

1st TH1ngs F1RST title

I hope your 2015 is going well. Our poor Dallas Cowboys met their demise in the NFL playoffs last week, and we are all trying to get over that awful last minute call reversal. We must all remember to do and complete football moves.

We are in the 3rd week of 2015... can you believe it!? We are also in the very middle of our 1st TH1NGS F1RST series. We are taking a look at the book of Ezra. The story of Ezra features a return to a city to rebuild what has fallen apart. We think this storyline really fits with our new year where we set out to rebuild broken things in our life.

Week 1 – They built an Alter First

They built the altar and kept coming back to that altar. The altar is a meeting place with God. BEFORE TODAY IS OVER we want to give you an opportunity to have a meeting place with God.

Week 2 – They built a foundation first

We talked about the importance of a foundation. We talked about how a foundation defines the fate of a building... and the size of a building. Remember that altars are easy to build and cost you nothing... but foundations will cost you. Foundations take time, money, and energy... but they are worth it. A foundation will mean what we build will last.

The people in Ezra 3 were moved to worship when the foundation was laid. They worshipped, they sang, they shouted, and they wept. It was a loud commotion and celebration. Build a foundation first and rejoice and celebrate the foundation.

So Israel is on a roll! They have some real momentum behind them. They were set free from slavery, back in their own homeland, in good standing with God through an altar, and laid the foundation for the temple to be built... things were going better than they had for generations! What would be the next exciting thing they would accomplish?

Let's read... Ezra 4

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,(NIV)

The enemies..

They were doing good, they were making good decisions, good things were happening... their reward... their enemies heard about it and showed up.

You ever feel that way? God I've been doing good, I've been making good decisions, and good things are happening... why did my enemies show up? Why did this bad thing happen?

Opposition is coming

You need to know that opposition is coming. At some point this year you are going to face difficulty. At some point in your marriage or family life you are going to face a stressful time. At some point in your finances, in your career, or in your spiritual life – you are going to face opposition.

Often we think opposition means that I have done wrong.. that I have made bad decisions. I mean if you reap what you sow... and we are sowing opposition... it must mean that we have sown evil bad things...

I have car trouble... God must be punishing me. I am sick it must be because I did something wrong... even though we aren't sure what it is...

Let's speak to this real quick. This is bad theology. This is the theology that is presented in the book of Job. They tell Job that the reason all this calamity happened to him was because of some evil he had done. They wanted Job to know that the opposition he was facing was because of his own failures and shortcomings... and ultimately it was God who brought all this bad as judgment of Job.

But they were wrong. God Himself tells them they are wrong.

GOD IS NOT PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE. Ever have a passive aggressive argument with someone... they would do these things that LET YOU KNOW SOMETHING WAS WRONG... BUT IN THE END YOU REALLY

DIDN'T KNOW WHAT EXACTLY WAS WRONG? We know SOMETHING is wrong but we don't know what it is...

This incorrect theology that opposition means we have done something wrong, usually brings us to the place where we know something is wrong, but we don't exactly what it is.

God is not passive aggressive. When you are doing wrong... we tells you very directly. He speaks to you, he sends other people to speak to you, he gets your attention... He doesn't leave you wondering.

So stop thinking like that! Jesus said...

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."(NIV)

Jesus says **opposition is coming**. But a world of opposition should not steal your peace... because Jesus has overcome the world.

Jesus does not say... In this world you will have trouble because of the evil you have done... no Jesus is speaking to disciples who have done good, were trying to do good, and who would do good... but still even then... opposition would come.

OPPOSITION IS A PART OF LIFE. Do not think that an opposition free life is the sign that you are doing good. That was not the case anywhere in your Bible!

Expect to face opposition this week. Do not be caught off guard by difficulty.

Since Opposition is coming you must **Face your opposition first**

You have a city to rebuild. You have a life to rebuild. Your opposition will try to stand in your way – you must face your opposition first or you will never see the life you want.

Your opposition is sneaky. Watch what the Israel's opposition does in **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."(NIV)

Your opposition can appear friendly Beware the enemy that says they want to help you.

Let us help you build... Who wouldn't want help? We seek your God... Who wonderful is that?

But the truth is that they did not want to help. The truth is that they did not worship the God of Israel only. They gave sacrifice to Jehovah.. but also other God's.

Notice the timing of the opposition. They show up in Ezra 4.. what happened in Ezra 3? Israel had just laid the foundation and then the opposition shows up.

The foundation is a lot of work... they did not come to help with that... if someone really has come to help you – they will get their hands dirty. These people showed up after the hard work is done.

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."(NIV)

Don't let just anyone build on your foundation!

Had they agreed to let these people help then they would have brought their false God's into the temple... they would have slowed down the work that needed to be done... the people that had not laid the foundation would have built a different work than what was imagined.

Don't let just anyone build on your foundation!

There will always be people who will show up to spend YOUR MONEY. ...to spend YOUR TIME. ...to exploit YOUR TALENTS. BE CAREFUL! THESE PEOPLE MIGHT NOT BE YOUR FRIENDS!

