The Opposition of God's People (Ezra 4)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: Albert Tang

[0:00] Do we have any oppositions at work? At church? Think about it. Often we face difficulties and people not as friendly to us at times.

How do we react? Just as following Jesus, how about think about that?
As we as Christians, do we actually face, in the name of the Lord, we face difficulties? Suffer for the Lord in some sense.
Yeah. The Lord said, before he departed, he said, in this world, you will have trouble. And that word trouble could be translated as persecution, affliction, or tribulations.
And if you read the context, Jesus was speaking about he was about to be crucified, going to the cross, right? So, as he was addressing to his disciples at the time, do not expect you'll have an easy way out if you follow me.
[1:21] Sometimes, even if we as Christians, just following the way of the Lord, you know, Jesus said, I mean, Paul said in 2 Timothy, he said that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Jesus Christ will be persecuted.

Now, that, the context was during his time, indeed, there were persecution for the church, for the people at that time.
Maybe here in New Zealand today, we're not too bad, you know, there is no persecution in a real sense. We don't, we don't, we don't, you know, we don't die for Jesus, we don't shed blood, okay, but maybe there are some, some sort of mistreatment to Christians in the, even in the Western world, just for the sake of Jesus.
We just want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus. Somehow, we may be discriminated. Have you faced that before?
If you haven't, praise God, but do you expect things will come, become worse, maybe, in the near future? We don't know. Did you know that there are, there are other brothers and sisters, it may not be too far away, they actually face persecutions in real sense, you know.
[2:49] This, this agency called Open Door, you heard about Open Doors, right? Every year, they put out, they produce a top 50, a chart, about churches, Christians in different nations being persecuted.

Just, just think about these figures. Three hundred and sixty-five million, how many is that? That's a lot, eh? How many we got in New Zealand?
Five million. Right? Three hundred and sixty-five million Christians face persecutions or discrimination of some sort.
and three point one seven, right? That's just a little less of the New Zealand's population under severe persecutions.
Thankful we are not in that sort of category, but it doesn't mean that we don't need to live a life, lead a godly life to witness Jesus.
[3:55] Jesus. And in Israel 4, even though it was many, many centuries ago, the people of God at that time, they faced persecution as well.

They faced oppositions. They had enemies. Thank you, Venus, for reading that for us. I do hope that you have that Bible open, so that when we look at those particular verses, we know, you know, that where we are and what we are talking about.
So in that particular 24 verses, there was the foes, the adversaries, the enemies of the returned Jews at that time. They brought their allegations to the Persian king, accused them that they're doing something wrong, bad for the empire.
And the result was the stopping of the rebuilding program. And even today, I mean, we don't, we, you know, the building of, rebuilding of the temple didn't mean much for us.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But I think today we are, the church representing the kingdom of God here. And we're trying to build the kingdom. And Christians, we will face oppositions.
[5:16] I mean, expect that. Right? And, but the thing is, how do we react? Do we just look at those circumstances that happened around us and being discouraged?

Or do we actually look at God and his sovereignty that we can keep going? The choice is how we see.
So let's have a look at that. Okay? Now, that is the background. In the past last couple weeks, we hear about Ezra 1, 2, and 3.
And we see that during the returning of the Jews, and God has led these people, Joshua, Zerubbabel, they came back, and on the site where the foundation of the temple, they actually had offered burnt offerings, and they planned to rebuild the temple.
All right? But something had happened. Something had happened there. Now, I'll give you some background. I think I gave it to you.
[6:31] We kind of had a look at that about a few weeks ago when I introduced this book. All right? So I think this particular time space that we're looking at, okay?

We all knew about this past history of the Israelites, and this is the time we're talking about in chapter 3 when Israel, I mean, when Zerubbabel and Joshua, or Yeshua, they came back, and they started to rebuild the altar and the foundation, but something has happened.
Somebody came and threatened them, and that particular program kind of just stopped until Ezra 5. Next week we'll talk about that. The prophets spoke to the people, and then they restarted the rebuilding program until chapter 6 when they all finished the temple.
Now, this is the particular time that we talked about, and then later on we'll talk about the return of Ezra.
[7:53] That's in chapter 7. Now, just bear in mind, chapter 1 to chapter 6, the time, between the time lapse, between 6 and 7, it was about 57 years.

