

Building the Kingdom of Christ as a Prophetic Minority

Free to Build

Ezra 4-6

If you have your bibles, you can go to Ezra chapter 4. We're just going to try to do three chapters this morning, Ezra chapters 4, 5, and 6. You probably did some things in your life that you were very grateful to get to do. There was one time in my life several years ago when we were in Nicaragua, and I got to do something that I was just very grateful to God to get to be a part of. We were doing ministry and we got word there was a village in Nicaragua that didn't have running water. We were actually going to get to go to this village and put water pipes in so that an entire village could have running water. We got really excited about this. The place was called The Promised Land. We loaded up, went to The Promised Land, got in our trucks and buses with water pipes. We get to the spot where we are about to put water into this community, and we noticed that all of the people who lived in the community had already done all of the ground work. They had dug trenches in front of their houses to lay the water pipes. So here we are, we come, dad was there as well as several others of us, and we are all digging to try to get to the main water source so that we could lay pipes, hook it all up, and all of these people could have water. About the time we started digging, we're excited, we're celebrating, we're so pumped to get to do this, all of a sudden, a vehicle with lights on it showed up, and a government official stepped out. It was a lady who looked like she meant business. She came and immediately shut the program down. I couldn't understand her Spanish, but I could tell by the way she was talking that she was not very happy. The translator said we've got to go. We're not supposed to be here. We don't have the proper permits. We're not allowed to do such a thing. As she's talking and as I'm hearing the translators tell us we've got to get out of here because

we don't need to be in this place, I'm looking at the faces of these people. Some of these people walk over a mile to get a bucket of water, put it on their head, and walk back to their house to wash and cook with. I'm thinking if we can install these pipes, it's going to make a world of difference. Not only that, I'm also thinking that we have a planned service that night and we're going to try to connect all of this water to the gospel and how what they really need is Living Water. Now, there's a government official who says huh uh; you cannot do this. If you proceed, you will be arrested, and I don't want to spend a night in jail in Nicaragua. So we are panicking, what do we do. Immediately dad says let's pray. We all circle around and start praying. We know what God wants us to do, there's a government official who says you can't do this under any circumstance, and so we begin to pray. "God, we know you want us to do this. We feel certain you want us to do this. You love these people. You want them to have water. You want them to know the gospel. We are begging you please make a way for this to carry on." As an answer to our prayer, God sent the mommas. All of a sudden, all of these mommas from the village got word that there was a government official that was about to keep them from getting water. I don't speak in Spanish, but I could tell that the mommas had something to say about this. They gathered around this government official, and all of a sudden, she was very outnumbered. There were about thirty angry moms and this government official who soon backed down. Before we knew it, we had the correct permits and were allowed to put the water into the village. I was praising God! But for a moment there, we didn't know how this thing was going to go. We have a task from the Lord, something God wants us to do, but then we also have the reality that the government is saying you cannot do this under any circumstance.

Our question this morning is going to be just that. What do we do when officials, perhaps the government, or outside pressure says you must stop building the Kingdom of Christ. You must be quiet. You have to stop the work that you're doing. What do we do as believers in Jesus Christ? We are going to get some insight from our brothers and sisters back in the time of Ezra because they had this mission, and that was to rebuild the temple. God had given it to them, but all of a sudden, they had opposition. All of a

