

"HOW TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN"

Ezra 7:10

Introduction:

This is a very interesting question -- and something that catches your imagination. Quite often people will come up to me and say, "well, what's happening?" It is kind of a common expression today. How do you make things happen.

*Greenbain Mall - 7th - Viewed some Art works of Masters
Michaelangelo - Picasso - Frank - Rene B Wright - Seventh prints -
One of a kind - space age ideas - DNE, especially - Two little pictures
of the image a ~~tridimensional~~ face - entitled - "little Puppies make me smile" - make
Happen*

I was reading around in the book of Ezra. And this was during the time of the Exile period in the Old Testament. You have got to remember that for some 65 or maybe 70 years, thousands of people have lived many hundreds of miles away from their homeland. They were away from the center of the culture, their religious faith. They were being absorbed into the main stream of the situation. They were discouraged, disappointed. And this was a special moment. People had been left on the sight where people who do not make a difference, there was just nothing left but a pile of bricks, stones, and rubble. And everyone had really no hope.

Now in conditions like that, there arose some men by the name of Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel, and Ezra. And one by one they made their contribution to the situation, under the leading of God's Holy Spirit. And each one made something happen. They made a difference.

As we read the book, we discover the power of God honored and blessed his work. Did he seek to interest others in the work of God. Chapter 7:6 - God prospered

7:56 him. Did he engage in some specific act of service. God prospered him. Did he require special endowments or special service. God gave it to him - V. 28. Did he seek gifted helpers. God gave them and called them out. Chapter 8:18. Did he need the presence and the power of God to face dangers in God's work - and to be brought through victoriously. God was with him and kept him. Chapter 8:22, 31.

7:1 The book of Ezra could be described as God's power in a man's life -- the hand of the Lord was upon him. It was not magic. It was power applied to a chosen task. God saw to it - so we learned something here. That in conditions like these - in Chapter 7 we read after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. There went up Ezra. Now this Ezra went up from Babylon. And he was ascribed and he was skilled in the law of Moses. Which the Lord God of Israel had given. And the King granted him all the requests because the hand of the Lord was upon him.

7:6

Now, if you had to write a resume, of this man - some of you probably have had to write a little such detailed account of your own doings. You write down, your home, your schooling, your activities. And if you are thinking about another job, you dust off the old one. Maybe re-write it and look for greener pastures.

Now if there is a resume of Ezra, I think we'd find it in Chapter 7:6. It gives us some quick insight - and really warns us. About how this man performs. He is a man who has capabilities - and he has gained the confidence of the King, Artaxerxes. I wonder sometimes as I read that, his friends, close friends of this old fellow did not call him "Art" for short. Ezra had the capacity to operate and communicate, and he had the confidence of this man. He was trustworthy, dependable.

Now another thing in V. 6 that impresses you is -- that little phrase, the hand of the Lord, his God was upon him.

Not only was Ezra - did Ezra have his hand upon the throne of the empire, but by God's grace, he had his hand on the throne of Heaven. Five times in two chapters, Ezra 7 and 8 - this phrase is repeated. In one way or another, the strong hand of the Lord was upon him. Now this is the image of the man who stands out in the crowd - who is deeply blessed.

Now as I think of the hand of the Lord, you know that reminds me of politicians and news men today who scramble to ride Air Force I with the President. Back and forth to their local cities, or towns, so that they can emerge from the door of Air Force I standing next to the President. Who for the purpose of good pictures, will put his hand on the local politician. That is always worth 50 or 60,000 votes. Now who of us does not like to stand in the presence of someone we consider great. And have the hand of that person upon us. Well, that was Ezra - and the only hand was the hand of God. And it is those two blessings - he had his hand on Art and his hand on God.

You know, Nicholas Butler, President of Columbia University, a great educator said -- I could put all people in three groups. He says, a small number make things happen. And then there is another group that is a little larger, they watch things happen. And then he said, I'd have a third group, that is the largest group of all - who have no notion of what is happening at all.

Now if he were speaking today, he would say Ezra was a man that made things happen. Now that is sort of creating interest for us. The people with whom we serve and work.

What are the qualities of a man or a woman who make things happen. And the answer comes back - look at Ezra - Chapter 7 and 8.

