we might write down the names of their leaders. 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.

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 Babylon. However, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. 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 Shesh-bazar, whom he had made governor. 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. Then this Shesh Bazar came and laid the foundation of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been in rebuilding, and it is not yet finished.

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.' Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives, where the documents were stored, and in Ecbatana, the capital that is in the province of Media. A scroll was found on which was written, a record, a record. In the first year Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem.

Let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices were offered and let its foundations be retained. Its height shall be sixty cubits, and its breadth sixty cubits, with three layers of great stones, and one layer of timber. Let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple that is in Jerusalem, each to its place. You shall put them in the house of God.

Now, therefore, Tatanai, governor of the province beyond the river, Sheth-Bazonai, and your associates, the governors who are in the province beyond the river, keep away. Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of the house of God.

The cost of it is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from beyond the river. And whatever is needed, bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require, let that be given to them day by day without fail, that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons. Also, I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill. May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a hand to alter this or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I, Darius, make a decree. Let it be done with all the diligence.

Then, according to the word sent by Darius the king, Tachani, the governor of the province beyond the river, Shetharbozani, and his associates did with all diligence what Darius the king had ordered. And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel, and by decree of Cyrus and Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adder, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. This ends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless now the proclamation of it to our lives.

Well, everyone who has lived long has gone through some trial or sorrow so deep that you could probably not even really put it to words. Perhaps it's a phone call you receive and you'll never forget where you were when you

received that phone call because the sorrow was so deep when the words came through the phone. You've been betrayed perhaps at a deep level by someone you loved. Perhaps you've watched a close friend or loved one die.

It's a medical diagnosis. The point is simply this, you've all gone through suffering. And this is because we live in a sin, curse and fallen world. You will suffer in this life. You will go through hardships. And this is certainly true in the church. You will face opposition and difficulty.

And what a text like this is saying to you is that God is with his people. God is with his people. This is the message to the readers in Ezra's day, and it's the message to us today. And you see that God is with his people in this text in two ways. God is with his people through his word, and God is with his people in his providence. So those are our two points. God is with his people through his word, and God is with his people in his providence. So first, God is with his people through his word.

You see this in verses one and two. Verse one begins of chapter five, now. Now before we can even go any further, we have to consider when is this now? What is the significance of this time? Well, the now will take you back to chapter 4 verse 24, the final verse of chapter 4, which refers to the second year of King Darius's reign. So that is the time period in which chapter 5 verse 1 begins. It begins in the second year of King Darius's reign. What is the significance of that year?

Well, Back in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, remember chapter 4 was entirely chronological. Back in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, it mentions that the building of the house of God ceased from the days of Cyrus to the days of Darius. That's roughly 536 BC. Remember they had laid the foundation, things were looking really good at the end of chapter 3. And then things ceased from roughly 536 BC to 520 BC for 16 years until the second year of King Darius' reign. Things ceased. The temple work had stopped. Now it had stopped really for two reasons.

They faced genuine opposition. It was one of the reasons the work had ceased. If you go back to chapter 4 verses 4 and 5, you read there that those who were opposed to God's people building the temple hired some lawyers. to go back and conjure up some things to make the Persian king unhappy with this building project and to put a halt to it. And that's what happened. So that's a genuine opposition that led to this stopping of the building. But that wasn't the only reason that the building project ceased. It ceased also, not just because of genuine opposition, but because of genuine sin.

And we know that from the book of Haggai. If you go and you read the book of Haggai, See this and maybe by a couple comments you'll remember it. But Haggai, you remember when he started prophesying? The second year of King Darius's reign. That's Ezra chapter five, verse one. The second year of King Darius's reign. That's when this stuff happened, the book of Haggai.

And when you go to Haggai, you'll remember that the people of God during that 16 year break with building the temple, also stopped building the temple because they were more worried about their stuff, their own houses, their own selves, than they were about building the house of God. This was sin. They were prioritizing themselves and their desires over God and his worship. So for these reasons, the temple building had stopped for 16 years. They had grown spiritually lazy for 16 years.

But what changed them? What was it that turned things around? It was the preaching of the Word of God. That's what changed them. Now the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. And then as you go on into verse two, you see that they start to rebuild the house. Now it wasn't Haggai and Zechariah's eloquence.