Israel said "You have no part with us in building a temple to God." Sometimes you need to tell people "you have no part in this." You aren't being ugly... you are safeguarding your future.

Some people are your opposition... you have to face your opposition first.

Israel, who had been slaves for 70 years, in this moment made a stand and faced opposition. They said we will be making our own decisions on this temple. This is what we have decided to build for God.

They faced the opposition and started building the temple of God...

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

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.(NIV)

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

So wait... quick history. The King of Babylon that defeated Israel and took them into exile, his name was Nebuchadnezzar. The Persian King who defeated Babylon and set Israel free, his name was Cyrus. After Cyrus came Darius, And now after Darius came Xerxes... There is a new king and these "friends" revealed that they are really opposition right here. They revealed that they really did not want this temple built unto God...

You can't kind of be friends... You are either for or against there is no middle ground. As Jesus said...

Matthew 12:30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.(NIV)

Lord help us to discern who is for us and who is against us

Here is the letter they sent to Xerxes

Ezra 4:12 The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations.(NIV)

Ezra 4:13 Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer.(NIV)

Ezra 4:14 Now since we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored, we are sending this message to inform the king,(NIV)

The king read this and wrote back...

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.(NIV)

Ezra 4:24 Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill..

It looks like the opposition had won. They pulled a power play and Israel was forced to stop. Israel had an altar, a foundation, but they would never have a completed city...

Don't you hate it when it looks like you are going to lose and your opposition is going to win... They faced their opposition, but the opposition was going to win.

God gave this vision, but... it looked like it would never come to pass. God had given the command that there should be a temple in Jerusalem... but now that looked impossible.

I want to give you an important piece of information. We will call this the timeline of a vision

STEP 1 The Vision is born. God has given the vision. He has given the mission or the command.

STEP 2 Someone works the vision. They set out to fulfill the vision God has given.

Now step 3 is an important step...

STEP 3 they fail and the vision dies.

As hard as they try... it is not enough. As much effort, time, and heart as they put into what God has called them to do... it is not enough. They fail miserably and the vision dies.

When God gives a vision.. step 3 is necessary. Because there is a step 4.

STEP 4 God Supernaturally resurrects the vision and brings it to pass

Check you Bible! This pattern happens all over the place.

ABRAHA is given the vision to be the father of a great nation. He tries to fulfill the vision. He fails and can't have a son. GOD supernaturally resurrects the vision and Isaac is born.

DAVID is given the vision and anointed King. He tries to fulfill the vision. He fails – Saul stands in the way. And after Saul dies, his son Ish-bosheth is made king of Israel. GOD supernaturally does what David never could do and David becomes the best King Israel ever had...

Jesus Christ was sent into the world to save it. He works to fulfill that vision. Everyone loses hope as He dies on the cross. BUT 3 DAYS LATER the vision is resurrected. Jesus is Alive!

No matter the opposition God can resurrect the vision!

God gives the vision

God had given Israel this vision of a Temple! They worked to fulfill the vision. They had now failed and the temple stood unfinished under the orders of the biggest baddest nation on the planet.

The bad news is... you are in step 3! The step where the vision dies and no matter how hard you work you come up short. BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS... there is a step 4!

God is about to resurrect the vision and bring it to pass!

They write a letter that reaches Xerxes father, Darius. The remind him of the promise of Cyrus.. Darius in Ezra 6 declares that the royal treasury should pay for the temple materials. He declares that the opposition, the rulers of the surrounding areas stay away and that no one stands in the way of the temple being built.

God did this! God resurrected the vision. And as we will talk about next Sunday – The temple is built!

You must **face your opposition first**

What are you struggling with today? What is standing in your way from seeing the vision God gave you come to pass?

I fell in love in 2007 with a girl sitting outside the taco diner in Plano Tx. She was wearing Pink shoes. I came up to her and said something really smooth and charming... who can remember what was said... you know it doesn't really matter...

Seriously though... I said... “Wow those are some pink shoes...” anything to strike up a conversation.

Upon getting to know this girl... I received a vision.. I want to marry her... I want us to have a family together.. It became apparent that she felt the same as well.. BUT THERE WAS A PROBLEM... a big problem.. She had severe epilepsy and grand mal seizures.

She told me that she would spend most of her life not able to drive and on expensive medications that leave her feeling not like herself. She leveled with me and told me that the doctors said she could never have children.

The vision we had... was dead. Nothing we could do about it. As much as I loved this girl I could not fix her problem, I could not heal her.

You receive the vision

You work the vision

The vision dies

But then one night when I was out of town at a church conference.. Sarah came to a prayer meeting. While she was at the prayer meeting she fell to the ground in a grand mal seizure. The people of the church... this church... Redemption Church gathered around Sarah Frazier and started to pray.

She has been healed ever since that moment. She has never had another seizure. She has had 2 beautiful boys and another child on the way. She drives herself to work every day. She takes no medication. She has been medically cleared.

God resurrects the vision. He does what we never could do.

What do you need God to do for you?

I know you are facing opposition... but you need to know what the Bible says...

Isaiah 54:17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.(NIV)

1 John 4:4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.(NIV)

MUSICIAN