sudden, they have a government that says you cannot build that temple under any circumstance. So what do you do when you're the people of God and you're trying to carry out the plans of God, but the government you live under does not allow such a thing to happen? How do you move forward? What do you do? You've got to think about Israel. Israel was once a religious majority. They had lands, kings, and armies. They would conquer. They had might and power, and they were able, under Solomon, to build a great temple because they were in control. They were the rulers. No one was telling them what to do. But now in Ezra, things have changed. They're no longer a religious majority. They're no longer in power. They're no longer the ones in control; instead, they are this little religious minority. They are under a new king. They are under the laws of the land. They're not in control; so how do they go about living their lives as a minority that doesn't have power and control? How do they live out what God has told them to do in that situation? I don't know if you feel this as believers, but there was once a time, even in our own country, where we considered ourselves to be the moral majority. We had power and influence, and we could wield that power and influence to really get things done, but the case is no longer. We no longer have as much power as we once did; instead, we find ourselves in what Dr. Moore would call the prophetic minority. We're a lot smaller. What do we do as the prophetic minority? Here's what we're going to say we're going to do. We're going to build the kingdom of Christ as a prophetic minority. What does that mean? It means we don't build the kingdom with our power, but through the Word of our God, just like the people in Ezra do. We are going to read Ezra chapter 5:1-2 because that's going to be the meat of our text.

Scripture

"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. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them."

(Prayer)

Father God, we pray that we would be a people that as we face opposition, as we face this current climate where we feel like retreating, we feel like hiding, maybe in our houses and churches, God, we have a command to build the kingdom. We have a command to go and make disciples of all nations. I pray that as we somewhat lose our power that we don't forget where our power comes from. It's not in our numbers, but it's in the Word of God. Help us to know that we have Your Word, Your eyes, and Your presence. Let us build as those in Ezra built. They built through the prophets. We pray this in Jesus good name, amen.

So what exactly is going on? Why in chapter 5 do the prophets show up? Usually when the prophets show up, there has been a problem. They're not doing what they should do. Something has happened usually when the prophets show up. We're going to have to go back a little bit and get some of the backstory. They've been told to build the temple of God. We've been going through Ezra as a church, so if you haven't been with us, you can go back and listen to those sermons. But we had this mandate. They are from exile, back in their land, and now they're building the temple under God's instruction. We find they are met with opposition. So in verse 1 of chapter 4, here is what we see, *"Now when the adversaries..."* I love how it says that. "Now when the adversaries..." the writer wants us to get who these people are. It's not like hey, there are some people that are coming. No, these are the adversaries; these are the bad guys. You can almost hear the Star Wars bad guy music. You almost feel Darth Vader mask, cape on; these are the bad guys. These are not one of us. So what do these adversaries do? Chapter 4 continues, *"Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here.' But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, 'You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we*

alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build 5 and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."

So what's going on? Israel is supposed to build this temple, but all of a sudden, they have these people that come and say hey, can we help? This looks like a good project. Can we help you build the temple? The writer has already given us a clue that these people don't have pure motives. They're the adversaries. They're the villains of our story. They're not the good guys; they're the bad guys. It kind of seems like Zerubbabel and the Jews are just mean. Here's the community wanting to come and help build the temple, but they are like, no, we don't want your help. We want all the glory for ourselves. We're going to build our own temple. It sounds like the Jewish people are not being very inclusive. It seems like they are just saying no. We don't care about you. We don't love you. Get away from us. What do the adversaries say to Zerubbabel and the rest of the people? They say hey, we worship God just like you do. We've been worshipping for a while. To understand exactly what they are saying, you have to go back to 2 Kings 17, because we get a picture of what these people meant by we worship the Lord. When they say they worship the Lord, they took YHWH and adding Him to all of the gods they have. These people are worshipping every god under the sun, and they add YHWH also. So they are saying hey, people of God, we also worship YHWH; we're on His team too. But they meant we worship Him along with all of our other gods. Here's the reality. God is not pleased when we bring Him into the worship as we worship all of the other gods and add Him also. The Bible is very clear that if you're going to worship God, you have to worship Him only. You only can worship the Lord God. So here, we have a pagan people who are worshipping all sorts of gods, and saying we want to put our lot in with you. We also worship YHWH like you do.