It wasn't that they were such gifted preachers. It's that the spirit of God worked through the preaching of the word to wake these people up from their spiritual slumber. You know, God's people didn't always listen to the prophets. In fact, they often did not listen to the prophets, but here they did. They responded to the preaching of the word of God because God's spirit worked through his word.

Do you here who are a Christian ever marvel that you love God's word? That's an incredible blessing. That's the result of the Spirit's work in your heart. If you love the Bible, if you want to read the Bible and get to know God as he has revealed himself to you in the Bible, that's the grace of God. Every time you open up your Bible to read it, do you know why you open it and perhaps your neighbor doesn't? The grace of God. Your desire to know God and to read his word in and of itself is a result of the grace of God.

We often sing, why was I made to hear your voice and enter while there's room when thousands make a wretched choice and rather starve than come? We might just tweak it a little bit in our context and say, why was I made to love your word, to love your Bible when thousands don't care about it? And the answer is God and his grace, his grace alone.

So after 16 years of spiritual lethargy, God's word was used in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5 to get these people back on track. But doesn't that apply to you, too, here this evening? Sometimes in your own life, don't you just need a dosage of the Word of God preached or the Word of God read to get you back on track? You're wandering astray, and what do you need, beloved? You need the reminders of the Word of God to reorient you.

Sometimes in your life, surely you think to yourself, I am not thinking correctly right now. As my pastor would say growing up, life without the word is absurd. And you felt that because you've gone days where you didn't read the Bible. And suddenly you're not thinking right anymore. You're not living right anymore. And when we stray from the word of God, we need a dosage like they did. to wake us up of his truth.

Recall Dr. Currid, y'all may know him, some of y'all surely do, John Currid. One time when I was in seminary, he was teaching this class and he said that there are times where he'll sit and he'll watch the news with his wife and then he'll get so annoyed with what he's seeing on television that he'll stand up and he'll walk away. And his wife will say, where are you going? And he'll say, I'm going to read my Bible. He is a reformed seminary professor and he's well seasoned in life.

And what he essentially is saying is, I need to be reminded of who's on the throne. I need to be reminded of who the king is because I'm watching the news and it's driving me crazy because the world's insane. And I need to know that God is the Lord and Lord and the King of Kings. I need a dosage of the Bible to get me back on track.

But I don't want us to overlook this fact that this was a 16 year slump. For 16 years they disobeyed God and didn't build the temple. And yet God came to them through his word and woke them up. And there may be someone here tonight, and certainly everyone here tonight has friends and family members, who for 16 years or more, you have thought to yourself, when is this backsliding, professing believer gonna wake up and start living like a Christian? Or when is this person who clearly is not a believer going to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved?

And this passage reminds you that God's Spirit can get that person back on track through His Word. For 16 years, and then in an instant, in just a couple of sermons, through Haggai and Zechariah, these people get back to work. Because God's Spirit worked through His Word. Do not underestimate the power of the Word. Ezekiel 37, he comes to a bunch of dry bones, and the Spirit of God works through the Word to raise them from the dead. That same Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, works through His Word today too.

You perhaps have unbelieving friends or family members, and what they need ultimately is not our eloquence or yours. They don't need our eloquence. What they need is the simple but yet powerful Word of God and the Spirit working through it. So you speak to them. As God permits and grants you opportunity, you speak to them the Word of God. That's what you speak to your unbelieving friends, your backsliding neighbors. Many of y'all will know A.W. Pink.

He was a minister in the first half of the 20th century. And we think of him, perhaps if you do know him at all, we think of him as being this mighty man of God. And that's a good way to remember him. However, he wasn't always a Christian. He grew up in a Christian home, but he got involved in the occult. And he spent several years very invested in the occult. And he was now in his early 20s. He was still living at home. His Christian parents were brokenhearted as he continued to rise up the ranks in the occult.

But when he would come home at night to his parents' house, his dad would stay awake and he would often say to him a Bible verse and goodnight. And so one day, Pink comes home, Arthur Pink, he comes home, his dad's there to say goodnight and say a Bible verse to him and he's trying to sneak upstairs so that he won't have to hear his dad. And his dad says to him, there is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death, Proverbs 14, 12.

Pink gets up into his room. He's going to prepare this message for an occult meeting coming up, very important message he's going to deliver. But every time he tries to sit to write, he just can't get those words out of his head. There's a way that seems right to a man. There's a way that seems right to a man. And he just can't get it out of his head. He's so distracted, he can't work on his message. Well, Pink ends up being converted in a very tangible way. He does keep his meeting at the occult later that week and he attends, but instead of delivering the message he had originally planned, he preaches the gospel.

