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HCC Sermon  
Ezra 1:1-11

### Stirred Up in the Spirit

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Image: God stirred up Hudson Taylor to see the Chinese evangelized.
2. Need: God often stirs us up by showing us the work that needs to be done.
3. Subject: What should we do when we feel this stirring? Pray to see if God might stir up people to join you in doing God's work.
4. Text: Ezra 1:1-11
5. Preview: God will stir up three types of people to do his good work

#### BODY

- I. God stirs up people that envision the work to be done (1:1-4)
  - A. God stirred up Cyrus cast vision on rebuilding the temple (1:1-4)
    1. The text explains why God stirred up Cyrus to allow Israel to rebuild the temple.
      - a. God fulfils his word by stirring up Cyrus.
      - b. The word stirred up is often used in the context of awaking someone.
      - c. God can stir up anyone to accomplish his work.
    2. Cyrus envisions that the people of Israel would return to the land to rebuild the temple.
      - a. Persian empire sent conquered people back to build temples to their gods.
      - b. The temple is central to Israel's identity.
    3. Cyrus envisions Israel's Gentile neighbors assisting them in the rebuilding of the temple.
  - B. Pray to see if God will stir up people to share your vision of the work.
- II. God stirs up people that do the work (1:5)
  - A. God stirred up three tribes to do the work of rebuilding the temple (1:5)
    1. God entrusts leadership of Israel to Judah and Benjamin
    2. God entrusted the task of temple worship to the Levites.
  - B. A minority of the church does most of the work.
  - C. Pray to see if God will stir up people to do the work.
- III. God stirs up people that provide the resources to do the work (1:6-11)
  - A. God stirred up Gentile neighbors to provide the resources to rebuild the temple (1:6-11)
    1. Gentiles who knew the Israelites provided financial help.
    2. Cyrus provides for Israel the temple instruments.
  - B. Pray to see if God will provide people that provide the resources to do the work.

#### CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Pray to see God might stir up people to join you in doing God's work.

2. Closing Image: Hudson Taylor's desire to evangelize the Chinese resulted in a new mission organization, OMF that has expanded Hudson Taylor vision to see indigenous church planting movements throughout East Asia.

## MANUSCRIPT

Many of you know that my son's name is Hudson. Some think we named him after the Hudson River in New York. Others think that we named him after a cartoon character from an old cartoon TV series named Gargoyles. For the record, we named him after a missionary named James Hudson Taylor. Let me share with you a pivotal moment from his life.

On June 26, 1864, Hudson Taylor left in the middle of the worship service because he couldn't stand the sight of a large congregation worshipping God while millions in China perished without the knowledge of the gospel. He writes in a journal: "unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony". Taylor had a singular concern that day. Millions of Chinese would perish apart from God, unless God raised up workers. This concern prompted him to pray. He asked God for 24 workers who would go with him to the interior of China to share the gospel. Two missionaries for each of the 11 provinces of China and two for Mongolia. Shortly after this prayer, Hudson Taylor founded a mission organization named China Inland Mission to do this work. **God stirred up Hudson Taylor to see the Chinese evangelized.**

**God often stirs us up by showing us the work that needs to be done.** He shows us this work through articles we read. An article on *The Gospel Coalition* website about the great de-churching shows us how many people in recent times have walked away from the faith. Reports from books such as Operation World show us how many people groups still have no access to the gospel. God shows us the work that needs to be done when we serve at church. We see the need for guests to be welcomed. We see the need for more Sunday school teachers. We see the

need for more small group leaders. Being a member of this church, I'm sure that you see the needs. Facility maintenance. Mentorship. Biblical literacy. Marriage counseling. Coaching for parents. God shows us the work that needs to be done, so that we might be stirred up.

**What should we do when we feel this stirring?** What should we feel the need to do something so that we can address this issue within the church? What should we do when we feel spiritual anguish when we hear about unreached people groups perishing without the gospel? What should we do when we feel this need to something so that God's gospel might advance?

Pray. **Pray to see if God would stir up people to join you in doing God's work.** Ask God if he would raise up people to partner with you to accomplish this task. Beseech him to provide co-workers if this is something he wants you to do. Put forth your request to God. Plead for his help. See if God would stir up people to help you to do this work.

