

July 5th, 2020

Finding Courage to Dream

Sermon Summary

This message looks at the Hebrew people's dream of returning home and rebuilding the temple of the Lord! This dream originated with God and God was going to facilitate and resource His dream for His people. However, God had given the people responsibilities in the fulfillment of the dream. There is much practical life application to be found in the book of Ezra when we study the struggles the Hebrew people faced in following the dream. The sermon starts off with Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the exiles to their homeland in Jeremiah 29:10ff. Each sub-point of the two main points are taken from the Book of Ezra chapters 1-4 and 6. They follow the storyline. The application for our lives is found in this closing statement and question: God has a dream for you and I can promise you He'll do His part, the question is, will you do your part to see the "God Dream" become a reality in your life?

Full Sermon Notes

"I've seen You move, you move the mountains, And I believe I'll see You do it again! You made a way where there was no way, and I believe I'll see you do it again!" God can move mountains in your life in order for His dreams and plans for you to come true! He can make a way when there seems to be no way! We're going to talk today about finding the courage to dream, to dream God inspired dreams for life! Let's pray and ask God to speak to our hearts about finding the courage to dream His dreams for our lives! Let's Pray!!

I'm so glad our children are with us again today. I know they miss Shorekids, because Shorekids is such an awesome place, led by awesome people who really care about teaching them about God and His love for them! Lacey is working hard to figure out when and how we can safely begin easing back into that very important ministry. Pray for her and her leaders! So kids, let me just tell you that when I talk about dreams today, I'm not going to be talking about the kind of dreams you have when you're sleeping. I'm talking about your thoughts and hopes, and dreams for the future! Your goals and plans for life! Now I know that for some of you, right now, that may simply be to have more time to play your video games, or hang out with your friends, go swimming, and just have fun this summer. But your dreams of what you want to be when you grow up are important and God certainly wants you to consider His dreams for you. His plans, His desires, His hopes for you to achieve, accomplish and be all He created you to be. How many of you kids out there have thought about what you want to be when you grow up? Wow, that's great! And I want to say this to you adults, It's never too late to dream about what God has in store for your life! No matter where you are in life, God has a plan for you! No matter how many times you've followed other dreams besides God's dreams, God still has a dream for you. Today we will discover some very important things about these kinds of "life dreams" by looking at the experiences of the Hebrew people. They had missed out on some of God's dreams for their lives because of their sin and disobedience! Their dreams had been crushed and they had been carried off into captivity by foreign nations. But God had not given up on them! God had dreams of them returning to their promised land and rebuilding the temple that had been destroyed. God's dream for His people had been spoken plainly through His

prophet Jeremiah in a letter written to the exiles. The words were powerful and spoke of a God-sized dream for His people. Today we will look at two main things concerning dreams for your life and your future:

God's Part in the Dream and Your Part in the Dream

Let's start off with...

### **God's Part in the Dream!**

#### God Originates the Dream

Listen to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles...

Jer 29:10 This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jer 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jer 29:14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

If you want God's will, God's plan, God's direction, and God's dream for your life, and you're willing to pray and seek, you will find it! God will show you, guide you, teach you, and empower you to follow His dream for you. In fact, God will work in amazing and unexpected ways to make a path for your God-given dream. He did this for His people who had been exiled in captivity. He had a dream for them to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple and He used a pagan king to make it happen! You see...

#### God Facilitates The Dream

Ezra 1:1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

Ezra 1:2 "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

Ezra 1:3 Anyone of his people among you--may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

Is that not fantastic? Cyrus, the pagan king of Persia wants to see the temple of God in Jerusalem rebuilt and the people restored to their homes! You see, when God has a dream for you to accomplish in life, He will facilitate that dream and do the unthinkable to make it happen! In our text He uses a pagan king. But here's an illustration of how God used the King of Kings to facilitate an even bigger God Dream! We know it is God's desire and dream for us to be saved! In fact that's God's first and greatest desire for your life! However, there's no way we can save ourselves, so God made a way by allowing Jesus, His Son, the King of Kings, to come and be our Savior! Speaking of salvation to His disciples...

Mat 19:26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

So when it comes to your life and God's dream for it, God originates the dream, and facilitates the dream! The Hebrews were about to discover another very important fact about God's Dream for them...

### God Resources The Dream

Cyrus continues his statement about the rebuilding of the temple...

Ezra 1:4 And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem."

Ezra 1:5 Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites--everyone whose heart God had moved--prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:6 All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

Ezra 1:7 Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.