So here is the first real temptation of these people. They were tempted to compromise the worship of God. They were tempted to compromise. It would be so much easier to just say ok. We'll agree. Why don't you come

in? Everything would have been civil. They probably wouldn't have opposition. They could have just said yes. Let's just agree that you can worship YHWH along with all the other gods, and that's perfectly fine. Israel could have compromised and not stood true to who they knew God was, a God who demanded to be worshipped only. You can't worship many gods, and YHWH. You can only worship YHWH because He is the only God. So they protected this idea where they weren't allowing compromise to come in. they weren't allowing the world to come and worship YHWH in a way that He does not approve of. Compromise is always easier.

Even for us as believers living in our current culture, compromise would be so easy for us. Imagine if we just all left and put that coexist bumper sticker on our cars. We say here's the reality. We've kind of had it wrong. We've said Jesus is the truth, the life, and the way, but we want to back up just a little bit and say Jesus is a way, and He's sort of a truth, and we've got Jesus, but what you have is just as equally valid. So let's just all get along. Let's all just agree that we can worship however we want, wherever we want. We're all on the same team. We're all going to get to Heaven eventually, so let's just agree as Christians that we don't have the truth; we just have a truth. If we started to talk like that, culture would love us a lot more. If we started saying we have a morality that we like, but it in no one is imposed on you. There's not set morality that everyone has to live under; we've got our way, you've got yours, so let's just all get along. If we would say that, culture would love the church because the church would have no threat whatsoever on culture's way of life.

The same was true in their day. If they had said sure, come build the temple with us. Go worship your gods. Go sacrifice your children and also come to the temple; let's just all get along. Let's all agree that everyone is right. It would have been very easy and they probably wouldn't have had opposition in building the temple. But here are a people that realized they couldn't compromise. If you're going to worship YHWH, you have to worship Him only. If you're going to be the people of God, you have to admit that YHWH is the only true God. So Zerubbabel and the people say no, we can't allow you to do this. We're going to build the temple of God on our own. So what happens? The people get angry. The people start to

bring opposition. They start to bribe the authorities, and they start to make the work very frustrating. They start bringing rules and obligations, and they really slow the building of the temple. So the first thing we see in opposition is the building of the temple is slowed because they don't allow compromise to happen. It's slowing down. It's taking a lot longer than it could if they just said hey, everybody is on the same team; let's just all do the same thing. In the midst of that, as you're reading, what the writer does who is explaining these events to a people that have already lived past these events. So the people who are reading Ezra's account are the people that have a temple and have a wall. They've already been through these events, now the writer is reflecting back to tell them here is what happened; here is what God was doing.

Then the writer puts a little parentheses and says here is the situation. There is opposition. The work is slowing. Now I'm going to bring two other stories just to remind you of two other times that similar things happened. If you look in verse 6, he is going to say remember Esther. It says, "*And in the reign of Ahasuerus*" (which is Xerxes, the name we more commonly call him) *in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.*" So he brings this story in. Hey, remember Xerxes. Do you remember what happened there? Do you remember that guy named Haman who brought an accusation against all the Jews they should be killed? There was a great power who was going to wipe out all the Jewish people. Guess what? You are still here. All the Jewish people are still here. How did that happen? It would automatically thought about Esther, and how God raised her up to be the queen. Esther, who would marry Xerxes and through this marriage, she would be able to save her people. He's saying opposition has been happening all throughout the story of God. It happened even in Esther's day, but remembers the greatest super power in the world sought to kill God's people, and God raised up a girl named Esther to save all the people. Do you remember that?

Then he goes to another parentheses. He says in verse 7, "*In the days of Artaxerxes.*" When did Artaxerxes rule and reign? This was during the days of Nehemiah. So he goes forward. Do you remember Nehemiah's day?

