**BCM Bible Study – January 24/25, 2018**

**God’s Unending Faithfulness [Ezra 4-6]**

**Background**: *Last week, in chapters 1-3, we saw the Israelites return to their homeland. They had been given the decree by Cyrus, King of Persia to return to the land of their forefathers and rebuild the temple. They’ve just laid the foundation and begun celebrating.*

**Read Ezra 4:1-5**

* What is now keeping the people from finishing the rebuilding of the temple?
* *Note: “The people of the land” or “the adversaries” are what we will come to know as the Samaritans. These are the people who were left over from the Northern Kingdom (Israel) when Assyria overtook it. It was normal practice for the Assyrians to displace people they captured and put them in other places; therefore, Samaritans would be a mixture of Jewish descendants intermarried with other nationalities. In a sense, some of them would have worshipped God, but they also worshipped other gods (2 Kings 17:24-41)*
* What reason do you think Zerubbabel had for declining the offer of the Samaritans? What might be worrisome to the community about bringing in people who worshipped other gods?
* Can you describe a time when you felt called by God to do something, but felt like there were too many impossible obstacles in the way? How did you handle or navigate the situation?
* What encouragement is there for those of us who are “facing opposition” to what the Lord is calling us to do?

***Ezra 4:6-23 is an aside foretelling the continued opposition that the Jews will face from the Samaritans moving forward. It’s letters that we see written from the Samaritans to the future King of Persia and the response from the King of Persia 50 years from the narrative that’s going on. The aside refers to the opposition they’ll have to rebuilding the wall after they complete the temple.***

**Read Ezra 4:24 – 5:5**

*The temple progress came to a halt a couple of years after it began around 535 B.C. Here, we see the Jewish people finally resuming the rebuilding of the temple around 520 B.C., therefore leaving us with a 15-year gap of inactivity.*

* What does Scripture say was the motivating factor for people to continue building the temple?
* What other potential obstacle could the people have now? (v. 3-5)

**Read Haggai 1:1-15**

* What were the Jews doing instead of building the temple of the Lord?
* What was the result of the Jewish people focusing on themselves and rebuilding their own homes instead of intently pursuing the restoration of God’s temple and holy worship?
* In what ways do we find ourselves putting our personal gains, comforts or agendas before worshipping the Lord and obeying his commandments?
* What rhythms or practices do you have to keep you focused on putting your relationship with God before everything else? How can we establish some if we don’t already? How can we keep each other accountable this semester?

**Read Ezra 5: 6-17**

* How would you describe Tattenai’s attitude in the letter to the king? How would you describe the Jewish response (in the letter)?
  + “The Jews didn’t look upon the Persian officer as a troublemaker, but graciously answered his questions. After all, they had nothing to hide, and the eye of the Lord was upon them. God saw to it that the work was allowed to go on while Tattenai contacted the king to find out what to do.” – Warren Wiersbe
* Read **Colossians 4:5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:12**. What do you think it means to “walk in wisdom toward those who are outside” or to “walk honestly toward them that are outside”?
  + How did the Jewish people do that really well in this section?
  + How can we make sure that we respond similarly in tough circumstances, and even with authorities?
    - “When it comes to the believers’ relationship to civil authorities, there’s no place for arrogance, accusation, or carnal anger masquerading as zeal for the Lord. When we we disagree with officials, we can do it graciously.” – Warren Wiersbe

**Read Ezra 6 (all)**

* How did King Darius respond to the letter from Tattenai? Did you expect another outcome – why or why not?
* What ultimate reason was given for the Jewish success of the temple rebuilding in v. 14?
* Look at v. 21. Who joined the Jews to worship God during the Passover celebration? Why might this be significant?
  + “Remarkably, the returning Jews are joined by everyone who had separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord. This shows that the community was essentially religious, rather than based merely on physical birth and lineage, and that outsiders could convert into it.”

**Conclusion**

*From Jeremiah, now to Ezra, one thing remains true: God is faithful. God was faithful to His promise to exile the Judeans, he was faithful to bring them back to their land, and now He has been faithful to make way for them to rebuild the temple as He commanded them.*

“No matter what our circumstances are, we can trust God to be faithful.” – Warren Wiersbe

* Where are you struggling to trust God’s faithfulness right now? What tempts you to believe that God isn’t faithful?

“God being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful and immutable, so all His words and acts must be and must remain faithful.” – A.W. Tozer

**Optional**: Begin or end with singing or reading the hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness” together in study

*Resources used: ESV Study Bible, Warren Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Encountering the OT (Arnold and Beyer, 2nd edition)*