Isn't that amazing? Cyrus encourages people to give to the mission of rebuilding the temple. We read that even their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver, gold, goods, livestock and valuable gifts. And then Cyrus gives back the things that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the temple! How many times do you see a pagan king giving back great wealth to the people they had conquered? But God can make the unthinkable happen and often does. God resources the dream. I don't have time to get into the details on all of this, but Northshore Church sure has a testimony of God resourcing His dream for us! We've met in a living room, golf club, fire house, ice cream shop, former night club, former Gymnastics building, former Pottery World building, then after Katrina, the parking lot of the Pottery World, Calvary Church, Grace Memorial, First Presbyterian's Gym, a movie theater, Crazy Carls Fireworks, Slidell Athletic club, and then God worked a miracle to get us in this place! And let me tell you, God resourced every step of the way!! So God's going to do His part to accomplish His plans and dreams for your life!

Now let's look at...

## **Your Part in the Dream**

### God Uses Your Unique Gifts in the Dream

Ezra 2:68 When they arrived at the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site.

Ezra 2:69 According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 drachmas of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments.

Ezra 2:70 The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns.

This is such an important part of finding courage to dream! The people were to give as they had ability to give. Together they raised a great sum to see the work on the temple continue.

Sometimes people simply think of the ability to give financially towards a God-given dream, but God has gifted us all with different kinds of abilities and talents and He wants us to use those gifts to build His kingdom. I love how verse 70 mentions priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants! In other words, God was going to use people of various gifts and talents to help accomplish the dream of rebuilding the Temple. I know I read these verses last week, but it bears repeating because it addresses this issue of God using our unique talent and gift mix!

God sometimes asks us to step out of our comfort zone and what is familiar to us, to do something only He could do through us, but much of the time, God uses the gifts, the talents, and the things we are interested in and good at to accomplish His plans. Here's the verses I was talking about...

Psa 37:3 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

Psa 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psa 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psa 37:6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

If you find your purpose and your greatest delight in life in your relationship with The Lord, then I believe these verses indicate that God will put the right desires in your heart. And if He puts the desires in your heart, then you can ask Him to give you the desires of your heart and it will be a no-brainer, He will give you those desires because He put them there! So if you are truly delighting in the Lord and He gives you a talent and desire to teach, then pursue teaching. If He gives you a talent and a desire to sing, then sing. If He gives you a talent and a desire to be a healthcare worker, then study and train for that, realizing that type of work is a ministry calling every bit as important as someone who is a missionary! The hospital is your mission field. Same thing with being a first responder, or a counselor. And then there are other jobs that may not

seem ministry related, like being a construction worker, an engineer, a lawyer, retail worker, or truck driver, but I can tell you this: You can be a witness of Jesus' love and grace by simply living out your faith with your attitudes, actions and words in the workplace! You'll go places and meet people that a minister would never have the opportunity to go or to meet! Now I must say this about life dreams and this applies to dreams you might have while sleeping: God would never put in your heart a dream or desire for something that contradicts the principles of His Word! And speaking briefly on dreams we have while sleeping, God has used those kinds of dreams to speak to people's hearts. He did that a lot in the Old Testament times. Once again, however, God would never speak something to you in a dream that would contradict the principles of His Holy Word! I've had people tell me that The Holy Spirit had told them to do something and that something was expressly forbidden in Scripture. I told them emphatically that "I guarantee, God didn't tell you that!"

### "God Dreams" Require You to Follow Through

Ezra 3:1 When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem.

Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

At some point you've got to start building! At some point you've got to take the first step! You can believe all day long that an airplane can get you from point A to point B, but if you never board the aircraft, you're not going anywhere! I once had a spiritual mentor who sat me down and shared with me that I had lots of good ideas, but I lacked follow through! This happened around 32 years ago. I have thanked that man many times for such Godly advice! It's one thing to allow God to put a dream, a plan, a vision, in your heart, but quite another thing to follow through! You can believe God wants to do something, and that He can do something, but if you never take the step to trust God and begin doing something towards the dream, nothing will happen. Two passages I use all the time, because they are so important and practical. First one is found in Ephesians.

Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

Eph 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So we're not saved by our good works, but we are saved to do good works, and those works are us "living the dream"! And then this passage...

Prov 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

Prov 3:6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

He'll make your path straight, but you have to walk down the path!

And watch this:

### "God Dreams" Are Built on Hope

Ezra 3:3 Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

Ezra 3:4 Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day.

Ezra 3:5 After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred feasts of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the LORD.

Ezra 3:6 On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.

Did you notice in verse 3 it says "despite their fear of the peoples around them"? Yes, sometimes "God Dreams" can be scary especially when you look at your circumstances! First of all God Dreams are God sized! (Seems too big!) Secondly they're God complicated! (Above my paygrade when it comes to my intellect!) Thirdly, they require superhuman strength! (Seems too hard to accomplish!) That's why "God Dreams" are built on hope! Not whimsical hope, but a faith-based hope in a God who is plenty big enough, who certainly has abundant resources, is not lacking in wisdom, and has the supernatural power to make the dream come true! In fact we read this in the book of Hebrews...