Here's what happened in his day. The work was slowed. There were these letters that came to the king, Artaxerxes. So the people were seeing what was happening and they wrote letters to try to stop the building of the wall. Notice some of the things they said, *"They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. Now be it known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired."* Here's this accusation...King Artaxerxes, if you let Nehemiah finish this wall, if you let God's people do, what they want to do it's going to hurt the kingdom. We've got to shut this down. A lot of people say that about the church. If we allow the church to flourish, if we allow the church to have the microphone, if we allow the church to have influence, it's actually going to hurt the culture. It's going to hurt people because the message of the church is damaging to individuals. We have the same accusation against us. If the gospel flourishes, it's actually going to be detrimental to our culture and to our country. That's what some would accuse us of.

It was the same thing in the days of Nehemiah. If Jerusalem is strong, then the kingdom falls away. In a lot of ways, that is true. You have the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God opposed to one another. But he is saying remember Nehemiah's day. What happens in Nehemiah's day is they actually sent a letter back. Artaxerxes agrees, and it says, *"...they went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease."* So what is he doing here? Opposition comes, they're trying to build the temple, opposition comes, but hold on just a second; I want to pull out for a moment. Let's talk about opposition for a minute, because I don't want you to think this is an isolated event. Opposition is the norm in the story of God. We often think if I have opposition, if somebody is making fun of me, or I'm suffering for the gospel, it's some anomaly. This has never happened to the people of God; there must be something wrong. I think the reason the writer inserts these two other stories is because he wants to remind the people that this is not an anomaly; this is normal. If you're going to do what God wants you to do, you're going to face opposition. But he says the opposition happened at the temple, but you're looking at a temple that got built. Do you remember

Esther's day? They were going to wipe out all of the Jews. Hey, you're still alive and you're one of the Jews. Hey, do you remember Nehemiah? They said stop with the wall. Guess what; Jerusalem has a wall. So what is he trying to say? There's always been opposition, but here is the reality. God always wins. God always wins. God conquers the power that be. In the moment, it seems like we are always on the losing side, we are always going to get defeated, but the reality is that in the bigger scope, God always wins and He always will.

So he adds these parentheses, closes the parentheses, and goes back into the story, back into the temple, and he says this in verse 24, "*Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*" That's a sad statement. The work of God stops. There is opposition, they have government officials telling them to quit, and so what do they do? They stop. What else can they do? They're not in control. There is a king who is telling us we can't do this. There are governors telling us we can't do this. I guess we need to just stop. If you look through the timetables, for fifteen years, they go back to their houses and just live their lives, and the temple lays unfinished. So opposition comes, they're building, doing what God wants, opposition comes, and what do they do? They just stop and go back to their lives. It's just hard. For some of you, life is hard. You have real opposition on trying to build the kingdom of God. We've been commanded to build a temple too. It's not a building; it's a people. We've been commanded to go and make disciples, but sometimes that hard. Sometimes opposition comes, and when it comes, often we just quit. We stop. We decide it's not worth it. I'm not going to push on because it's just too hard. This was Israel; it's just too hard, so we're just going to stop. We're going to go back to doing what we do. We're out of control. We can't control what the laws are. We have to obey the law, so we're just going to go back to our houses.

Then we have this beautiful transition in the book of Ezra. I love this transition. Remember in the beginning, "Now the adversaries." It's bad, like Darth Vader, it's not going to go well. Then in chapter 5, we have this, "*Now the prophets...*" I love that! "Now the adversaries..." "Now the

prophets." It's different music now; it's the good guy music! Different music, different score; these are the good guys. All of a sudden, something is about to happen. The prophets are here. For fifteen years, the people have stopped. They're afraid. They're back in their houses, and all of a sudden, the prophets show up. What happens when the prophets show up? Notice what it says in chapter 5:1, "*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.*" I love that little phrase, 'who was over them.' What did the people assume? Darius is over us. He is the king. He's got the laws. We have to do what Darius says, and the prophets are saying, ah, excuse me; Darius is not your leader. He is not over you supremely. Yes, you need to be in submission to the government as long as you can, but there is a higher authority. The God of Israel is over you, and when He commands you, He is who you follow. The God of Israel is over you. There's nobody else over you; the God of Israel is over you as His people. Notice what they said, "*Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*" All of a sudden, things changed. Everybody is in their house doing their own things, they're all submitting saying the government says we can't, so we can't. We're just going to go back and live our lives in our houses. We're going to privatize our faith, and then the prophets show up. They say hey, what are you doing? The prophets have a message. If you look at Haggai, they say you are in your houses and My house is left unfinished. There's a reason you aren't prospering. There's a reason things are going well for you. There's a reason you're not satisfied. It's because you aren't doing what I commanded you to do. I told you to build My house. I told you to build My temple, and you're not doing that.

