



“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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Jump Start # 2932

Ezra 1:2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.'"

Our verse today comes from a proclamation made by the Persian king. This took place in his first year. The Lord stirred his heart and set about these divine plans. Students of the Bible will remember that twenty years later, Nehemiah would be leading a building force to restore the walls around Jerusalem.

Layered in this one verse are multiple lessons for us to see.

First, a pagan king recognized that God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. It wasn't the king's superior leadership. It was the strong arm of his armies. It was the hand of God. He knew that and he acknowledged that. There is a thread of humility running through this king that is refreshing and noteworthy. Far too many, even in this day, would take the praise for all the good and point fingers and blame others for all the wrong. Everything good is because of me and everything bad is because of you. That's the soundbites we hear out of Washington. Not this king. He understood that God had given him these blessings.

Second, he understood that God had a divine mission for him. He was to build a house for the Lord in Jerusalem. We rightly call that the temple. Cyrus had temples. They were filled with idols and promoted the faith of paganism and polytheism. How easily he could have said, 'We already have enough temples.' Or, 'I'll build it, but I want it close to my home. It will be in Susa, the capitol.' He did not put his reasoning into what God told him. He followed it. What a remarkable concept and how foreign to think a foreigner understood this and many of the people of God did not. The very reason Judah had been in Babylon, now Persia, was because of idolatry and ignoring what God said. This king understood.

Third, here God was using a foreigner to accomplish His will. Time and time again, God has done that. It was Babylon that the Lord used as an instrument of punishment.

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Now God was using Persia as a instrument of hope, future and restoration. I wonder if some of Judah would have no part in this because God was using a "foreigner." I wonder if they thought this wasn't right. Can God still do similar things today? Can God use a non-Christian to accomplish His will? Can God use a wicked person to bring about something for His people? And, just how would we feel about that?

All of this reminds us that we much too often segment people into different classes and categories. Aren't all people made in the image of God? That includes pagans? Isn't the Gospel message for all people? It's easy for us to keep God in our church buildings and believe that He belongs only to us and no one else can have access to Him unless we say so. We become the guardians of God. We decide how and when God will be used. We limit our prayers to us. We think blessings flow only to us. We can feel mighty righteous and that easily slides right into self righteous.

I wonder in their thankfulness and praise if Judah thanked the Lord for Cyrus. Through Cyrus they were able to return to their beloved Jerusalem. Through Cyrus they were able to again worship in a temple. A whole generation had not seen that. For many this would be a first. But Cyrus was the king of Persia. Thank the Lord for a foreign king? Thank the Lord for a pagan? Thank the Lord for one who did not believe as they did?

And, how about us? Could we thank the Lord for a doctor who may not be a believer, but helped your family? Could we thank the Lord for a politician who passed laws that enabled the people of God to continue on freely? Could you thank the Lord for a school teacher who maybe worships differently than you do? And maybe, just maybe, the people of God were helped by someone who wasn't a believer. Rather than thinking that it's the people of God who do all the helping, God can use anyone, at anytime, and in any place.

What is also remarkable is that God was doing things and Judah was not aware of it. The people of Judah didn't know that God had moved Cyrus' heart. The people of Judah did not know that God was doing things for their behalf. And, right now, what is God doing for you? Or, for His people? There may be things that you and I are completely unaware of, but they are happening. God is busy. People we would never, ever think would have anything to do with the will of God, but there they are. Unlike Cyrus, who seemed to understand that God was doing things through him, Nebuchadnezzar never seemed to understand that. He didn't seem to know that God was using Him to accomplish His will. Nor did the Jews in the first century understand that through their hatred and persecution, God was spreading the borders of the church.

God had not forgotten His promises nor His people. He never does. God is greater than any king, any kingdom and is not limited by oceans, time, nor places. Our God is an amazing God.

Good things happened through Cyrus. They happened because God was there.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
