

God's at Work in Ordinary People

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[0 : 0 0] conquered and carried off into exile because of their sins but now they have been brought back so we've got our drawing there first they were conquered by the Babylonians and that's the red bit there and we remember the stories about Nebuchadnezzar and the exile they left in three waves the nobles and the treasurers and Jerusalem all spoken about in Daniel but then the Babylonians were conquered by the blue guys and the blue guys there are the Persians and they had three kings that are dealt with in the book of Ezra nearby and the exiles returned in three ways first in Zerubbabel and that's what we've been looking at and we'll be finishing looking at this evening and then Ezra and nearby and all three of these set about getting the people to worship God and at the same time at the bottom we've got these other prophets Zechariah Haggai Zechariah Esther and Malachi that were written and in the Hebrew Old Testament the book of Ezra and Nehemiah would have been one book and it was right at the end of their bible and they were looking forward with this great hope looking forward to a great and glorious king who will bring God's people into his presence but this king was going to end up looking very different to what they expected and the reality that they lived in was that their world was very confusing they were still oppressed they were still under Persian rule they didn't have autonomy and so everything was very tough and tricky for them and just by a way of structure last week Robbie took us through chapter three and we saw there that everything's awesome and we saw other people worshiped and then in chapter four uh-oh here come the haters the people stopped the work and they downed tools and then in chapter five what we're going to see is tonight the people get back to work as they hear God's word and we see the power of God's word and then in chapter six we're going to celebrate how he's the king God behind the seeds brings his people to joyful worship so chapter three everything's awesome chapter four uh-oh chapter five back to work and chapter six he's the king and we're going to try and draw out two applications tonight and the first is be diligent in the muck and ordinariness of life and the second application is going to be be faithful in building God's temple and uh last week we ended with that amazing picture of God's people at worship that Robbie painted for us and how they sung praises to God but by chapter five something has gone wrong the people are no longer at worship they have given up on building the temple they've downed tools that and building that temple the great symbol of God's presence with them and so the question naturally is what's happened between chapter three and chapter five to cause this and the answer is chapter four well what happens in chapter four is that

God's people have met opposition they've been they've met with discouragement from those around them and they've been opposed by the authorities it was as if the people around them were saying you don't really believe all that Jesus bunk do you you need to give up on that Jesus stuff and get ahead and then you'll succeed in your career and at life or it was as if the authorities were saying if you preach Christ and his Christian ethics then we're going to lock you up and so what did the people do they stopped building the temple and they tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the midst of bad and hard times and I wonder how you would have reacted then how might you react today maybe you might turn down speaking about Christ maybe you might concentrate on your career a bit more maybe you might try and get the house sorted so you can be as comfortable as possible in the midst of hard times all while bemoaning how hard it is for Christians today and so what does God do in the response to this chapter 5 we see he sends them a prophet someone to speak to them on his behalf and not just one he sends them two prophets Haggai and Zechariah and a prophet there is going to remind them of the covenant that he is their God and they are his people and so we read there in chapter 5 verse 1 of Israel now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet a descendant of Ido prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them and I'm just going to paraphrase for you quite quickly what what it was that Haggai said to them what the heck are you doing why are you doing up your kitchens when the temple is in Rome why have you stopped building the temple the presence the symbol of God's presence with you and the good news is to their credit the people heard the word of God and they obeyed it and they got back to work and so in verse 2 we read then Zerubbabel son of Shealtel and Joshua son of Josedach set to work to rebuild the house of

God in Israel and the prophets of God were with them supporting them well last yesterday I had the great joy of moving into a house that I bought my first place ever and last night at about 10 o'clock I found myself just messing around and pulling off wallpaper because I could and I had the thought what are you doing you're an absolute lunatic why are you pulling down wallpaper you should be getting to bed getting ready for tomorrow it's church tomorrow you should be doing a bit more prep on your sermon well I wonder if maybe this scenario sounds familiar to you any of us you you're once a very keen as a Christian you went to all the kids holiday clubs when you went to university you on the CU exec you finished university and you joined a good job and you got stuck into the kids work there you start a job but then something happens you start encountering opposition at work maybe your colleagues start mocking you maybe your boss starts making asides about how being a Christian is holding you back and if you cut some corners you'd be getting on a bit better and the temptation there is to draw back from living for Jesus and speaking about Jesus and obviously just to make the caveat there some of us are perhaps more outspoken than others so some of us might need to reign back from speaking more outspokenly but others of us might need to be encouraged to be braver in living for Jesus and speaking for Jesus well back to our story and like any building work they start the building work and it's not very long before the town planner gets involved so we read Ezra chapter 5 verse 3 and 4 at that time Tash and I the governor of Trans Euphrates and Sheptah Boz and I and the associates went to them and asked them who authorized you to rebuild the temple and to finish it and so far we've seen God at work through his word and now we're going to see God at work behind the scenes through his all-seeing eye we've got that wonderful verse verse 5 but the eye of God was watching over the elders of the Jews and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received so the people continued building the building work even though even while the town planners investigations were being made just to flag up a couple of details in the passage there the first thing is in this letter that we skimmed over we didn't get time to read but the people acknowledge that it's been their sinfulness that has taken them into exile verse 12 but then in verse 8 we notice the diligence with which they did the work of rebuilding the temple Tatanai says the work has been carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction and then the last thing to notice there is that the temple they are building and working on was built by a great king so verse 11 we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago one that a great king of Israel built and finished and because the eye of God is on them gods and gods at work behind the scenes to bring his people to worship the authorities the authorities make the investigation and they are allowed to continue in the rebuilding work but not only do they get permission the pagan king Darius does goes even further than that he gives them everything that had been taken away from the temple originally and what's more he agrees to pay for the work of rebuilding the temple and for all the sacrifices that accompanied correct worship of God and so the cost so we read in chapter 6 verses 4 the end of verse 4

