

THE TRAGEDY OF MISSED OPPORTUNITY

EZRA 1:5-2:70; COL 4:5

Text:

Introduction:

Life is a series of opportunities offered and choices faced. We are ever faced with decisions in every area of life, not the least of which is the spiritual. The Jews faced a choice in regard to an opportunity long ago, and the events of that incident are instructive for us now.

1. THE OPPORTUNITY THEY WERE OFFERED

A. The Decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-3)

Ezra 1:1-3

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 2Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in

Judah. 3Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

B. The Backing of Cyrus (Ezra 1:4-11)

Ezra 1:4-11

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

5Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. 6And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; 8Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. 9And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, 10Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a

second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

1. Gave them assurance and safety
2. Gave them a clear objective - rebuild the temple.
3. Gave them back the captive temple vessels.
4. Gave them other wealth
5. Gave them necessary means of transportation.
6. He asks others to help them.

C. The Guarantee of Success

1. It didn't mean that every single detail was perfectly worked out.
2. But it did mean that Cyrus had undertaken this as a personal project and thus had provided them with the guaranteed success.

D. The Challenging Opportunity

1. An opportunity for a captive people who were deeply tied to their homeland to return to that homeland.
2. With the aid of a captor.
3. Other examples of those who missed opportunities.
 - a. Those outside the ark in the flood.
 - b. Ten foolish virgins missed the bridegroom.

Matthew 7:23

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

2. THE REACTION TO THE OPPORTUNITY

- A. The people rose up to return - chapter 2 records this.
 1. It is obvious that only some exiles chose to return.

2. Notice the number recorded in Ezra 2:64 and the word some in Ezra 2:70.

Ezra 2:64

The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

Ezra 2:70

So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

3. Those who chose to return was just a small remnant.

B. Many people chose to remain in Babylon.

1. We do not know exactly how many remained, but the number was significant.
2. According the book of Esther there was enough Jews still there to destroy 75,000 of their enemies in only two days.
3. The fact that so many remained behind is truly strange in the light of the opportunity which faced them.

C. Why did they who stayed behind stay behind?

1. Some were comfortable there.
2. Some of them were too deeply involved with the life of Babylon to effectively break away.
3. Some were afraid it would cost them too much to leave.
4. Some were simple afraid of failure.
5. Some failed to recognize the enormity of the opportunity (history making events seldom look the same way twice.)

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ACCOUNT

A. Elements of human nature is involved

1. Men missed them for the same reasons they miss now.

B. Opportunities are still missed

1. Because of comfort
2. Because of worldliness
3. Because of the price it may cost us.

4. Because of fear of failure.

5. Because we may not even realize the opportunity before us.