

It Takes Faith to Fly

Ezra 8:21 through Ezra 8:23 (NKJV)

²¹Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. ²²For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him." ²³So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

Ezra 8:31 through Ezra 8:32 (NKJV)

³¹Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth *day* of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. ³²So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.

Uncle Oscar was an older gentleman who was really apprehensive about flying in an airplane. All of his friends knew it. One day he happened upon a situation where he was forced to travel by plane. His friends waited anxiously to hear how it went. When they saw him again, they asked if he enjoyed his flight. Uncle Oscar said "Well, it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be, but I'll tell you this, I never did put all my weight down!"

How many of you know that once you're on the plane it doesn't matter if you put all your weight down or not? Having faith and trust in God is a lot like riding in an airplane. We have to believe where ever God takes us, we will not fall. In our text today, Ezra and the group of Israelites who were returning from Babylon found themselves in a position where they had to rely completely on God for deliverance.

As we examine their story, I pray that we all learn how to have faith in God for his miraculous power. Today we will, like Ezra, take a trip. I want to encourage you to do three things: Choose Your Destination, Check Your Bags, and Get On Board. Then we will conclude for the day.

Choose your destination.

The children of Israel had been in captivity for 70 years. But now, because of God's grace, the prophecy of Jeremiah had come to pass and they were being allowed to return to their own land. Even though they were returning to their original country, it was new to most of them.

In 70 years time, most of the adults who went into captivity were now deceased. It was their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren who were about to make this journey. We have to recognize for them, home was where ever they were held captive.

For example: I'm originally from Birmingham but my daughter, Faith was born and raised in Auburn. For her, Birmingham is not home. It's a place she goes to visit. I'm comfortable there in Birmingham. I know people and places. I know the rhythm of the city. I know the mentality of the city. I can show up and fit in effortlessly.

That's what its like to be in our comfort zones. When we are comfortable spiritually, we feel safe and secure. We know our way around in our habits. We know what to expect and we know how things work. In our comfort zones, we know the people we like to deal with and we have a set of places we are willing to go. We have a grip on things and we feel like we can handle whatever comes our way. We believe we have everything under control.

Here is the problem: God has something better for us, but it's outside of our comfort zones. God has a better destination and a better opportunity for us, but it's not located in the place where we feel like we have control.

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹But as it is written:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

Eyes have not seen, nor ear heard what God has prepared for us. What God has for us is unfamiliar. God wants to take us to destinations in the spirit that are new for us. God wants to take us from our way of living to a place called holiness. God wants to take us from condemnation to a place called righteousness. God wants to take us from mediocrity to greatness.

God wants to move our men to a place filled with strength and integrity. God wants to move our women to a place filled with virtue and reverence. God wants to move our children to a place filled with obedience and honor. God wants to move us from glory to glory and it can't happen if we are bent on staying where we are. We can't do what is safe and familiar and expect miracles. Miracles happen in miraculous circumstances. Each day, each one of us must choose our destination. We must make preparations to go with God where ever he leads us.

Check your bags.

Ezra had gathered the people together to leave. They met by the river Ahava in Babylon for a few days. When we read the complete story we find that Ezra was being commissioned to restore worship in the temple. But he didn't have everything he needed. He needed some items for the temple, which the king provided. He needed some priests and Levites. And he also realized they needed some type of protection for the journey.

Anywhere along the way in this 800 mile journey, they could have fallen into the hands of bandits and robbers. They were carrying large amounts of silver and other materials for temple worship that would have been tempting to robbers. They also had their own personal items.

But Ezra couldn't ask for help from the king. He said he was ashamed to ask the king for an escort of soldiers because he told the king "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all those who forsake him." So his solution was to fast and pray. They were to humble themselves before God and ask for a way to travel.

Baggage example:

A few years ago my wife and I took a trip to California. During that trip, I had planned to play golf and had to take my golf clubs. I remember we had to look up information at the airline to know how my golf clubs would travel and how they might affect the number of bags we could carry. The airline had certain size and weight requirements for all bags as well as a limited number of bags we could carry on board and a number of bags we could check at the counter.

As it turned out, my golf clubs counted as one of our pieces of luggage so we had to put everything we needed for the week in one bag and one carry on per person. Otherwise we would have to pay extra.

How many of you know that some things got left behind? That extra, extra pair of shoes stayed at home. Some books got left behind. The full sized toothpaste was left behind and a travel sized tube was added. The portable CD player was left behind too. Once the bags were checked, they were tagged, and the person at the counter issued us our itinerary and tickets for the trip.

When we are sitting in our comfort zones, we can have all of our favorite things around us. We have all of our extra pairs of shoes and our music players, and our extra outfits. We have all of our old friends, our favorite places to go, our usual habits and even some regular sins. We fill our lives with the things we like and enjoy. But just like traveling on a plane, going with God means we can't take all of those things with us. For our eternity, we can't afford to pay the price for all of our extra things.

