

## **Long for God's Glory in Your Good**

Ezra 5-6

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I used to attend an uncompromising conservative church that stressed the fact that we should always focus on God's glory and find joy in Him alone. This led me to rebuke a friend for being sad after her mother died and not finding complete joy in God. In hindsight this was a mistake because what I was saying, while theologically correct, wasn't the whole picture. Sorrow isn't inappropriate for Christians. In Psalms laments are common, in which the psalmists not only glorify God for who He is but also express faith in His goodness to them. Though it's good to always rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances, He understands that our joy can be made more complete through His blessing and provision for our needs, and by this He is glorified even more. We must understand that there is a link between God's glory and our good, and we cannot isolate these two ideas.

The first way that these two are linked is that our good is found in seeking God's glory. We see this in Ezra 5:1-5. Recall that the Israelites returned from exile and laid the foundation of the Temple, but now were facing opposition from the previous tenants of the land who were illegitimate worshippers of God. Ezra 5 takes place 20 years into this century-long opposition. During these two decades construction on the Temple was forcibly halted. Verse 1 mentions the prophecy of Haggai, and if we look in Haggai 1:4, 7-9 we see that the Israelites eventually gave up and went on living their lives, building up their own houses while the house of God, the symbol of His glory, was in ruins. They got used to the ruins and lost their zeal for God's glory. They didn't long for or pray for it. They didn't ask for God to give them a way to fight for it. They forgot that God brought them back not just to live in the land, but to do so as His people. So Haggai calls for them to repent, and in Ezra 5:2 we see that they listen and start the rebuilding process despite opposition and without authorization. And immediately God blesses them by moving Tattenai to appeal to Darius without ordering a stop to the construction, and again by moving Darius to authorize and even fund the rebuilding. Their good is found when they seek God's glory. Before, they misguidedly focused on their own lives, which we know from Haggai 2:15-19 didn't lead to their blessing, but rather reduced harvests, one of the curses laid out by the covenant that they failed to abide by. But when they focused on God's glory, He provided. And just like for the Israelites it's God's design that if we seek God's glory instead of focusing on our

own lives, He will provide for us (Matthew 6:33). But we, who are under the New Covenant, have no curses but only blessing, for Jesus became a curse for us.

But how can we be sure that our good will be found in seeking God's glory? This brings us to the second way that His glory is linked to our good, which is that His glory is won in our good. God stakes His reputation on being good to us. In Ezra 5-6 we see that God worked things out so that Darius not only allowed the rebuilding but also contributed money and livestock to the effort. In 6:14 we see that this is all by the sovereign direction of God, who is above all kings and can turn their hearts. God accomplishes His will by His sovereign direction for our good. We know this applies to us from Ephesians 1:11 and Romans 8:28. But we must understand that our good isn't primarily material. In Ezra 6:16-17 we see that the Israelites were impoverished when we compare the sacrifices they gave, which was primarily from Darius' government aid, to the far greater numbers seen in the dedication of Solomon's Temple. Likewise for us, in Matthew 6:33 we see that God doesn't promise to give us whatever we want, but to provide for our needs. We should be content and grateful for His provision. George Müller, a pastor and philanthropist, sought to glorify God by founding orphanages without himself having the resources to do so, but trusting in God to provide daily needs, which He indeed did by providing food and eventually helping more children through these orphanages than all the others in England to that date. So we see in this example how God's provision is sufficient to meet our needs, and ultimately brings Him glory. Finally, our good is not primarily physical, but rather spiritual. In Ezra 6:19-22 the Israelites celebrate Passover, the reminder of God's faithfulness to them in delivering them from slavery in Egypt. For God's glory, He had death pass over Israel and led them to pass through the waters to enter into a relationship with Him, for their ultimate good. Likewise Communion for us reminds us of our deliverance from slavery to sin. Through Jesus' resurrection death passes over us, being made powerless, and we by passing through death in Jesus have died to our old selves but have also been raised in Him to a new life through faith. This is our ultimate good that ultimately brings Him glory.