Right? And something that has happened between those years were the book of Ezra. And we all read about that book, right? About the persecution of the Jews.
It's almost a genocide. And God did a miracle to save the Jews. So if we had that kind of background, we understand what kind of oppositions, what kind of threats, what kind of mentalities the Jews were under during those times.
All right? Bear that in mind. Not an easy time to live, to go through, as being the people of God. Just think, people living like in North Korea, living in Iraq, in Middle East, you know, you go out in the middle of the, in the morning, you cannot guarantee you can come home safely.
That's kind of the situation they lived in. All right? So let's have a look at this passage. Firstly, we see the adversaries, the enemies.
[9:17] Okay? Who are those enemies? Now, the author of Ezra, he went straight in his description about these people.

when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard. Who are these enemies? They came, not as bad, they came, they offered their help.
They were kind of friendly people. Let's come, you're building the program, let's come, we can help you. But, but the author described them as enemies.
And, in verse two, these people were actually, they said themselves, since, they were here since the time of Esar Hayden, king of Assyria, who brought them there.
Who were these people? They were there earlier than the return of the Jews. So they've been there for a while. But the thing is, they were not pure Jews.
[10:25] They worshipped Yahweh, but they also worshipped something else. And that's why, that's why the returned Jews, they said, in verse three, you have no part with us in building a temple to our God.

Right? So, we, often, when we read this passage, we might think, why being so exclusive? Remember the Jews at the time? Well, if people come to offer help, join them. The more the merrier. But, they understood, they realized, these were not, these were not the people that they could work together to rebuild the temple of God.
Some scholars thought these were the earlier ancestors of the Samaritans. All right? They were Jews, but they also kind of mixed blood.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

They worshipped Yahweh, they offered to Yahweh, but they offered sacrifices to Yahweh, but they also worshipped idols. And, for the returning Jews, remember, they just, they just, remember, why were they exiled?
[11:47] Because of their syncretism. Because they worshipped Yahweh, and they also had worshipped idols, and right in the middle of Jerusalem, in the temple. And that's why God kicked them out.

Let the enemies destroy the temple, right? And they knew, they couldn't repeat the same mistake again. so they denied their help.
We want to build the temple ourselves. So I think, we need to be careful. Today, many, many people say they were Christians, right?
They have the name text, the church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. They said they belong to Christ, but really are they Christians?
Christians. We need to find out. I mean, these are easier to identify, but there are lots and lots of people, and they say they are Christians, but maybe there's something quite different from what we believe.
[12:52] So we need to discern. When we look at, you know, search the internet, don't just say a Bible or Christian, and then you just absorb everything.

We need to discern, right? And look at the response of these people. When they got rejected, in verse four, these people, the mentality, their attitude was right there.
I think they wanted to offer help because there were some sort of advantages. If they involved in that, and when the temple was built, they could have some sort of power and control.
people. But now they're being rejected. Oh, they set out to discourage the people and to make them afraid.
Right? And there was various ways. They harassed them, threatened them, and eventually the building project was stopped, was halted.
[13:56] Are there enemies in our lives that cause us hesitance in our walk with Jesus?

Do we identify them? I think we all have enemies, but sometimes the enemies in the Bible, is more than, often, it's not just flesh and blood.
Sometimes, especially in Psalms, the enemy is always something a little bit more. It's like evil forces. Right? There are some forces against the will, the power of God.
So we know, we know that apart from the people that are attacking us, but behind that could it be Satan, the accuser. the ultimate adversary that attacks us.
But interestingly, for the people of Jews, now, in the book of Ezra, he described that those names, which Venus has just read, those were the physical enemies.
[15:17] But interestingly, in the book of, in those two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, I will read next week, when they pronounced the word of God to the Jews, they were actually warning and rebuking the people, the Jews themselves.

They were being disheartened. They were being just complacent, just let the temple of God just lie ruined. And they were busy doing their own living.
And they were the one who was responsible for not building the temple of God. So sometimes we just can't blame others.
We just can't blame the circumstances. Even at times, I believe, often we just put too much blame onto Satan. And Satan didn't even know, oh, did I do that?
It was you, it's my problem. You know, not building the kingdom of God and just going on my own daily pursuit. It could be me.
[16:30] I am responsible. Could be the greatest enemy here. So let us identify who was the most responsible in this sort of enemy.