I think there are at least a couple of points that we can make here that will give us guidance in this. First, selected priorities. And second, spiritual purposes. I know that these two are close - they are just about twins. But if you will listen carefully, I hope to give a little bit of insight on this. Now these two things - that I think Ezra had, that are sort of the key.

I. SELECTED PRIORITIES

Now I am impressed with people who are spiritual. I am impressed with people who know a lot of things. But we really kind of get disturbed about the modern way in which people carry on things without any selecting of priorities. I think maybe this is what has happened to the modern educational system, in this country of ours. They have gotten away from the priorities which they had in times past. Ezra was a thinker and he responded and he initiated things. And he got his priorities straight. Let me give you some ideas about how he went about this. Where people are incredibly busy doing good things - we often hear people. But we say, what are my priorities. The great question in the '80's. How do I know my priorities. Do I have a grasp of my personal priorities that I am working on.

Now, Chapter 7:10 - I believe is really a formula type of statement that probably describes the priorities of all Scribes, of all of Ezra's whole generation. But I am

impressed that Ezra, whom I believe to be the author, he wants us to know that he really believed in these priorities. These verses were the thing that he arose with in the morning. That managed his life throughout the day. And that he closed out the day. And check up on these priorities which he had here.

1- First, there was hunger for the word of God. He would study the law of God. This was his design for life and how life should be lived. One of the things that I like about this man is, that he made an application here.

One of the troublesome problems today is that I think there are a number of people who may study or read once in awhile, the Bible, but they rarely seem to do it. It does no good to say that I believe in the Doctrine, of the incarnation, if you do not follow that Doctrine. And if you leave the Doctrine and go out and incarnate yourself in the world. Where people are hungry to hear the love of God and the message of Jesus. Ezra digested this, and he says, this has become flesh and bone of my life.

A wonderful thing excites us when we think about a man who has chose to study - immersed himself in the law of the Lord, and to do it. This is discipline, and that is not easy. Now some of you say this morning, of what relevance does that have to me. Somebody is now saying - well, I am just a housewife. Well, do not knock housewives because I am married to one. And she does a real good job. But she follows those priorities and it has made a difference in our family and in our home. And it ought to make a difference in every one of our lives today. She grasps her priorities and so did Ezra.

Carl Jung said, I have observed that a directed life - and I suspected that he meant a life with priorities, is generally better, richer, healthier than an aimless one. But it is better to go forward with the stream of time, than to go backward against it. What is he saying the healthy people that I have met understand what is first. Do you know what is first in your life today.

Some man recently wrote about the failures of Hitler. That the major point of his failure was his inability to know his priorities. He allowed his armies to sweep across the map of Europe. South, East, West and North - and that was his down-fall. He did not understand military priorities. And the author concluded with this statement. "He who cannot reject, cannot select."

Now that ought to help us when we think about the expenditure of our time, and energy. I mean spiritually thinking men and women. They spend a lot of time. Seeking out the nature of God's priorities for us. Selected because there is a hunger for the word.

2- Second, the priorities we have in current events. We might look at V. 27 - and see that not only do men and women who make things happen understand their priorities, but they also have a unique understanding of current events. This part 7:27 of the story is an encounter with Ezra and Artaxerxes. In which he was given the freedom and the power to go back to Jerusalem. And to help and rebuild.

You can imagine what you or I would be like coming here with an encounter like this.

It is described in the early part of the chapter. And when you have been given money, men, material - and told to go and do the job. You would have begun thinking now - I wonder how this job will come out. I wonder if I can really handle this thing alright. And people will be asking you how did the old King act. And Ezra looked back on this experience in V. 27 - in the presence of the King and the success of the encounter, and he said - blessed be the Lord God of our Fathers who has put such a thing as this in the King's heart. To adorn the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. And has extended loving kindness to me before the King and his Counsellors. And before all the King's mighty princesses.

Ezra looked into events and he saw the hand of God at work.

He did not look at the surface of things, his own performance, his own identity. His own management abilities and capabilities.

The thing that emerged and his reaction, I have seen God at work in this thing. I have looked into the situation, the Spirit of God is upon my life, and in the heart of the King - it is a super thing to see what God is doing. This is a prospective not often shared in the world today.

There are people who are always looking into things. Looking into events. But they find little meaning and little purpose. They can't see what God is doing.

