

F.B. Meyer:

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. Ezra 1:1

THERE were many rays focused on this spot. In the first place, it had been definitely foretold by Jeremiah that the captivity would only last for seventy years. In the next place, Daniel, having learned from comparison of dates that the allotted time had nearly expired, had set himself to pray. Also, if Josephus be credited, the aged prophet had shown the young king the predictions of Isaiah in which his own name was clearly mentioned: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden: . . . he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts" (Isa. xlv. 1, 13).

God is the fountainhead and source of all spiritual blessing, and of all those great movements for the uplifting and enlightenment of mankind which have swept from time to time over the world. Go to Him when you want to reach the heart of kings, prophets, and people. Oh for the faith of Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, and other stalwart men of God, that through Him we may stir up the spirits of those who will not listen to our appeals! For the fervent prayer of a righteous man still availeth much. In prayer you can touch the spring of all the stirrings that the world needs.

But it is not enough for God to stir men, they must obey. It appears that only a comparatively small number of captive Jews obeyed the Divine stirring and came out of Babylon with the chief of the fathers. The call resounds for volunteers, but only a few respond; the inspiration breathes over us, but only some are susceptible to it. God works to will and to do, but only certain of the children of men work out what He works in. Whenever there is a Divine stirring abroad, let us rise up and go.

Till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummin. Ezra 2:63

IT must have been a great disappointment to these people who found themselves excluded from sharing as priests. Their names were not on the register, and so they had to wait until a properly qualified authority could adjudicate their case. The mere inference of reason was not enough; they needed the direct corroboration of the anointed priest with Urim and with Thummim.

So in our life it is not enough to rely on the inference of reason, or to allow our Christian standing to be determined by the evidence of a document. We must seek the direct witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit. How many Christians there are who have no experimental knowledge of what the Apostle meant when he said that the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are born again. They are always referring to inference, and the testimony of others; and therefore their consciousness varies, and they cannot eat of the holy bread of God. But when the Spirit of God speaks through the Urim and Thummim, and certifies that we are the children of God, giving us the white stone with its new name, and revealing Christ as dwelling within us, we have, immediately, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, and eat of the holy things.

Assurance is needful before we dare to appropriate the things which are freely given to us of God. Who of us is not able to verify this from his personal experience? We could not enjoy the Father's table, so long as there was a doubt about our sonship. But the assurance of faith may be ours as we wait in the presence of our great High Priest, speaking to us by the Holy Spirit, who witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God.

And they set the altar upon its bases. Ezra 3:3

THIS is the first thing that must be done before our temple's building or other undertakings can be crowned with success. It was well that the returned remnant made this their care; it augured well for their future. The new start that God Himself was giving would have been invalidated without that altar, which meant forgiveness for the past, and renewed consecration for the future.

Where is the altar in your life? Where the burnt sacrifice which betokens entire surrender of consecration? It cannot be too often insisted on, that since Christ died for all, all died in Him. We were not only saved by his death, we were included in it, but we must appropriate and identify ourselves with it. We must look up to God and say, "I desire that this death should be mine, to the world, to sin, to the flesh; make it so by the power of the Holy Ghost, that in Jesus I may be truly dead unto sin, but alive unto Thee."

Perhaps that last clause will help some souls most. Do not perpetually dwell on the dying side, but think much of the living side. Yield yourselves to receive God's life, which is the life of the Son of God in the surrendered

nature. Be very sensitive, and "quick of scent," to every movement and prompting of the Holy Spirit. Seek the things which are above, where Christ, your life, is seated. So you will find your energy drained away from self to Christ. Because He lives you will live also. A maple tree planted on a barren soil sent out one of its rootlets to a richer patch not far away, and ultimately all its roothold was there, till finally it was bodily moved and transferred from its first position to this more salubrious one.

Let us build with you. Ezra 4:2

AT first the world does its best to intimidate the Church; then it asks to be permitted to join with it. A most subtle temptation this. The child of God is greatly inclined to yield; the proposal seems so harmless, and so likely to be a means of blessing to the poor, hungry, weary world. But there is only one condition on which the world may be admitted; it must yield a true and humble submission to the cross, and be willing to give up all for Jesus — conditions which the world will not consider for a moment; and so its heart is filled with bitterness and gall, and it sets itself to hinder where it had professed willingness to help.