We see this principle in this morning's text. **Ezra, chapter 1.** Please turn there with me. Ezra, chapter 1. If you turn to the middle of the bible to Psalms and turn left, you'll eventually get there. Ezra precedes Nehemiah and follows 2 Chronicles. Ezra, chapter 1.

This week we begin a series on Ezra – Nehemiah. Rebuilding the Ruins. Technically, today's sermon is the only one that will be in Ezra. All the subsequent sermons will be in Nehemiah. But in the Hebrew Bible, both Ezra and Nehemiah comprise of one book. It tells one story. God brings Israel out of exile from the land of Babylon and restores them to their homeland. He re-establishes them as his priestly people so that the nations might come to know him.

Now Israelites such as Daniel had already been praying that God would end the exile (Daniel 9:1-2). He prays that God would return the people of Israel to the land. He asks God to establish Jerusalem as a place where his name dwells.

Ezra and Nehemiah show how God answers that prayer for restoration. God raises up Ezra to rebuild the temple and teach the law. God raise up later Nehemiah to restore the wall of Jerusalem so that it might be city once again.

Now one might wonder: what do these stories have to do with us? We're not Israelites. We're not in exile in Babylon. We don't worship at the temple.

While we might not be Israelites, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah shows us God's faithfulness to stir up individuals so that his people might serve as his witnesses to an unbelieving world. God now raises up the church so that it might serve as God's witness in an unbelieving world. But there's always work to be done so that the church might accomplish its mission. **What should we do if we sense God stirring us up to do this work? Pray to see if God would raise up people to help you with that work.** Who are those people?

In this morning's text, **we'll see three types of people that God will stir up.** Three categories of individuals. Three kinds of people. Three different molds. We'll see three types of people that God will stir up.

First type of person that God will stir up. **God stirs up people that envision the work to be done.** God will raise up people who also see the task. They have an ability to discern what God needs his people to do. God will give these individuals the ability to cast vision. **God stirs up people that envision the work to be done.**

We see this in this morning's text. **God stirred up Cyrus to cast vision on rebuilding the temple.** Cyrus saw the need for Israel to return to the land and rebuild the temple.

**The text explains why God stirred up Cyrus to allow Israel to rebuild the temple.** Look at verse 1. *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it into writing.*

**God fulfills his word by stirring up Cyrus.** God told Jeremiah when Israel was in exile in Babylon that it would last 70 years (Jer 25:11). After 70 years, God would defeat Babylon and return Israel to the land. Another prophet Isaiah prophesied that it would be a king named Cyrus who would enable Israel to the land (Isa 44:28).

**The word stirred up is used often in the context of awakening someone.** We still adopt this vocabulary to describe someone slowly waking up. For instance, we might say: I hear the baby stirring. The Bible depicts God often as the one who causes the stirring. He awakes a person. He arouses them to carry out his purposes. In this case, God arouses Cyrus to proclaim the return of Israel.

**God can stir up anyone to accomplish his work.** Look at the phrase: King of Persia. It's repeated twice in this verse. Cyrus led the Persian-Medo empire to defeat the Babylonians. He's not an Israelite. A foreigner. A Gentile. But God controls even the hearts of unbelievers to accomplish his purposes.

Cyrus attributed the vision of rebuilding the temple to God. The word: "God occurs five times" within these verses. Each of these occurrences reveals something about God. He sovereignly rules over all things. *God of heaven.* verse 1. God is relational. *God be with him.* God

has a special relationship with Israel. *God of Israel*. God has chosen Jerusalem to be the specific place where he dwells. *God, who is in Jerusalem*. Verse 3. *House of God*. Verse 4. The Israelite God that gave Cyrus this vision to rebuild the temple.

Let's look at Cyrus's proclamation. **Cyrus envisions that the people of Israel would return to the land to rebuild the temple.** Look at verse 2. *Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kings of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel – he is the God who is in Jerusalem.*

Unlike the Babylonians, who deported people from their homelands, **the Persian empire sent conquered people back to their homelands to build temples to their gods.** There is extra-biblical attestation to this fact. An artifact called the Cyrus cylinder describes how Cyrus allowed different people to return to their homelands to build temples to their God hoping that he would gain favor with these foreign deities.