Most of us look at the world, at people, and at events on the surface. We size up things by size and shape. We look at the church and we size it up by the attendance

figures. We look at the church and we size it up by the money and the amount. The bottom line is profit and loss statements. The only thing that we can see.

Ezra looked into events and said, what a great thing God has done. And a man who has a spiritual mind, today, first - the first question he looks for is - what in the world is God doing here.

Ezra responded to his own comments by saying at the end of the chapter - I will strengthen according to the hand of the Lord, my God, and his hand upon me. Courage comes in the legitimate sense when you see God at work.

Catherine Cobb - one of the 52 hostages - when asked how she survived all of that solitude for 14 months. She said, every morning for several hours I took my Bible and the work of Thomas Kempis and I prayed, and I meditated, and I saw God at work in all of this. And I never lost hope. I got courage because I was aware of the presence of God. Now this is a prospective that is different from that of another hostage. Richard Blucher. Who said, I survived by meditating every day on my hate for my captures.

Now Ezra has a prospective, Godly people discipline themselves to look at events, and people, and say God is here. And that is what he was doing.

Now, man cannot stop the momentum of what God is doing.

Someone wrote about the work of Mother Theresa, of Calcutta, India. Now, some of us not fully embrace all of the theology but this Roman Catholic nun believes in. But she has a perspective that all Christians really ought to try to follow. She walked into a ward of children, who had been thrown into the gutters, and had been discarded and left to die. And the camera captured Mother Theresa, holding up a new born premature baby. Whose face and head was horribly disfigured. A piece of awful looking humanity. She held it up in her hand and said, the life of God is in this child.)

Now when we look around us in the world today, there are people who have a perspective - but I fear we are losing the main one. We have let things just trickle down, and we get off on the issue of abortion, we get off on the issue based on convenience. And we fail to see the deeper things of what God values and what God is doing. And what God wants us to discover.

Ezra in this encounter with God was not impressed with his own performance. He wasn't touched by the Kings, surroundings, or majesty. He wasn't moved by the moment of opportunity, to go back to Jerusalem. But rather he said, I have seen God doing things and the bottom line is - I have taken courage.

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8:21 The third thing about his priorities was contemplation. He knew that he was spiritually involved - and you will see in V. 21 - of Chapter 8 - that Ezra was ready. He was like a runner. He was ready to go. The gold and the silver was going to finance the trip. The construction and the process of the temple - there were the men, the chariots were there. And everybody was lined up. And Ezra contemplated on this and suddenly, Ezra thought about the group of people with all of

it's money and materials. They had to cross literally scores of miles of wilderness. And desert. They were going to face enemy troops and hostile groups. And it was not going to be like that song - "Seldom Is Heard A Discouraging Word". The whole thing was going to be discouraging. And the chances were that they would not survive the trip.

8:21
8:22
Now what Ezra really needed was a whole battalion of Marines. What he needed was - well, I don't know if war ships or submarines would have helped or not. But watch him in his thinking about these priorities. "I proclaim to fast there at the River Ahava. That we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all of our possessions. I love the next verse - I was ashamed to request from the King troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way. Because he had said to the King, the hand of our God is favorably disposed, to all those that seek him. But his power and anger against all of those who forsake him."

Now the point is very simple. Ezra, on a number of occasions had had conversations with this King. And in his talks with this Persian King, in Babylon, Ezra had managed to tell him about the dimensions of his God. How powerful his God was - and do you suppose when the story of the burning bush was told, and the exodus from Egypt, and the story of David and Goliath. That the bottom line which touched the King was the power of God.

Now Ezra has somewhat of a dilemma. He is facing a David and Goliath type of situation. How will he get out of this - what do you say to the King of Persia, do you say by the way, we need some soldiers to do God's work. In other words, we are like somebody giving one of these hot testimonies you know for Christ, and then

go out and there is a very practical moment, when you almost hear the King say - hey, if your God is so powerful, let him lead you across this wilderness.

8:23
Now Ezra realized that and he was smart enough in his thinking to know that he had a power source. And if you should turn away from the conventional, protective mechanism, he says our weapons will come from fasting and prayer. And we will trust a mighty hand of God.