So you have the prophets show up with a people that aren't obeying what God told them to do. I just want to read what Haggai actually says because you have Haggai and Zechariah showing up. Listen to what Haggai actually said to them in chapter 1:13, "Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message..." The Lord's message. Here's the Lord. The Lord is going to speak to His people, and here's the

message, "I am with you, declares the Lord." That's good! Here are a people that are afraid of Darius. They're afraid of the governors. They're afraid of the political system around them. They're afraid of the kingdom they find themselves in. Haggai steps in and says I have a word from God: Don't forget; He is with you. You are not on your own! Why are you afraid in your houses? Why are you afraid to go against the king? Why are you afraid to go against the governors? Don't you know that I am with you, the God of heaven and of earth, not just this small little plot, and I am with you, and I have commanded you. Notice what happens. Notice what God does through His Word, "And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God..." He used His Word to do what...to stir up the people. The people were in defeat. They couldn't take on the Persian Empire. They're little. They're a minority. They don't have power, officers, or elected officials. They are living in a land that's not technically theirs. They're living under a foreign authority, so they can only do so much. But God shows up and says hold on; I want to remind you of your authority. It's Me. I'm over you and I'm with you, and I've given you My command and My word to go and build My temple, so why aren't you doing it? In other words, get back to work. I know there is opposition, but I'll take care of that. Do you remember Esther? I took care of that. Do you remember Nehemiah? I took care of that. Right now, here is what's going to happen; you are going to see the completion because I'm with you, I'm for you, and you're under Me.

I think for us, we have to be reminded of the truth that we find in these Scriptures because we, too, are a church that is increasingly under opposition. We are increasingly becoming more and more the minority. Every time you have a poll like how many believers are in the United States, it's never on the rise; it's always in decline. Those polls are supposed to signal to us, hey, you're losing, so be quiet. Just go back in your churches, go back in your homes, worship and pray, but when you step out of those doors, you need to just be quiet because you've lost. It's over. We're increasingly finding, even in our culture, opposition against

faith, and opposition against the gospel. You can feel it. It's becoming more and more tangible, even in a cultural sense.

I was looking just yesterday at the ERLC. It's an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention. They look at political things and different things that go on in the culture. A few days ago, there was a football coach, named Joseph Kennedy, and at the end of every game, just by himself he would just kneel and pray at the field. By himself, didn't make a big fuss about it, he would just pray at the field, and he got fired for doing so...for praying as a football coach. That's illegal now. In South Carolina, (this is in the south) a church plant that used a public facility, a civic center, to have worship on Sundays, came under scrutiny, and now they got removed and say it's against the law for a church to meet in a civic center. You find it over and over again. You go to Supreme Court and you have all these rulings and cases that are coming against Christian liberty. Can a cake baker refuse to make a cake for a same sex wedding?

All of these issues are coming to a head, and we can find sometimes that it goes well, and sometimes it goes really bad. So the question is, what do we do in our current culture as we begin to find ourselves more and more in the minority, not in the majority? When we start losing power and we start losing this sense of where we walk out our doors, and now we're on the wrong side of history. Now we're against things. Now we're labeled as haters just for believing in the gospel, that Jesus loves sinners and wants to redeem them, but that word, sinners, is very offensive. We have the truth, not a truth. That's very offensive. We find ourselves in a culture that when you open your mouth at work, at home, or when you walk out the door and you want to live your faith in public, it gets opposition.