There are five things of which we are expressly bidden to beware — they are five phases of an unequal yoke: fellowship with unrighteousness; communion with darkness; concord with Belial; part with an unbeliever; agreement with idols. Let us beware of these things, and cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. There may seem to be great loss and needless sacrifice in dispensing with the help of Rehum and Shimshai; but if once we accepted their help, we should discover to our cost that they were adversaries still, and that their only desire was to retard our efforts.

We sometimes shrink from some great undertaking for God, and are inclined to accept the proffered aid of wealthy but ungodly men. But their help may be purchased by the cost of all that makes our work worth doing. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?"

"Yea, with one mouth, O world, though thou deniest

Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews. Ezra 5:5

IT was a delightful thought amid obloquy and opposition, like that which the Jews were at this moment encountering, to know that God was watching them with jealous care. We are reminded of the words of the Psalmist, quoted and authenticated by the Apostle Peter, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." And he goes on to argue, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" The Jews certainly found it so; for the efforts of their enemies to induce them to desist from their work of temple-building were rendered nugatory and ineffectual by the special care exercised over them by their Almighty Friend.

It may be that you will have to encounter hatred and opposition in doing God's work; but be sure not to look at these things, but steadfastly to Jesus. Must you not watch the foe? No; you could not make a greater mistake. You must look away to the face of Jesus, and you will find that He, like a good shepherd, is looking carefully and lovingly down on you, and watching the stealthy movements of your foe. Even when we are not directly conscious of that watchful eye, it still follows us. He knoweth the way that you take; and He is acquainted with the varied circumstances of your life. He has pledged Himself to be with you for ever; as Wordsworth once said of his beloved daughter Dora :

"Dear child, fair child, that walkest with me here,

Though thou appear untouched by solemn thought,

Thy nature is not therefore less divine;

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,

Thou worshippest at the temple's inner shrine,

God being with thee when thou knowest not."

The Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the King unto them. Ezra 6:22

**YES**, the hearts of men are in the hands of God, and He can turn them whither He will. There are many instances of this in Scripture. God gave Joseph favor with Pharaoh; Moses with the Princess; and Daniel with the King of Babylon. If certain matters can only be settled by reference to great men, kings or men of affairs, make the application; and then betake yourself to prayer, believing that as He inclined the heart of Darius, in the instance before us, so He can do as He will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of earth.

That unkind overseer, that vexatious member of your home's circle, that great man whose help you so greatly need – these are accessible to God's Spirit, if only you are intent on seeking his glory, and doing his will. But you must be able to show, as these Jews could, that your cause is identical with the cause of God, before you can claim, with unwavering faith, his interference on your behalf.

Then when the answer comes, let us thank Him, separating ourselves still further from the filthiness around us, so as to keep the feast with joy. Do not be afraid of joy; when God makes you joyful, do not think it necessary to restrain your songs or smiles, for fear that an equivalent of sorrow will presently be meted out as a make-weight. Our blessed Lord was desirous that his joy might be in his Disciples; it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God; it is with exceeding joy that He will present us faultless before the presence of his glory. "Thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

I was strengthened, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me. Ezra 7:28

IT was no small work that the good Ezra had undertaken. To lead a great expedition across the inhospitable desert; to convoy the sacred vessels and a large treasure of gold and silver; to set magistrates and judges over all that great district beyond the river – this was no slight task, and he needed strength. But in the simple language of his heart the good hand of his God was upon him, and that was sufficient to nerve and strengthen him.

It is wonderful what resistless might comes to the soul, when it realizes that it is treading the path and working out the career determined for it from all eternity by the Almighty. The thought imparts the same kind of impulse to the soul, as the touch of love or authority on the arm. We are reminded of the veteran, who, when charged by the Duke of Wellington to take a difficult position, turned to him and said, "I will go, sir; but first give me a grip of your conquering hand."