Hudson Taylor, at the age of 62, was asked why it was that God had chosen him to be the founder of China Inland Mission. He was heard to say, God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do his great works through large committees. He trains someone to be quiet enough, little enough, and then he uses them. If you could get Ezra's spirit for just a second and sense the struggle that was there - I think you would hear Ezra saying - before we begin our trip to Jerusalem, it is not to get some Marines out in front of us. It is rather to acknowledge before God, our weaknesses, and ask for the strong arm and hand, that will guide us. And I am excited to see how people are going to trust the strong hand of God.

Ezra's life was on the line. He was deciding where the power was going to come from. Robert Browning wrote in every man's career are certain points where he dares not be different. The world detects him clearly if he dared. As baffled at the game, and losing life. I believe Ezra had or would have lost everything at that moment. If he had not drawn from selective priorities.

7:9
V. 9 - We see the good hand of God was upon him - for Ezra had set his heart upon God. And that was no accident. That that happened. God cannot be cohearsed in

distributing his favors. God will bless as and when he will. And Ezra knew it was not certain techniques - but it was a certain kind of character. He knew the reality of power and he set his heart upon this in V. 10. God's blessing rested upon him and gave him every ability for the task which provided him with helpers and protected him from foes and rested upon him.

Selected Priorities

- 1. Craving & hunger Word of God -
- 2. Current Events - God at work
- 3. Contemplation - Not mania - Hand!

II. SPIRITUAL PURPOSES

7:12

In Chapter 7:12 - we read about his inquiring into the law. And the King of Kings came to Ezra - that he freely offered him to go to Jerusalem. And those to go with him. And we see this series of purposes - you are sent by the King to make inquiry about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your land.

And so there was conveyed to him the silver and the gold, the King and his Counsellors, and those who dwell in Jerusalem with silver and gold. And those, a free-will offering from the people. Who are going with him, who had willingly offered for the building of the house in Jerusalem. So we find that there were three kinds of offerings taken here. Chapter 7:15, 16 - there was the King's gift first. There was Ezra's collection from the Babylonians. And third, there was a free-will offering, of his fellowmen.

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The first of the spiritual purposes was about what they were doing. They needed to understand what they were to be doing on this. Whatever seems good to your

7:21

brethren it says here. V. 21. Whatever Ezra the priest, and the God in Heaven requires

7:23-25

of you, be it done in all diligence. V. 23 - whatever is commanded by the God of Heaven. V. 25 - Ezra according to the wisdom of your God. Which is in your hand.

As we read all of this - what that says to me is, of prime importance to you today. Too many people are trying to do things in the Kingdom without ever sitting down and discovering the Spiritual purpose of what they are doing.

There is too much purposeless ministry going on. It is like a hum-drum. People use the Bible, Scripture, God's Word. And sometimes they don't know what they are doing. Now I have been many years - but they need to know what they were doing.

Now this is the thing about industry today - large executives will tell you what their purpose is. They'll tell you what their job is - what they are supposed to be doing. What their task is. But in this rushing life in the city of Chesapeake, we sometimes ask ourselves the question - does my congregation know what it is all about. Have I been talking to them all of these years, and they do not understand what the purpose is. To expand and to reach people for Jesus Christ and to claim them.

Furthermore, do those who are leaders in our church, know. Do all the men and women with which we work - know the purpose of this congregation. Out of all the purposes that we have - do the lay people know. What you are supposed to be doing. Do we know that we are supposed to be at work for this church. Do we know that we are supposed to be building stronger families. Do we know that we are supposed to be

creating a bond in the marriages. Do we know that even in friendships and relationships - these familiar passages from the Word of God - as you begin to read them over until here is a simple statement of purpose. Together as a group, we are to lead in the redemption of mankind. This is the purpose of Southern Baptists.

I am really impressed with Ezra. Twenty-five hundred years ago, maybe more - you boil it all down. His purpose was to get the goal to Jerusalem - and the goal meaning not only the money - but do you know what your purpose is. Talk to him about this. To get their purpose lined up as to what they were supposed to be doing.

2 The second thing, understanding the people. That was the spiritual purpose that he had. It is interesting in the insight - Chapter 8 - V. 1. - the people are a part of this movement. And in the first 14 verses, there is an endless list of names representing groups of people. Who have joined together - there they all are. They knew that you do not pull all the work for God if you do not have your people.

8:15 V. 15 - I assembled them at the river that runs to Ahava. We camped there for three days. I observed the people. And the priests. And here is an interesting comment, about his people. I did not find any Levites there.