Now I'm not telling you that every time we speak the word of God to a friend, a neighbor, somebody who's backsliding, an unbeliever, that's going to be the effect. But I am telling you that sometimes it is the effect. I am telling you that God can do that through his word. And so speak that word to those around you, but also to your own life, it is true too, isn't it? In your own life, I am sure that you have sins. Every Christian, even the repenting, believing Christian has the remaining sin, Romans 7. And so in your life, the spirit of God can work through his word to chisel

away that remaining sin, to grow you in grace and in holiness. And you sit underneath the word, not above it. And that's how the spirit of God works. And that's what verse one says. They're under the word. It's beautiful.

Secondly, though, this evening, let us see God is with his people in his providence, in his providence. And this is chapter five, verse three, all the way through chapter six, verse 15. As you come to chapter 5 verses 3 and 4, you begin to see God's providence unfolding there. In chapter 5 verses 3 through 5, you see this man named Tattenai. He's a Persian appointed governor over the people who live beyond the river. So he's a governor for Persia over the Jerusalem territory.

And Tattenai and his associates come and ask a few questions of God's people. Who gave you the decree to build this house? And what are the names of your leaders? And Tattenai and his associates ask these questions because they want to send a report back to King Darius and see if he approves of this building project to make sure that what they're doing is above board. But notice how God's people respond after they get these questions.

They just keep on building, verse five. But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews. And they did not stop until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it. So they just keep on building. And the reason they keep on building is because the eye of their God was on them, and it was on them because they were his church.

They were the assembly of God. God has a vested special interest in his church, and so he keeps his eye on them. He is going to keep his covenant of grace. He is going to keep his promises to bring forth a seed to crush the head of the serpent. So his eye is on them because he loves his bride, he loves his church. Now in Zechariah chapter two, verse eight, and in several other passages in the Bible, we read that the church, the people of God, are the apple of God's eye.

I've always loved that imagery because if you think of your pupil, the apple of your eye, it is something that you are always guarding and protecting. You have a little shield that God has built for you called your eyelid. And whenever something tries to touch it, whether you even think about it, you just close your eyes. You're always protecting it because it's dear to you. So God is saying that his church is the apple of his eye. It's dear to him. He cares about his church. He protects his church.

So when you come to Ezra 5.5 and you read that God's eye was on them, God's eye is on them in some ways because they are the apple of his eye, because they are precious to him, so he sets his gaze upon them.

Now in chapter five, verses six through 17, Tattenai, the Persian appointed governor, together with his associates, send their report to King Darius. And in this letter to Darius, Tattenai reports what the Jewish leaders told him. And the Jewish leaders tell him lots of different things. The Jewish leaders tell Tattenai that the reason they're in this mess is because their forefathers disobeyed God, they angered God. And so God raised up Babylon to come and destroy them and to destroy their temple. But they also say to him that Our authority to do this, from a human perspective that is, came from Cyrus. Cyrus, a previous king, they say, made a decree that they could rebuild the temple. Go back and rebuild the temple.

And we know that that's true. We already read about that decree back in chapter one. That's when Cyrus made that decree. That's the decree that they're referencing here. But Tot and I says, well, they say that there was this decree made by King Cyrus. Darius, if you would please, search the royal archives and see if you can find this supposed decree and see what it says. Did Cyrus really make this decree? And if he did, did it really say what the Jewish leaders are saying that it said? So you move to chapter 6 verses 1 through 5 and there you find Darius searching for that decree. And lo and behold, he finds it. And guess what? It says exactly what the Jewish people said that it said. It talks about how they are to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God.

But what's fascinating in chapter six, verses six through 12, which is the portion of Darius's response. So Darius has received this suggestion for Tatanai to search for the decree of Cyrus. He finds it, and now he's sending a report back in chapter six, verses six through 12. He's sending a report back to Tatanai about what he wants him to do. So what does Darius want Tatanai to do for the Jewish people? Does he want to have them stop the work? What's he going to do?

