

On The Road To Reformation: Lord, Deliver Us From The Ambushes Of Enemies!

Ezra 8:31-32

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A biblical reformation is very much like sanctification, it does not happen all at once, but rather comes in stages over a period of time. There are periods in a biblical reformation where there are new insights and heights of attainment in doctrine, in worship, in government, and in sanctification that are reached, but then there are periods in a biblical reformation where those heights of attainment are simply guarded and protected against enemies that would compromise or steal away what has been gained. There are periods in a biblical reformation where there is amazing and rapid growth, but then there are periods in a biblical reformation where a remnant struggles to climb ever so slowly up a mountain of opposition, trial, and tribulation (like the rock climber who moves slowly up the side of a mountain). There are periods in a biblical reformation where the Gospel is transforming entire nations and governments (as in the Protestant Reformation in Europe), and there are periods in a biblical reformation where the Gospel is only transforming individuals and families—when reformation is but a day of small things (as at the present time). But even then, let us not despise the day of small things; for all biblical reformation is ultimately accomplished “not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). Without this perspective that reformation comes in stages by the work of the mighty Holy Spirit, dear ones, many may burn brightly at first with great zeal, but may burn out and fade away (like a falling star) when reformation does not come as quickly as they had hoped.

This Lord’s Day, we will be considering together the stages of reformation that faced Ezra and the remnant of God’s people who set out on the road

to reformation from Babylon to Jerusalem. The main points from our text are these: (1) God Delivers His People From The Ambush Of Enemies On The Road To Reformation (Ezra 8:31-32); and (2) Reformation Continues After Arriving In Jerusalem (Ezra 8:33-36). I will only be able to address the first main point today, and will address the second main point next Lord's Day (God willing).

I. God Delivers His People From The Ambush Of Enemies On The Road To Reformation (Ezra 8:31-32).

A. In the previous sermon from the Book of Ezra, our attention was focused primarily upon the holy treasures (of gold, silver, and precious vessels) that were entrusted to the Priests and the Levites to guard and to keep until they arrived in Jerusalem to be used in the Temple of God for His worship. Likewise, it was noted that Ministers of the Gospel (as well as Elders and Deacons) have been entrusted by the Lord with holy treasures to guard and to keep in the form of sound doctrine (particularly the Gospel), in the form of pure worship, in the form of faithful church government and discipline, and in the form of precious souls who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. We observed that trustees/stewards (to whom are entrusted such priceless treasures) will not receive the "well done" from their Lord for being creative, innovative, entertaining, smart, or successful in the eyes of their peers, or for building mega-churches. To the contrary trustees/stewards will receive the "well done" from their Lord for being faithful to feed, faithful to nourish, and faithful to protect the sheep entrusted into their care. It is required of a steward that he be found faithful (Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 4:2).

B. As we now focus our attention upon our text for this Lord's Day, we see that Ezra and his relatively small group of reformers embark

upon their long journey on the road to reformation, and that the Lord (in answer to their prayers) preserves them from all their enemies along the way until they safely arrive in Jerusalem (approximately 4 months later, Ezra 7:9).

1. You will recall that Ezra had appointed a time of prayer and fasting for God's people before setting forth upon their journey. The specific request that they asked of the Lord was His Divine protection from all their enemies (Ezra 8:21-23). Now we see in the verses before us the gracious answer of God to these fervent prayers offered to Him (Ezra 8:31-32).

2. Dear ones, we should never hesitate throughout the day to bring unto the Lord the needs that we have in this life, for Christ Himself has taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Our daily bread simply represents all of our needs in this life (food, clothing, shelter, job, education, use of gifts and abilities, health, protection, wisdom to make decisions, marriage, old age, death, etc.). And if we are to pray for our daily earthly needs, how much more we are to bring before the Lord our spiritual needs for His grace to save us, to sanctify us, to preserve us, and to glorify Himself through us. If the Lord did not want us to bother Him with all of our daily needs of a physical and spiritual nature, why would He have stated so clearly in the Lord's Prayer that we were to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"?

a. Beloved, the Lord hears the cry of the ravens for their needs (Psalm 147:9). Ravens were unclean birds under the Old Testament dietary laws—they were scavengers and fed on dead animals. And yet even the loud, unintelligible squawking of the ravens is heard by the Lord, and He cares for them. And do you think for a moment that the Lord does not hear your cries, dear child of God? Are you, whom He has bought with the priceless blood of His own dear Son, not of infinitely more value than ravens? Will He not hear your cries?