Just as I needed my golf clubs to play golf on the trip and Ezra needed the articles for temple worship, God will require us to take some specific things with us on our trip. We have a challenge then, to narrow down and pair down our luggage for the journey. That's where fasting and prayer come in.

Fasting is a lot like checking our bags at the counter. Through fasting, we search ourselves under the watchful eye of the Holy Spirit. We examine our lives and allow God to reveal to us the hidden sins that easily beset us. We allow God to show us the excess baggage of insecurity, doubt, fear, and unbelief. Fasting helps us to measure our faith and know if we meet the requirements for travelers on the way to heaven. As God shines his light on us during our times of fasting, he will reveal the items we must leave behind. We must then afflict our souls and put them away.

Fasting and prayer help us to get in line with God. They bring us in closer fellowship with God because we submit ourselves to his standards. Fasting and prayer help empower us by ensuring we are ready to receive the blessings of God. Fasting must be accompanied by prayer. Prayer is like our itinerary. Prayer tells us which concourse we must walk to. It reveals which gate we must enter and tells us the times and locations for our journey. Prayer can help us get on the right flight and ensure we don't miss our flight.

It is our way of communicating with God to know what his will is for our lives. Prayer is our way of getting daily direction from God. It is our personal communion with the Father.

Answers to prayer give us the assurance that he will never leave us nor forsake us. Learning God's voice in prayer gives us the confidence to walk in faith because we hear his directions. It doesn't matter if we are trying to find a way to travel to Jerusalem or if we are just trying to make it through the day; fasting and prayer can strengthen us to get on board and go with God.

Get on board.

Listen to what Ezra told the king:

"The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him."

What a bold stand for the Lord! These are the words of a person who has chosen their destination. He has decided to go with God. When he realizes he needs help, he doesn't go ask the king for an escort. He doesn't arm the people. He doesn't go out

and hire mercenaries. Ezra still stands with God. He is putting his faith and trust in God to deliver them safely on their journey.

At some point every believer must make a firm stand for the Lord. I'm not talking about standing for the idea of God or Christianity. We have some people in our world who are in agreement that God is good, but they are not actually with God. It's like the person who believes saving the environment is good, but doesn't do anything to help save the environment.

If some of us were asked if helping people in need was good, we would agree. But we don't actually do anything to help people in need. We like the idea, or agree because we have to be socially correct, but we don't actually do anything about it. There are people who believe that going to church is a good thing, but they don't actually go to church.

There comes a time when we must go beyond the idea that faith in God is good. We must actually step out on our faith. We must actually trust in God. We must lean and depend on God. We have to relinquish the control of our lives to God.

As long as we are in control we are not acting in faith. The abundant life in God will require us to fly in the spirit. That means God is going to take us to some places where we have no control over the outcome. He is going to take us to high places in the spirit that may startle us because we can't fly.

Joyce Meyer once said "favor will take you where your character can't keep you."

Today I say "Faith will take you where only God can keep you."

The challenge is to go with God on our spiritual journey and not try to keep one foot on the ground. God wants to take us to new heights but we can't get there because we are anchored to what is familiar. We know what God has in store for us, but we keep packing extra parachutes and safety nets. We know where God wants us to be, but we keep trying to get there with alternative modes of transportation.

We try to ride our careers to success. We try to ride our family and friends to happiness. We try to ride our social status to popularity and fame. We try to ride our jobs to financial freedom.

None of the things of this world will ever get us to where God wants us. Our bosses haven't ordered our steps like God has. Our family and friends can't give us unspeakable joy like God can. Our social status can't make people love us any more than they already do. Love comes from God because God is love.

We know that God is good. We know that God is our way out of no way. We know that God is the only deliverer. But we are just like Uncle Oscar; we get on the plane but we won't put our full weight down. We don't trust God enough to put our full weight down on him. We trust God to a point. We trust God as far as we can see him. We trust God with some things but not others. We are still trying to hold ourselves up. We are still trying to deliver ourselves. We still have God as one of our options instead of him being our only option.

Ezra said:

"The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him."

We can have confidence in God because his hand is upon us.

John 10:27 through John 10:29 (NKJV) Jesus said ...

²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

God has his hand on us, so we don't have to be afraid. We can put our weight down. God's hand is on us and he won't let us fall. God's hand is on us and he won't forsake us. God's hand is on us and he will deliver us.

Conclusion:

Many people today are trying to reach their life destinations without God. They try to skip the counter and ride with all of their baggage. They want to fabricate their own itinerary. The kingdom doesn't work that way. In the kingdom, we are all bound for glory. The only way to get there is trust in God. He has more than enough power to deliver us safely to an abundant life. We just need to put our weight down on him.