**The temple is central to Israel's identity.** Recall their first building project in the wilderness. Once God led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea, he established a covenant with them. But he also gave them instructions on how to build a tabernacle. This would be where the presence of God dwelt. Unlike the other people of the earth, God would dwell with his people Israel. They would be for him priests (Exodus 19:6). Through Israel, the nations would come to know God. Wherever Israel traveled, the tabernacle would go with them.

After Israel settled in the promised land, Solomon built a temple in the city of Jerusalem. Unlike the tabernacle that could move, the temple was static. If Israel wanted to meet with God,

then they would need to go to the temple in Jerusalem. Likewise, the nations would need to come to Jerusalem to meet with God. If you read the prophets, then you'll see this theme of the nations coming to the city of Jerusalem because that's where the presence of God dwelt.

**Cyrus envisions Israel's gentile neighbors assisting them in the rebuilding of the temple.** Look at verse 4. *And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.* The phrase that describes Israel's gentile neighbors is "the men of his place". We'll see this phrase repeated later.

God answered prayer by stirring up Cyrus who envisioned a rebuilt temple in the land of Judah. God continues to stir up people to build up the church so that it might accomplish its mission of making disciples. As many of you know, we exist as a church to make God loving compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all the nations. Here in Houston and abroad.

When you feel stirred up by some need you see, pray. **Pray to see if people might share in your vision.** Ask God to reveal to you: Who else shares in your burden? People who have been stirred up by the same task.

Note that Cyrus did not keep his vision to himself. He wrote it down and proclaimed it. Look again at verse 1. *He made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing.* He communicated it to his subjects through verbal and written decree.

While you pray about this vision, share it with others as well. See if others might affirm you of this vision. Let's say you find that your spiritual life is a little dry. You have little time to read the Bible and to pray. You conclude I need some help. It would be helpful if other guys might join me. Maybe we can set aside a Saturday morning or possibly a weekday evening after



the kids go to bed to study the Bible and pray. It won't be for an infinite amount of time. Maybe we'll do it for 12 weeks.

At small group, you separate into groups for prayers. Guys in one room. Gals in another room. Of course, you know the process. Praise. Prayer. Each guy shares. When it comes to you, you ask the guys to pray for your spiritual life because you feel dry. You also share that God gave you this crazy idea of getting together with some guys to study the Bible together for 12-weeks. You ask the guys to pray to see if there might be other men willing to do that.

The next day, you receive a text from a guy in small group. He writes that he gave some thought about what you shared the previous night. God convicted him this morning of how little time he spends in the word. His wife also tells him often that he needs to read the Bible and pray if he's going to spiritually lead his family. He shares that he would be open to joining you for a 12-week Bible study. God answered your prayer. He showed you that he has stirred up someone who shares in your vision.

This applies not only to studying the Bible with other guys or gals. It might be a vision on how to serve the homeless in our community. God may give you a vision to equip members of church with an understanding of missions by hosting a Perspectives class. God might give you a vision to mentor the youth of our church. God might give you a vision to practice a Sabbath despite your busy medical school schedule. Pray to see if God might raise up people to share in that vision.

First type of person. A person that envisions the work to be done. What is the second type of person that God raises up when you feel stirred by something?

**God stirs up people that do the work.** God raises up people who will work with you to accomplish this task. He recruits help for you. He gives you people to aid you with this deed. He provides you partners to labor along beside you to accomplish this assignment. **God stirs up people that do the work.**

We also see this in the task of rebuilding the temple. **God stirred up three tribes to do the work of rebuilding the temple.** Look at verse 5. *Then rose the heads of the father's houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred up to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.*

Ezra references three tribes. Judah. Benjamin. Levites. Now there's a fourth category of people, priests. But many of the Levites serve in a priestly role so I grouped the two together.