b. Dear believer, who is leaning on the righteousness of Christ alone for your eternal salvation, you are not only invited, but commanded to come boldly (confidently) unto the throne of grace in order that you might obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). That throne which we are commanded to boldly approach in prayer is not here called a throne of judgment or a throne of condemnation, but a throne of grace. It being a throne of grace, it means that none of us are righteous in ourselves or worthy in ourselves to approach that throne. There would be no reason for grace, if we could earn the right to come to that throne of grace. It being a throne of grace, it means that Christ has fulfilled the law of God for us, has paid the debt of sin which we owed to God, has been raised from the dead to infallibly prove once and for all that Christ's redemption for us is found eternally acceptable before the Father. It being a throne of grace, it means that Christ is our advocate upon that throne of grace, continually praying for us that our faith would not fail and continually applying to us the benefits of His redemption moment by moment (even when we are weak in faith, even when we miserably fail Him, even when we are bent over like reeds in the strong winds of affliction and trial and our faith almost seems to be like smoking flax).

c. Just as Ezra and God's people brought before the Lord their need for safety from enemies along the road to reformation, you may seek the same Lord and find Him just as willing to hear your prayer for mercy and grace in the time of need as the Lord was willing to hear the prayer of Ezra and that relatively small band of reformers. It is not our worthiness that is the ground of our approach to the throne of grace, but always, always, it is the worthiness of Christ that is the ground upon which the Lord commands us to come boldly to the throne of grace.

C. I would have you note from our text that God's deliverance was not simply from the threat of enemies that **might have attacked** God's

people as they traveled along the road to reformation, but it would appear that God actually delivered His people from real ambushes that were set in place along the road to reformation, as appears from Ezra 8:31 (“and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way”). The form of the Hebrew verb (“delivered”) is intensified and conveys the idea that God “caused them to be delivered” (it is in the Hebrew Hiphil Hebrew form or pattern). Standard Hebrew lexicons (like *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver, and Briggs) translate this word to mean that the Lord actually “snatched” His people out of ambushes that were set for them. Whether the Lord gave warning by some natural or supernatural means before they approached the ambush or whether the Lord put such fear in the hearts of those had set ambushes against them; in either case, God heard the cries of His people and snatched them out of the plans and plots of their enemies (who had heard that they were on the road to reformation from Babylon to Jerusalem). This makes God’s deliverance even more personal—it was not a mere hypothetical deliverance, but an actual snatching out of a real life ambush.

D. Likewise, dear ones, God has snatched His people out of the jaws of the greater forces of the enemy time and time again throughout history (**Gideon** and his 300 hundred blew trumpets and broke vessels with torches inside them against 120,000 Midianites; **Hezekiah** simply prayed to the Lord and 180,000 Assyrians that surrounded Jerusalem were destroyed by God’s angel, **Paul** was delivered from the Jews who lay in wait for him according to Acts 20:19). Let me also cite one historical account outside of Scripture of the Lord’s incredible snatching His people out of the jaws of the Papal Antichrist. The year was 1588. The Reformed nation of the Netherlands was under the cruel boot of Spanish oppression and torture. An enormous armada of Spanish ships (about 130 ships), partially paid for by indulgences raised by the Papal Antichrist,

sailed for England to crush Protestant support there and to stamp out Dutch resistance to Spanish dominion and Papal oppression. The Reformed in the Netherlands and the Reformed in England and Scotland prayed and fasted as the Spanish Armada made its way through the Atlantic. And in answer to the prayers of God's people, God sent a violent storm off of the coast of Scotland which decimated a large portion of the Spanish Armada. This is an account presented by one who claims no religious partisanship.

An unusually severe September Atlantic storm had formed off the Scottish coast, and the returning Armada fleet was caught in its fury. Many Spanish ships left formation and straggled away. Some beached on the Irish coast, with the Spanish sailors being captured or deserting and melting into the Irish population. Other stragglers managed to rejoin their squadrons, or wander back to Spain on their own. It was this storm that caused nearly all the damage and loss—both shipwrecks and casualties—that we associate with the Armada. 15-20,000 Spanish sailors perished, and close to 60 ships were lost or damaged beyond repair before the remnant of the force finally succeeded in returning to Spanish ports (<http://www.historybuff.com/library/refarmada2.html>).