Who is the greatest enemy? enemy? Maybe at times, we need to repent and ask God to forgive us.
Secondly, the allegations.
These, what are the accusations or allegations from these enemies? In verse 6, in verse 7, if we read it carefully, there were two names and two different kings.
And if we really have a sober mind, what sort of years, what sort of timeline was there?
Now, at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, who is Xerxes? In verse 7, and in the days of Arthur Xerxes, who is Arthur Xerxes?

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[17:42] Now, always we've been talking about in chapter 3, chapter 2, chapter 3, it was time, it was the reign of who? Cyrus. Now, how long was the time between King Cyrus and to this guy Xerxes, or even this, another one, Arthur Xerxes?

Now, just have a look at the timeline again. Cyrus, 537, he allowed the Jews to return to rebuild the temple, right?
And the riots was the time that the temple completed. It was some sort of 20 years in between. And there were two kings.
In history, there were two kings between Cyrus and Darius, but the Bible did not record it. Okay?
But have a look at this.
Xerxes was actually Asahyrus, Asahyrus. Who was that? He was the Persian king in the book of Esther, which Esther was the queen.
[18:51] All right? So, and Arctus was even later. That was the time of 444. That was the, that, that is not Ezra, it's Nehemiah really.

It was Nehemiah. So, that was some, wow, 70 years back, 70 years after, after, after this. So, what happened here?
So, it was a long period of time. All right? And, I have to think through about this. So, what actually happened?
When the people, okay, when the enemies of the Jews, they accused, they brought their allegations to these two kings, it, somehow, it was a, a big time lapse.
Do you know, do you understand what I'm saying? Was it, was it during the reign of Cyrus and Darius? Or, is it actually after them?
[20:09] And, I, we talked to amongst, pastors, what could be the solution? And, our resolution was, it was the time, it was the author, in his, in his writing, he was trying to, he was, he was not concerned with the timelines.

He did not, he was not concerned with the chronological orders. But, he wanted to stress something. Main theme. The theme was, all these times, throughout the various emperors, the kings, all these times, Jews were under persecution.
That was what he wanted to say. And, indeed, if we read the book of Esther, we know, it was, it was not God who did the miracle, that would be no Israel's return.
You understand what I'm saying? So, these people, I mean, the Jews at the time, was under all sorts of persecutions.
And, these allegations were brought to them, it was from different periods, but all the time, they were being accused. whether it was Cyrus, it was Darius, it was Xerxes, it was Artax, Xerxes, it was all these times, Jews had real hard times.
[21:42] And, they brought their allegations to the kings, look, if they restored the walls, I mean, the walls wasn't even built until the time of Nehemiah, remember? Right?

But, these things, all the gathered together, just to stress that how the enemies in different times, they really had held on to the Jews.
Right? And, they were not loyal to the Persian kings. I mean, they, what's it got to do with them?
I mean, they were not Persians, and they were not Jews, they were half Jews, and they were kind of mixed blood. Were they really, really loyal to the Persian empire?
No. They only see if there are any advantages in them. Because if these returned Jews become strong, they will, I mean, their position, their advantages will decrease, threaten to their own identities, economy.
[22:50] That's why they need to put them down. I mean, these adversaries with their allegations remind me something. When I was, you know, this story of Lion King, it reminds me of these hyenas.

Right? You know, what's the names? Chen Shi, Benzai, Ed, you know? Were they really, really loyal to Scar? No. When the circumstances turned the other way, they killed Scar.
Right? And, look, it's a good reminder for us. These enemies with their allegations, don't even put too much focus onto them.
God's love. If they're not right, they're not true, don't even bother to spend too much time and effort on them. We have much better things to do.
Right? Just focus on God. Focus on what God wants us to do. And do it faithfully. pray. And in due time, God will just make straight.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[24:01] I like the song we sung before, right? And God's able to change all these enemies who want to attack us. He can make them good. So instead of just focusing on how to deal with these hyenas, you know, let's worship the king.

