

In the Face of Opposition

Series: Renewal

Ezra 4

March 31, 2009

Sermon Outline

Introduction

- This morning, in this next message in our Ezra series, I want to talk about something that is difficult for all of us. Opposition. As we seek to live for the Lord, we face opposition: opposition from sin within, opposition from the world, and opposition from the enemy of our souls – Satan. Many of you are familiar with the very real frustration and discouragement that can come as a result of this opposition.
- Take home point of our story is – **we should expect opposition, but there is hope.**
- Background: You may recall from my message two weeks ago, that by decree of Cyrus, the Emperor of the Persian Empire, the Jewish exiles living in Babylon were released to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The journey was 900 miles, about a four month trip on foot. The people arrived and not long after they arrived, they began to rebuild the temple foundation. The temple foundation was rebuilt – which was cause for great celebration and rejoicing. That's where we pick up our story today.
- Read Text
- **We should expect opposition, but there is hope.** Three insights, observations drawn from our story that establish that point ...

For God's people in this story....

1) **Living righteously came with great opposition**

- Right when God's people begin to live for God again after years of exile because of their idolatry – God allows them to encounter fierce and relentless opposition.

- If the people in our story, Jesus, the disciples, and really God's people from all generations have experienced opposition as they lived for God, shouldn't we also expect opposition?

2) The opposition was consistent

As I mentioned in the reading of the text, verses 7-23, are basically the author Ezra giving another illustration of the kind of opposition the people in his generation faced. From what we can gather, it seems that the events in verses 7-23 probably occurred about 40 years after the beginnings of our story. The task is not rebuilding the temple, but instead its rebuilding the temple walls – a task that didn't gain the kind of momentum it needed until Nehemiah arrived on the scene years later.

3) Eventually the opposition stopped...for a time.

- In verse 24 we read that the work of God “ceased **until** the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.” In other words, a time came when the opposition of Israel's enemies was rendered irrelevant and as we will see next week, the temple was fully rebuilt. The people watched as God defeated the opposition.
- In Scripture, this is the pattern. God's people are opposed, and then God delivers them from that opposition. However, though tremendously significant, the deliverance is **always partial; it's never complete**. In chapter 6 the TEMPLE is rebuilt. That's a huge accomplishment! However, another wave of opposition soon comes as the work of rebuilding the WALLS begins. What we see in the OT, is that though opposition sometimes subsides, it doesn't go away. Though there were seasons of rest, there was always another wave of opposition that comes.
- The same is true of us today. We pray in faith, even as Jesus has taught us to pray to “Lord, deliver us from evil” but even as we do we believe what he said to his disciples when he said, “If they persecuted me, they **will** also persecute you (Jn.15:20).”
- In this fallen world, as God's people in our story saw, God will both deliver us from opposition **AND** allow the opposition to continue. Indeed, opposition will continue until the Lord comes again to take us to glory. The flesh will oppose us (Gal.5:17), Satan will oppose us, and the world will oppose us. These things are a given...
- **So where is the hope?**

Here is where the hope is: it's the Gospel.

Let me explain...

A. The Gospel demonstrates that God is for us. And if God be for us who can be against us?

B. We have hope because the Gospel declares that through the Cross, God has conquered all other forms of opposition. What or who opposes us? Sin, Satan, the World, and Death. But all those enemies were overcome at the cross.

C. There is hope because through the Gospel, you have been reconciled to God, adopted into God's family and even right now are on a road, a narrow road that is leading to an eternal "opposition-free" life.

D. There is hope because the Gospel will prevail. God has decreed that his purposes on earth will unfold as he works through His people. Sure the believers in Ezra's day faced opposition. But God's purposes prevailed through them despite every setback and every opposing force. Surely his purposes will prevail through you as you trust him through the opposition you face.

We should expect opposition, but there is hope.

What does this mean practically?

Well just imagine how your life might change if every time you faced some form of opposition you reminded yourself "we should expect opposition, but there is hope." My hope is in Jesus. I don't need an opposition free-life to be happy. I am happy in Jesus and what He has done for me. I am happy that even now I am on a journey to opposition free life in heaven.

Questions for Application/Discussion

- Read Ezra 4. For the sake of review, explain how God's people in our story were opposed. How did they respond to the opposition? How do you tend to respond to opposition?
- What other examples come to mind in Scripture, where God's people were opposed? How should our story and the examples you just gave affect our own expectations as they relate to opposition?
- What are some of the ways that Christians in our day are opposed?
- When you feel opposed, by sin within, Satan or the world – or a combination of these, how do you tend to respond?
- The message main point was, we should expect opposition, but there is hope. Chris talked about how our hope is the gospel. Read summary points in the outline above that explain how the Gospel gives us hope. How does hearing those points affect you/encourage you?
- Is there any way you are facing opposition right now that we can pray for you about?