E. Dear ones, the enemies of a biblical reformation are on every side at the present time. They set ambushes for God's people who are on the road to reformation from Roman Catholic Babylon to Reformed Protestant Jerusalem (if you will). The ambushes set by enemies are seeking to destroy a biblical reformation in the Church of Christ, in the Christian family, and in the individual lives of Christians.

1. **Ecumenicalism** is one great enemy that attacks the Church of Christ and destroys a biblical reformation. I refer to a worldly ecumenicalism that puts on a false face of peace and unity and takes us ever closer to Roman Catholic Babylon in compromising and redefining the free Gospel of Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law, in compromising and redefining justification by faith alone, in compromising and redefining sanctification that is purchased by Christ and applied by Christ to God's children and yet a sanctification that loves Christ's law and endeavors by God's grace to walk in obedience to it (with the goal of conformity to the image of Christ), in compromising and redefining the

worship which God alone authorizes in the singing of Psalms without instruments and bands, without religious images, without sacred signs and symbols (except Baptism and the Lord's Supper), and without man-appointed holy days (like Christmas and Easter), and in compromising and redefining who is that antichrist, man of sin, and son of perdition that sits in the temple (or church) of God usurping the prerogatives and authority of Christ as Head over His Church. Such worldly ecumenicalism may appeal to the masses; it may fill mega-churches and cathedrals; it may gain the applause of religious leaders and world leaders, but it is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15). This worldly ecumenicalism is not interested in preserving and protecting the sound doctrine, the pure worship, and faithful church government that Christ in Scripture has entrusted to His Ministers and to His Church. Since Vatican II, the Papal Antichrist has conspicuously changed his persecuting mask into a tolerating mask in reaching out to Protestants, to the Greek Orthodox, to Jews, to Muslims, and now to atheists and homosexuals (based upon the recent interviews of Pope Francis). There is no greater enemy to a biblical reformation than a compromising ecumenicalism. A worldly ecumenicalism disarms and renders defenseless the Church of Christ, for it strips the Church of the infallible authority of Scripture alone. As this is an enemy of a biblical reformation, we should like Ezra and those reformers who set out on the road to reformation pray that God would preserve us from all worldly ecumenicalism and rather cause us to be devoted to a covenanted reformation that is based upon the infallible authority of Scriptural doctrine, worship, and church government alone.

2. A great enemy that would ambush a biblical reformation in the Christian family is **the absence, neglect, or refusal of male leadership** in the Christian family. The Christian family is under siege by enemies who want to redefine godly, biblical leadership as oppression over women and children in the home. No doubt, there are always abuses to which one can point in the use of leadership and authority within the

home (or anywhere else), but the abuse of something good does not condemn the lawful use of something good. Godly husbands and fathers who love and serve their families by providing for their bodily needs, by loving and encouraging them, by feeding and nourishing them in their spiritual needs, by protecting them from all enemies (both physical and spiritual), and by going before the family as an example for the family to follow are sadly AWOL (absent without official leave) or are missing in action to such a large extent. The world and the worldly church promote egalitarianism as to roles within a family (where men are robbed of their biblical role to be servant shepherds and everyone has an equal say in what goes on in the family). However, the Scripture firmly places that role of leadership upon the shoulders of husbands and fathers (1 Corinthians 11:3). Dear men, if you are not leading your family by Scripture, by love, by service, and by example, the enemy will find your family to be an easy target to ambush by way of each member going its own way and doing its own thing, rather than being bound together in covenantal love and biblical truth. And women if your husband or father is AWOL, are you praying for him, are you encouraging him to take that loving leadership, are you encouraging him to talk to someone who can help him grow in becoming the loving shepherd he should be in the family, or ladies are you rather hindering the loving leadership of your husband/father because you have become a rival instead of a helper, a constant fault-finder instead of a loving encourager (loving correction not constant condemnation). Ladies, you are to love your husbands and to set such an example before even unsaved husbands that they might be won to Christ by your example (1 Peter 3:1).