I think it's a much better way to deal with these circumstances. Someone, a young pastor, being wrongly excused, and he was very frustrated.
He came to this spiritual giant called Charles Spurgeon. It was a long time, a century or so ago.
Charles Spurgeon, he replied to this young pastor, he said, do reflect, do confess, but also do give thanks.
And this young pastor was very perplexed. What do you mean? And Spurgeon said, look, I crucify the Lord all the time, and he forgives me.
What's the big deal about these minor allegations? If they were not true, just swallow it. And let God deal with it. There's no comparison for what I did to the Lord.
[25:27] Now, I think in facing allegations, accusations, I think different people, I'm sure, I mean, different people without different personalities, with different abilities, we might react a little bit differently.

some who want to do justice, some want to explain things and make it clear, and some like me, I don't have any ability to think too deep, I'll just let it go.
do. But I think whatever responses we choose, I think it's the heart. Our heart needs to be right. We don't, we don't, you know, we don't respond with a tooth for tooth, an eye for an eye.
even though we want to do something, our heart needs to have rest before him.
And we need to forgive before we actually go and do something. Otherwise, we'll be just like these guys, you know.
[26:40] We'll be just fighting each other, no matter those are non-Christians or we're still Christians, among Christians. And after these allegations, yes, at times, we find that the aftermath was, well, was compelled to stop.

Nothing happened. Because it was a royal decree that came down, couldn't do anything. And sometimes we get frustrated. Yes.
Well, I want to serve the Lord. I want to do this. I want to do that. And because of, I don't know, some non-believing bosses, non-believing family members, and some, even at church, some fellow brothers and sisters, they can frustrate us.
And somehow, we cannot carry on. I've heard people say to me, I really want to go to a mission trip. But my parents didn't want me to go.
My non-believing parents. Well, that's fair enough, because they didn't understand. And the Lord does understand. So just come before the Lord and seek His will.
[28:03] And some, there are some legitimate reason that God allowed that to happen. It might not just be the right timing. But that is not the final thing.

Don't just stop at what we see. Yes, I mean, we are in time and space. We cannot see too far. Right? But the aftermath about this stoppage of this rebuilding the temple is not the final story.
I have a double A here. The absolute authority. 424. The work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a stand still.
Yes, but until the second year of the reign of the riot king of Persia came to a stand still, not forever. God has his timing. Thank you, Dominic, for reading those songs. It was a great message in itself.
[29:22] King of kings, the God who's sovereign, he's won the battle. I am in time and space.

I cannot see too far. I couldn't see 30, 40 years ago, I couldn't see me standing here.
I was, you know, I had been through some hard times. I've been through some frustrations. I almost want to give up. ministry, right?
But God ultimately has won the battle and I had to patiently trusting his sovereignty to make things right for me.
And next week I'll be preaching too, right? I'll be preaching the king of kings, right? So in chapter 5 and first part of chapter 6, indeed, those Xerxes and Artax Xerxes, they call themselves the king of kings.
[30:34] But we know who is the ultimate king of kings, right? God has his timing, came to a standstill only until his approved timing.

second year and the reign of Darius, king of Persia and the temple was completed. Indeed, Jesus said, in this world, you will have trouble, tribulations, persecutions, oppositions, you name it.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

but he hadn't finished that phrase. He said, but take heart, I have overcome the world.
I've forgotten to include a slide. Terence created a cartoon for me. I've forgotten to share it with you. But it's like something like, I'll share it with Pastor William, the kids share it with you.
It was like a tug of war, it was these demons, enemies. They like those names that we just read. [31:53] They were on one side. It was many of them, like the hyenas. They were always hassling and harassing and they were trying to pull. And there were two or three poor, weak Christians were trying to, wow, against all these immense devils.

how can we overcome them? Look, we're weak, we're so fragile, look at them, just, oh, I'll give up. But we try our best.
But little as I know, there's a big hand, big finger at the back of this rope. He pointed his finger and I couldn't lose.
Right? But we couldn't see it. And all the times I would just see, oh, I can't win, I can't win, it's too much for me. But who's behind us?
Who is the most sovereign? Who is the king of kings? We can't lose. let's pray.
[33:11] Father, I just want to thank you. Not just in history, but in reality. And today, you are the king of kings.

You have overcome, you are victorious. You have overcome death and sin and hell. And in you, we can have this kingship that you have promised to us.
We can reign with you. So, Lord, help us to look up onto you and that we can overcome our enemies.
Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host