You remember Aaron, who first set in motion the ministry of the Levites. Aaron was set aside to lead in the moral and spiritual things - be a pace-setter. A model, an intercessor, and a leader of the people.

Moses examined the role - it was amusing as we would say - the computer punched out the list. And told him who was there. The builders, the accountants, the transportation men, the architects, the public relations men. But there were one group missing - the Sons of Levi.

Now, there may have been some reasons why they did not make application to go. The Sons of Levi are not out on the points - at the front. And God renews something in his work - in history. Quite often the religious establishment has to catch up from things a little later.

Once again, the Levites were not there. God had to speak to other people and generate interest and vigor. Where were the sons of Levi. That is something that bothers us. They may have become comfortable in Babylon. Maybe life was not so bad. And they built their homes and they were enjoying living there. And they did not want to be disturbed.

V. 16-17 - Ezra said, get the sons of Levi - get them and the number of them - and a number of them came. The unwilling, he is unwilling to proceed without them.

And he got influential men and seeked them out - 11 of them. He sent them to seek the ministers for God's house.

He sent them to the right place - to the college. For educating priests. He sent

them to the right man, Iddo - who was chief, president. And told them what they were seeking.

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7:28
v.28
Now, the third thing is accountability of the people. I think this is another spiritual purpose which we have in mind. Ezra had a procedure in V. 28 - I said unto them, ye are wholly to the Lord, and the utensils, the silver, the gold, and the free-will offering unto God. And he challenges them to watch and to keep them until they weigh that. And they made a record of all that they had.

Now this took into account the possibilities of the frailties of people. He apparently kept a careful record. And he told them - you get so much gold now, when we get to Jerusalem. We will weigh it again. You might hear somebody say - I am offended. I am insulted. You are going to weigh this gold again when I get to Jerusalem in four months. Don't you trust me. I can hear Ezra saying, yes, I trust you - it is your human nature that bothers me a little bit. And I would like to protect you - and I want you to know there will come a moment of accountability - it is coming up.

Sometimes we Christians take far too lightly - the great thing that we are accountable unto God. Men and women who serve God in the home, the marriage, the family, the congregation - exercise our gifts, our opportunities, and our resources.

We have no right to say to those people - you cannot tell me what is good and bad, and what is right and wrong. There is accountability in good. It motivates us.

Does this not bring you to fear that someday, you shall stand before God and he will want to weigh the gold and the silver that he asked you to bring to Jerusalem.

God gave you a wife, did your home grow. Did you become all that I created you to become in Spiritual leadership. I gave you children, I know you want to educate them. Give them three good meals a day. But did you exercise your spiritual gifts. Did those children grow up in an atmosphere where they were free to follow Christ.

What have you done with your financial resources - have you kept back too much for your own leisure. And have you just not served in a way that God has called.

There was a story of Terence Fox which told about at age 15 - he had a burning ambition to be wealthy by 30. At 20 he quit Marquette University, and went to work. He worked on Wall Street - and later he got his degree by attending night school. In the six years he spent on Wall Street - he saw that he could make a lot of money if he worked hard. He said, what did it take - 24 hours, 7 days a week committment. My golf game went, I stopped hunting, my marriage faltered. I was on the road - always traveling. I was never home. I spent time alone in strange airports. And he says one day, I said, you are here because you chose to be.

Now that ought to speak to us.

There are some dangers to avoid and Ezra rewarded them. There is the danger of neglecting that which is familiar. He was 31st in the law - V. 6, 11, 12, 14, 21, and 25.

Often we say, well, I know that. Why bother about it further. Ezra knew that about the law of God, but he kept studying.

He avoided the danger of mere head knowledge. He carried this over in his daily living, and in his daily walk.

And Ezra avoided the danger of novelty. He had a purpose - and it was spiritual. The people of God stood at a turning point. And this is our message today - that as the pressure and situations arrive, Ezra went to look and see what God was doing. And God was at work. And had he taken the band of soldiers, the shepherd of Israel would never have come into view. The spiritual instinct was - simple trust in full view of God. The action here is marked out for us.

Spiritual Purposes

- 1. understand his Test
- 2. understand the People -
- 3. understand the accountability of the People -

- Selected Points
- 1. having good work
 - 2. inherent rewards - at work -
 - 3. contemplation - hand of God