3. A great enemy that would ambush a biblical reformation in the individual lives of Christians today is **sexual impurity**, promiscuity, infidelity, pornography, and gutter music. Sexual impurity is so rampant and is so acceptable that it is even taught as acceptable to children at the very earliest years in the godless public school system. What a battle for

the mind, heart, and soul of every Christian is this enemy to our own personal biblical reformation. Sexual addictions that exist in the young and old alike are destroying a biblical reformation in the lives of Christians. Sexual impurity is sadly tolerated more within Christian circles than drug or alcohol addiction, and yet it will as truly destroy a biblical reformation as drugs or alcohol. This enemy is ambushing those who truly desire to walk on the road to reformation from Babylon to Jerusalem. What can be done to break such besetting sins (not only sexual impurity, but any besetting sin)? These steps are intended for all those who are trusting (however weakly) in the Lord Jesus Christ as their righteousness in the sight of God.

a. First, you must realize the seriousness and power of this enemy—you cannot take this enemy lightly. This enemy can literally destroy your life. You must pray for a holy hatred for this enemy. You will not take the urgent and necessary steps that you need to take if you play with this enemy, flirt with this enemy, and treat it as a toy to pull out when you want and to put away when you want. If Ezra and the band of reformers fasted and prayed for physical safety before embarking on the road to reformation, how much more should we when it involves our souls. There are particular sins to which we may become attached that have such a hold on us that we must not only pray, but fast as well (Matthew 17:21).

b. Second, you must confess to Christ your sin not merely because of the consequences that you suffer, but supremely because you have offended your Heavenly Father, who is most holy but who is most gracious in saving you (Psalm 51:4). Dear ones, pray that the Lord would grant that the greatest shame you sense is not the shame of the consequences you have or may suffer, but rather the shame you sense in violating God's honor and glory by your sin.

c. Third, you must constantly eye the mercy of God that is in Christ Jesus lest you be swallowed up with self-condemnation.

Conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit, but self-condemnation that moves far passed conviction of sin and leads to despair or an over-preoccupation with sin is not the work of the Spirit. There is no power in your mere grief or sorrow over sin, there is only power in Christ and the redemption which He has already purchased for weak, sinful, struggling Christians. Where there is no hope of a besetting sin being overcome, futility and hopelessness will overcome the Christian. Thus, we must ever eye the promises of God that are ours in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:13; Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:3-5).

d. Fourth, pour out your heart to God to deliver you from this besetting sin. Remember that you when you pray, you come to a throne of grace, not a throne of judgment and condemnation, and to a sympathetic High Priest and not to an angry, condemning Judge.

e. Fifth, when you feel yourself being tempted and drawn away, you must immediately fill your mind with the things of the Lord (pleading with the Lord to deliver you, reading and memorizing His Word, thanking Him for His mercies, singing His praises, etc.). The idea is to replace that temptation with that which is good, honorable, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). The real battle is in the mind and affections.

f. Sixth, you must have the sincere intention and desire to flee fornication rather than running to it (1 Corinthians 6:18). If you continue to go to the same websites that have led you into sin, or to watch the same movies, or to listen to the same music, or to nourish the same wicked thoughts, you will be continually placing sexual temptations in your mind and before your eyes and ears. We are not to test God by placing ourselves in tempting situations, and then expecting God to deliver us. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). Mortifying the flesh is a battle (Paul also thought it was in Romans 7 in which he also wrestled with the sin of lust). It is not easy or comfortable (it is compared to plucking out the eye if it offends you in

Matthew 5:29). Christians are to “exercise” themselves to godliness, as if they were training for some Olympic event (1 Timothy 4:7).

g. Seventh, contact someone you trust (who does not have a loose tongue) and ask them to work with you on being accountable each week, and to pray for you and with you, and to encourage you to follow through with all of the steps outlined above. As far as accountability, there are Christian organizations that have filters and screens on line that either block all questionable web sites or that send an email notice to the person that you are accountable to when a questionable website is visited.

h. Eighth, get busy, don't be idle. Don't waste time on the computer or in front of the TV. Occupy your mind with good Christian reading. Exercise your body with walking, riding a bike, and meditating/praying at the same time. Be active, not sluggish and lazy. An empty, lazy mind and lifestyle is the workshop of the devil.

i. Ninth, never ever forget that Christ is always praying for you who trust in Him and yet who are weak in faith and who fall into sin (just as Christ prayed for Peter and the other disciples on the Sea of Galilee in Matthew 14:22-33). Though your prayers may be tainted with doubt, with weakness, with struggles, and though you may wonder whether they make it past the ceiling, take the eye of faith off of yourself and off of your weak prayer and turn the eye of faith to your Advocate, who pleads His righteousness and not your own as the ground of your acceptance at the throne of grace. Never forget, it is a throne of grace, and your Savior who knows the worst about you, ever lives to make intercession for you (Romans 8:34). There is hope because Christ was powerfully raised from the dead, and never forgets you, who trust in Him and in His glorious righteousness alone for your eternal salvation.

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