So what do you do under opposition? What do you do when you know if I say something that I might lose that friend, that position, or I might actually lose my job, or actually suffer what happens in those moments? This is exactly where the people of God found themselves in Ezra...what if we keep building? They had this thing called impalement where they would put these poles in the ground. They would sharpen one edge, and if you were against the king, they would pick you up, put you on the pole, and let you hang there to death. So all the people when they're building the

temple, knowing they don't really have approval, that's what they're thinking. We're probably going to get impaled. But God spoke. Do you know what we're going to do? We're going to trust Him. We're going to go with God. We're going to obey God, and we, as the church, must do the same. We have a mandate to go therefore and make disciples. Do you know what Jesus said right before that? All authority on heaven and earth is given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples. So as we find ourselves in a climate where opening our mouths about the gospel might have opposition, we're not sure we're allowed to, Jesus says you are. Just go for it because all authority is given to Me. when I say 'allowed to', you might find yourself like Paul, in prison for it. But even in prison, the gospel goes forth because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. Do you remember Esther, remember Nehemiah, remember Ezra? It's been like this ever since the beginning.

So what do the people do? They get back to work because the prophets told them to because the Word of God said go. So they go and they build. Notice how the story ends in chapter 5:3, "*At the same time Tattenai the governor... "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?"*" Hold on! What are you doing? Why are you guys getting back to work? It's been fifteen years. Did you get a new permit? Did the king say it was ok? I don't think so...who gave you authority? Notice what it says in verse 5, "*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...*" So there's a difference now. They don't stop. Before, opposition came, they just put down the hammers and left. This is hard; we're not going to do this. Now, opposition comes, they kept on working. Why did they keep on working? Because the eyes of God were on them. Why are the eyes of God on them? Because they have the prophetic word they're living under God's rule and reign, and they're listening to His Word and His authority. They are remember God is with us; we have His Word and His eyes, so I don't care what anybody says. We're going to keep doing what God says. The bottom line; we're going with God because our whole story tells us that God always wins. We don't want to be against Him because He's the God of heaven and of earth.

Notice what happens. This Tattenai is a governor, and he sends a letter to Darius, and he basically says look, they're building the temple, it's got huge stones, and everything is being built on it. They send this letter and he says here is what the Jews say about this building. They say we are servants of the God of heaven and earth. That's their claim. That's why they're building this. Then they also say they've got this decree from Cyrus, the king. So they're saying they have authority from God and from the king. Darius, I think you need to check this out, so Darius actually goes and finds the scroll from Cyrus that said yes they have permission to build on this new site. So Darius writes a letter back to Tattenai, the governor, and says in Ezra 6:6-7, "*Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your associates the governors who are in the province Beyond the River, keep away. Let the work on this house of God alone.*" Leave it alone! He actually says if anybody messes with it, they are going to be impaled. They're going to be killed even if you mess with it. Not only that, but he actually says I'm going to actually pay for it, I'm going to take all of the revenue, if they need anything, animals, stone, gold, silver, we are going to pay for the building of this temple. Can you imagine? Here is a people that stopped their work because the government said no, and all of a sudden, God says don't worry about the higher authority, just worry about what I said. You get back to work. And as they get back to work, God, through His providence and sovereignty, moves upon the king's heart to let them continue. Not only that, but He has them pay for it!

What does this tell us? This tells us that God is in control, and whether we have authority from the government, or no authority from the government, do you know what we do? We build the kingdom of God. We keep preaching the gospel. We keep sharing with others the goodness of God, not matter what it costs us. God says that's been the story from the very beginning. There's always opposition, but I've always been in Heaven, I've always been in control, so you just do what I have called you to do.