Heb 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Heb 11:2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

So when you can't see the way through, the way out, the way up, the way forward, your faith in the God who can do all things, gives you that blessed hope! That know-so hope! This is the kind of faith the people had in their God-given dream of rebuilding God's Temple in Jerusalem.

Notice verse 6 again...

Ezra 3:6 On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.

### "God Dreams" Require Teams

Ezra 3:7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and gave food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia.

Ezra 3:8 In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers (the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem) began the work, appointing Levites twenty years of age and older to supervise the building of the house of the LORD.

Theologian Leonard Sweet says this...

"The Bible knows nothing of a solo ministry, only team ministry!"

Throughout the Old Testament we see teamwork and one of the first things Jesus did was gather together a team of twelve. When God gives you a dream, a calling, a career, always remember that He will also put people in your path to mentor, guide, instruct, encourage and help in various ways. That's the very reason for the church. We are the Body of Christ, Jesus is the head, and are called to work together to accomplish God's Dream of reaching people with the good news of His love and offer to forgive. And when this happens...

#### "God Dreams" Inspire Praise

Ezra 3:10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel.

Ezra 3:11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

They had only finished with the foundation and they began celebrating and praising the Lord! They had hope even before the foundation, and then with that small, but very important step, they knew God was keeping His covenant promises to them and so they praised God for the blessing of a strong beginning, and praised Him for what was yet to come! Praising God for what He is accomplishing in your life and for what He's going to accomplish in your life builds our faith, and increases our hope and our joy! But there are some practical things to remember!

#### "God Dreams" Need Discernment

Ezra 4:1 When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel,

Ezra 4:2 they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."

There may be times when someone may offer you a shortcut to achieving your God-given dream, however, God would never want you to compromise your God-given principles and ethics. You see, in God's kingdom, the end doesn't justify the means! The way we live our lives while pursuing our dreams really matters. Paul put it eloquently in his letter to the Ephesians...

Eph 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Eph 5:7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

Eph 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

Eph 5:9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

Eph 5:10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Eph 5:11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

And then in verse 15 he says...

Eph 5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise,

Eph 5:16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Eph 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

So we need discernment to know how to accomplish God's dreams for us! Later on, other Persian rulers came to power. There were still people in the surrounding areas who were jealous of the Hebrews and were very much against their attempts to rebuild the temple of God.

### "God Dreams" Will Face Opposition

Ezra 4:4 Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.

Ezra 4:5 They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Ezra 4:6 At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Here's what happened! Some of the pagan people got together and made false accusations against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. They basically claimed the Hebrews were rebuilding the temple in order to restore themselves to power and revolt against the Persians. Have you ever had lies told on you? It hurts doesn't it? Satan will stop at nothing to try and prevent God's will for your life! When you try to live for the Lord and live a Godly life, there will be opposition. Jesus even talked with His disciples about this. Listen...

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

John 15:20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

And what I'm about to say is hard to accept, but it's true...

### "God Dreams" May Die

I know what you're thinking! "God's dreams can't die!" They can! Cyrus was long gone and another King was now in power and he listened to those who were in opposition to the Jews. He issued a decree to the Hebrews who were trying to rebuild the temple of God. Watch this...

Ezra 4:21 Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order.

Ezra 4:22 Be careful not to neglect this matter. Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests?

Ezra 4:23 As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop.

Ezra 4:24 Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The work was stopped by force! The dream died! Historians believe the work was not only stopped, but what they had accomplished was destroyed! Some of the folks probably wanted to give up at that point. Have you ever been in a spot like they were in? The dream you thought was God's dream, His plan, His will for your life all of sudden gets stopped in its tracks. All of a sudden, there's no way out, no way up, no way forward! The dream is dead! But this is where we must remember if it's a God-given dream, even though it may be dead from a human standpoint, we must not forget God has the power over death, including the death of a dream. You see...

### "God Dreams" Get Resurrected

Some 16 years later, God moved His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to prophesy to the people and they were inspired to begin the work again. However, some provincial authorities questioned the work and asked who gave them authority! They responded that back when King Cyrus was ruler he had issued a decree for the temple to be rebuilt! The authorities spoke with King Darius about the situation! A search was made in the archives for the original decree and it was found! King Darius read the decree and God moved on his old pagan heart just like He had done with King Cyrus. And check King Darius' reply to those provincial authorities...

Ezra 6:7 Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.

Ezra 6:8 Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop.

Ezra 6:9 Whatever is needed--young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem--must be given them daily without fail,

Ezra 6:10 so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

And guess what? The dream was fulfilled!

Ezra 6:14 So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.

Ezra 6:15 The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

Ezra 6:16 Then the people of Israel--the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles--celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.

So the bottom line for you today is this:

God has a dream for you and I can promise you He'll do His part, the question is, will you do your part to see the "God Dream" become a reality in your life? Let's pray.