and verse 5 the cost are to be paid by the royal treasury also gold silver articles of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem and are to be deposited in the house of God and then verse 8 and 10 we read how Darius says moreover I hereby decree that you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of the house of God their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury whatever is needed must be given to them daily without fail so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons and it's a complete reversal of where the people were in chapter 4 and it's absolutely amazing and it's all come about because of the hand of God working behind the scenes and you see when the people gave up the work life was very hard in chapter 4 and they thought their way to make it easy easier was for them to give up in the building of the temple the symbol of God's presence with them but what they discovered in reality was the exact opposite rather than making things easier it actually make things harder so listen to a Haggai couple of verses I'll just read it for us from Haggai chapter 1 now this is what the Lord Almighty says give careful thought to your ways you have planted much but you have harvested little you eat but never have enough you drink but you never have your fill you put on clothes but you're not warm you earn wages only for them to in a purse with holes in it but here they've heard the word of the Lord and they've gone back to work and they have been astoundingly blessed and I wonder if this is perhaps true for us where do we go and what do we do when things get hard in life when we're under pressure and Robbie last week he painted that wonderful picture of us of how very often when we're faced with pressure we are slow to pray but I wonder if there are other ways where we might be tempted to give up on following

Jesus and of cultivating his presence with us when life is hard and I wonder if we've learned the hard lesson that rather than making things better neglecting Jesus in the tough times actually makes things worse but the wisdom of Ezra says if you trust God obey his word put it into action and God will do amazing things for you God will bless you and bring you to worship even in the ordinary sufferings and the muck of life and the great irony in the story here is that although the Israelites found it tough to follow God the pagan king Darius gets it exactly right just scan down at verse 12 of chapter 6 look what he says may God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who lifts the hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem what's he saying God's got a plan he wants to live with his people and he's in charge he can do whatever you want with kings rulers and people joyfully we get to the end of the story and the story ends with the people of God being brought to temple brought to worship the temple is completed and they celebrate the first Passover back in the land since returning from Babylon they remember how they've been rescued from Egypt and they remember how they've been rescued from Babylon and so chapter ends with the people listening to the word of God and God powerfully working to bring his people his purposes about in the most unusual circumstances and so at verse 14 we read so the elders of the Jews continue to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai and the prophets and Zechariah and decided a descendant of they finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus

[14 : 41] Darius and now to Xerxes kings of Persia and as the people worship God in verse 16 so God fills them with joy verse 22 goes on for seven days they celebrated with joy the festival of unleavened bread because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work of the house of God the God of Israel and so we see God's hand has worked powerfully to bring about his people to worship him so just to recap there in chapter 5 we see the people go back to work and we see how they listen to God's word and put it into practice in chapter 6 we see how God is the king he's the God behind the scenes who brings his people to joyful worship well I wonder what we are to make of all this and I think there's two main lines of application that we should perhaps take from this passage and the first one is be diligent in the muck and ordinariness of life but when prepping this passage this week I think Simon very astutely made the point that basically chapter 3 to 6 is just a long planning dispute and you get these long letters listed in it it is incredibly ordinary but in this ordinariness we see God working and I wonder if you're a keen listener if you noticed what the repeating word is in this section diligence time and again diligence and I think the first application is that Ezra is setting the scene for us of the coming of a great king king Jesus who's going to come into a world that is hostile even though he is the rightful ruler of it and he is going to look very different from what you might expect it's not going to be fireworks straight off the cuff but it's rather going to be more hurry up and wait and that's a confusing and discouraging to us and so what Ezra is saying is do that temple building work with diligence to the best of your ability even though life is confusing and even though very often it seems ordinary and messy and the second application I think is this be faithful in building God's temple you see when if you've read Haggai and Zechariah they describe the temple that the people are to build they describe it as so much more than bricks and mortar they describe it in kind of an end times bigger than the world a new creation a temple that fills the world with God at the middle of it and so the word that Haggai spoke to the people then is really a word for us today we have a great king in Jesus he is building a living temple filled with people who know him and love him and love him and of which he is at the center and this temple is going to be glorious and it's going to fill the new creation and it's going to be bigger and better than anything we could ever imagine and it's a temple that we've been asked to help with the building with in teaching some kids on Sunday clubs and speaking to our friends and folk at the shops and praying for kids praying for people praying for our friends that they might come and know Jesus and trying to obey

God's word in every area of life and the challenge for us is and the challenge of Ezra is in a confusing world filled with opposite opposition and discouragements will we be faithful in building God's temple will we be committed to working at that diligently don't give up on building that heavenly temple don't retreat into being comfortable in this world and remodeling your kitchen or being safe and happy in g11 or wherever it is and all the things that the people around us are living for rather live for that heavenly temple to come rather live for that heavenly world to come let's pray as we close father we thank you and that the saints back in the past were faithful in obeying your word in setting about doing diligently the work that you'd set for them to do we pray that we would hear that word today we pray that we would be committed and faithful and diligent in working in building that great heavenly temple that is to come in Jesus name amen how you plan and your hope are reaching out to you what are you doing how you plan to see you how you plan to see you you you you you you you you it