Think, soul, of what that hand is which holds the waters in its hollow, and spreads the curtains of the sky, and was nailed to the cross; that brought blessing with its touch to so many weary sufferers, and now holds the mysterious book, sealed with seven seals; that caught Peter, and lay lightly on the heads of the little babes. That hand is strengthening thee for a work for which by nature thou art unequal, but to which thou hast been evidently called. Go forward: it holds, guides, empowers thee. It can lead thee before kings, princes, and nobles, so that thou shalt not fear; it can preserve thee from dangers innumerable; it can shield thee from the fire of the enemy; and none, man or devil, can pluck you out of the Father's hand.

Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them at Jerusalem. Ezra 8:29

THEY were protected by God, whose presence with them across the wild desert made it needless to ask for an escort of soldiers; but they had to take care of the precious vessels of his house. It was a reciprocal trust. So it must be with us, as we are taught in 2 Tim. i. 12, 14. There are two deposits, as the margin shows. We deposit ourselves, and all we are and have, with God; whilst He deposits with us his sacred Gospel, the vessels of which we must "guard through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us," and be prepared to defend with our blood.

Our deposit with God. – How safe are they who commit their all to God! Faraday was asked, when dying, on what supposition he depended as he contemplated the other world; and he replied, "I am relying on no supposition, but on a certainty; I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him."

God's deposit with us. – But let us be true to our trust. The Holy Bible, the Doctrines of the Christian Church, the Day of Rest, the House of God, the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Christian Baptism – these are some of the vessels which have been passed down to us, and we must hand on intact. Be ye clean that carry them! Oh, what joy it will be when we reach our destination, and can resign our trust, and weigh out the deposit, and hear the Master's "Well done!" But, in the meanwhile, whilst marching across the yellow sands,

where wild dangers lie in wait, let us not seek the escort of creature or worldly might; but boast of the Hand of our God, which is for good upon all them that seek Him.

The people have not separated themselves. Ezra 9:1

THIS was only too true! There had been, on the part of princes and rulers, gross intermarriage with the people of surrounding lands. The holy seed had become mixed and diluted. And it was the more sad that this should have taken place, when it was to cleanse his people from such alliances, and the evils to which they inevitably led, that God had passed them through the purging fires of the seventy years' captivity. It afflicted the good Ezra sorely. With every sign of Oriental grief he poured out his soul before God. And this is the lesson we should carry with us. It has been truly said that communion with the Lord dries many tears, but it starts many more. We no longer sorrow with the sorrow of the world; but we become burdened with some of the griefs that still rend the heart of the Lord in the glory.

This fellowship between the Lord's people and the world is becoming increasingly close as we near the end of the age. In the appointments of our homes, our amusements, books, and practices, there is very little to choose between the one and the other. If there is any distinction, it lies in a certain sadness with which Christians take their pleasures, as though remembering a something better. But the rest of us do not grieve over it; we do not rend our clothes: we do not take these things to heart, as though they specially concerned us.

Let us at least separate ourselves after the manner of Christ, who frequented the temple, acknowledged the State, accepted invitations to great houses; but his heart and speech always revolved about his Father. What if it led to our being cast out without the camp!

We also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Ezra 10:4

THIS narrative reminds us of the story of Achan, who took of the accursed thing, and kindled the anger of the Lord against the children of Israel. There must be confession and the putting away of evil ere communion with God can be re-established.

It is not given to every one to be an Ezra. There are abuses to deal with, and wrongs to right, on every side; but they require to be dealt with by those who are specially adapted or qualified for the work. Be always ready to do such work, if there should be no one else. It was the life motto of a great man always to act as though there were no one else who would. Still, Nehemiahs and Ezras are not given very largely to the Church or the world; and, for the most part, we must be content to be of those who say, "Be of good courage, and do it; we also will be with thee." But though this seems but a little thing, it may lead to great results. Many a man has been urged to a noble deed by the encouragement he received at a critical hour from some unknown and obscure disciple.

If you cannot do a great thing, identify yourself with one who can. Stand by him, identify yourself with him in public or private, by sympathy and prayer. Though the strongholds of evil are great and high, they may be swept away before an avalanche of snowflakes, any one of which would melt in the warm hand of a child.

Oh for more of that magnanimity, which is quick to recognize the matters that belong to certain elect souls — not envying, nor disparaging, but frankly confessing their eminent qualifications, and falling in to further and accelerate their success, which will be the gain of all!