Well, he essentially says, you need to promote the work. You need to pay for the work, and if you don't promote the work and pay for the work, punishment by death. We're going to take the pillars out of your house and impale you on them. So he actually goes beyond what Cyrus had already declared. Cyrus, if you'll remember from back in chapter 1, did declare that they would help pay for the work. But there was no threat of death by impalement from a pole from your own house if you disobeyed. But that's exactly what he says to do. God is going above and beyond what he had already done through Cyrus. He's going above and beyond that now through Darius. Now Dale Ralph Davis captures this well, he calls this vintage Yahweh, vintage Yahweh.

Because you would never have expected Darius to respond this way, to be so zealous to make sure the Jewish people get to build their house. And so why, why does Darius respond this way? Why does he do this? Why does Darius do this? I actually think that's not quite the right question. The question you should ask is, why does God do this?

Because ultimately it is God who is working through Darius to accomplish his purpose. He is the one who's in ultimate control. And all we can say to that question is, God has providential control over whatsoever comes to pass. And he often does far more than we could ask or imagine or think. He has special providential care for his people. Darius did not respond this way because he was kind. Darius responded this way because God was in control of whatsoever comes to pass. And if you think that that's imposing anything upon the text, look at chapter six, verse 14. This is exactly what it says.

And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Edo." And then this, they finished their building by decree of the God of Israel. and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes, king of Persia. God is decreeing their decrees. God is the one who is setting in order the very things that Darius and Cyrus and Artaxerxes and others were doing.

It's because of all of this that they are able to ultimately, in verse 15, complete the house of the Lord. In the sixth year, I believe it is, of King Darius's reign. Is that correct? And the house was finished on the third day of the month of Adder in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. So it's in the sixth year that they complete it.

And there's some significance there to the date. They completed it in 516 BC, which is exactly 70 years after they had been brought captive by the Babylonians, because they were brought captive in 586 BC. So it's been 70 years. Jeremiah said it would be 70 years. There's some things here that are significant about God's perfect working out of exactly what he said he was going to do. But ultimately, why did they finish building the house?

And it's for the two things we've been seeing in our text. It is because of God's word and God's providence. And both of those are brought together in verse 14, because notice it says, First, it's because of the word, and second, it's because of God's providential care for them. You see that in verse 14 again, the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai. So there's the word, the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo. But then it's also through God's decree, God's providence, they finished their building by decree of the God of Israel.

So what then is the takeaway? or then as a takeaway for God's people today. Well, God is with you through his word and in his providence. That's what the text is teaching us. He's with us through his word and in his providence. And particularly harping on this second point, his providence, perhaps this little proverb could be of some value to you.

There's a little saying that I came up with when I used to work in lawn care and I would be weeding and I don't like the heat because it's terrible. And so even though it was very painful, I would wear shorts while I was weeding for 40 hours a week and sticks would smash into my legs all day. It was quite painful. But in God's kindness, I was slowly over many years sanctified to try to have a better attitude when a stick would smash into my leg.

And so I would tell myself, Where I am, their God has put me. Where you are, their God has put you. Where you are, their God has put you." And I use that to try to restrain myself from losing my temper. But the point is, where you are, their God has put you.

So that doesn't make the pain go away, that doesn't mean all of a sudden sorrow isn't sorrowful and hardship isn't hard, but it's a reminder that you can tell yourself if it's of help to you, where I am, their God has put me. Wherever you are in life, whatever that valley is of darkness, and no matter how dark that valley really is, you are there because God has put you there and he knows what he is doing.

Every Christian needs these reminders. Every Christian needs to be reminded of the providential control of God over whatsoever comes to pass. Parents need it as they raise children and it's difficult and they lose, they can become overwhelmed and sad because raising children's hard or the elderly Christian needs it because aging is difficult and children need it because being a child can come with its fair share of difficulties. We all need this truth of God's providential control and sovereignty over whatsoever comes to pass.

And ultimately, We see that come to its conclusion, its climax in the cross, where Jesus Christ came and suffered for our sins in accordance with the will of his heavenly father. And of course, his own voluntary condescension. But God is in control. He loves to save and sanctify his people. And he often will use his word and his providence, not just in Ezra 5 and 6, but in Yazoo City in 2026.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do thank you and praise you that you work in our lives through your word and in your providence. And oh God, we do pray that we would therefore love your word and love your providence even though it be hard. Though the grief seem off so strong, we pray that you would grant us the grace to see that you indeed are in control of that grief and you will not let harm come to us any further than you have ordained it in your wisdom. Oh God, I do pray that you would grow us in trust and in love for you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.