Notice what happens at the end. It says in verse 14, "*And the elders of the Jews built and prospered...*" How did they build and prosper? "*...through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah...*" How did they

build? Through the prophesying, through the prophecy, through the preached Word of God, they built the kingdom. In other words, we have this little minority, but they're a minority that is also prophetic. They have the Word of God, they're living their lives on the Word of God, they're standing on the Word of God and under the Word of God, and they have the very eyes of God. They're saying hey, we're going, and they're building and prospering according to the Word of God. It's their lifeblood. I love this; it says, "*They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia...*" I love that! How did they get this temple built? By decree of God. See, it looks like it was by decree of Cyrus. That's what it looks like it was. Cyrus said build, but there was a higher decree, and that decree was from God. Notice, God used both Cyrus and Darius, and also even Artaxerxes. How did he use Artaxerxes? All he did was oppose it. But God says through all of these different reigns, all these different kings, all these different circumstances, I was building My house.

Do you know what the people are doing now? They're celebrating. Here is what it says in verse 16, "*And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.*" Notice this in verse 18, "*...for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.*" Why are they celebrating? They're celebrating through a feast as it is written in the Book of Moses. They go right back to the Scriptures. We're living our lives on the Scriptures, we love the Scriptures, and we're obeying the Scriptures. According to the Book of Moses is referencing to the Old Testament, to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. The people are saying the Book of Moses is telling us to worship our God in this way, "*So they slaughter the Passover lamb for all the returning exiles...*" They do what the Scriptures command. They're slaughtering the Passover lamb, "*And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them...*" They are rejoicing in the sovereignty of God. God actually turned the kings in their favor, and they're rejoicing.

You have this big story, a people that were supposed to build a temple, and opposition came. The king says no, we've got to quit, and the prophets said who told you to quit. I don't think God did, and God has all authority. He has all power. He is in total control, so until He says stop, you keep building. All of a sudden, through the Word of God, they're stirred up and they keep going. They keep building. Opposition comes back, but they don't stop; they keep going, and God actually turns the heart of the king, Darius, to help out with the work. Now, they're just celebrating the sovereignty of their God. What is the lesson here? What we need to do is obey what God says and let Him take care of all the details. He is a God who can turn the hearts of kings and can change things. What we need to do is to build. That's the same message for us. What we need to do, no matter what opposition we face, no matter how hard it is, no matter how we get made fun of, no matter how our Facebook post gets interpreted, whatever happens to us, what do we do? We keep building the kingdom of God, not as a powerful majority saying look how many people we have; no as a prophetic minority saying we have the Word of God. We're going to stand on it, we're going to love it, and we're going to preach it because in the Word of God we have the good news of Jesus Christ.

I love how Haggai talks about in his prophecy, there is actually a greater temple coming. Here's what it says in Haggai chapter 1, "There is a greater glory coming." In chapter 2, it says, "Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not... The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts." What is the latter glory of the temple? It is when Jesus shows up on the scene and says you love this temple. In three days it will be destroyed and it will be raised again because the temple is Me. I am the place that God dwells. Jesus is that greater glory, and when He rose from the dead, He now calls us His temple. We are the place of His Spirit, where we are the place that God dwells. As His temple, what do we do? We build the temple, and the temple is not about wood or brick, it's about people. We go and share the gospel with everyone, everywhere, and when there's opposition, what do

we do? We keep preaching. When there's approval and prosperity? We keep preaching. No matter what the circumstances are, we keep preaching. There's another prophet, Haggai and Zechariah. What does Zechariah say? In Zechariah 9:9, he says there is a king coming. Not just a temple, not just we're a temple, there is also a king who is coming, and that king is Jesus Christ. That king is the one who has all authority on heaven and on earth. Our king has told us as His temple to get busy building His temple. No matter what opposition we face, we've got to believe God is sovereign and He is in control. We're going to let Him deal with all the details, and we are going to preach the gospel. The whole story of Scripture is God's kingdom has always been faced with opposition, but God always wins.