Why did these three tribes step up to rebuild the temple? If you recall, Israel began as a united kingdom. But after the reign of Solomon, the kingdom divided into two parts. Israel in the north. Judah in the south. Assyria conquers Israel in 722 B.C. Israel is taken into exile. But Judah remains standing. The Babylonians later conquer Judah finally in 586 B.C.

Two tribes in the south comprised the kingdom of Judah. Benjamin. Judah. Recall that all the kings of the united kingdom came from these two tribes. Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. David and Solomon came from the tribe of Judah. All the kings of the kingdom of Judah would descend from the tribe of Judah.

All the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were bad. Not one of them followed the Lord. It was a different story in Judah. Some followed God. Others did not. It was a mixed bag. But we'll see in the post-exilic period that God would use leaders from the tribe of Judah to re-

establish Israel in the land. Hence, it's no surprise that the kingdom most faithful to God out of the two would be the one to return to the land.

Now Jerusalem was in the territory of Benjamin. God entrusted the task of temple worship to one tribe. Levi. The Levites taught Israel the Law, offered up sacrifices at the temple altar, maintained the temple grounds, and helped Israel celebrate its various festivals. The Levites return with Judah and Benjamin to help re-establish Israel's devotion to God.

Let me go on a tangent for a moment. Think about this. There are twelve tribes within Israel. Only three tribes felt stirred to respond to God's vision of rebuilding the temple. Three out of twelve is twenty-five percent. Only twenty-five percent of Israel felt the need to re-establish God's mission of blessing the nations through the rebuilding of temple. It's comparable to organizations today. Twenty-five percent of the organization does one hundred percent of the work. Unfortunately, it's the same within the church. A minority does much of the ministry within the church. Now I don't say that to discourage you.

But think about this. How amazing would it be if HCC was different? Instead of twenty-five percent of our membership contributing to the work of the church, more people got involved. Imagine what would happen if everyone decided to volunteer to help serve in various ministries. Minister Stan would no longer have to hunt for D-group leaders. He would have enough people to help teach youth Sunday school. Mr. Frank won't need to find help for AWANA on Friday nights. We would always have enough people serving on our welcome team Sunday mornings to welcome newcomers and greet members. Imagine if each small group member takes ownership in following up with those who are absent. Small group leaders will not be the only ones following up with those who are absent. Can you imagine how small group

members will feel? I know that my small group leader is obligated the message me. He's the small group leader. She's the small group leader. But everyone in my small group reaches out when I'm missing. People at this church care. End tangent.

When we feel stirred up by a task for God, **pray to see if God would stir up people to do the work.** Ask God to supply the individuals needed to get the work done. Co-workers. Partners. Co-laborers. Teammates. ask to see if God will provide people will help you to carry out the task.

Imagine this. You feel led to lead a team of believers on a short-term mission trip to Japan. Your team will partner with a local church to put on a vacation Bible school for the community. The church will advertise it as an English camp. It'll last 2 weeks.

You ask God to provide teammates if this is something that you want to do. You put in a bulletin announcement. You post messages on the church GroupMe, Discord, and Slack channels. A few days after the announcement is posted, you begin to receive messages from people who would be interested in learning more about the trip. One person volunteers to join the team because they had just finished reading John Piper's Let the Nations Be Glad. A college student volunteers because they just attended a winter mission conference and felt convicted to participate in a short-term mission trip.

We talked about two types of people that God stirs up. People with a vision. People who do the work. Let's move to the last type of people that God stirs up.

**God stirs up people that provide the resources to do the work.** He will raise up individuals that provide the supplies need to accomplish the task. It could be skills. Finances. Tools. Knowledge. Whatever is needed to get the job done. **God will provide those people God stirs up people that provide the resources to do the work.**

We see this in this morning's text. God stirred up Gentile neighbors to provide the resources to rebuild the temple. Two gentile neighbors are mentioned.

First, **Gentiles who knew the Israelites provided financial help.** The general populace of Babylon provided supplies to rebuild the temple. Look at verse 6. *And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered.*

God regularly raises up Israel's Gentile neighbors to supply Israel with what is needed to build his dwelling place. When Israel left Egypt, their Egyptian neighbors supplied them with gold and silver (Exodus 12:35-36). Israel would use these resources to build the tabernacle. A foreign king Hiram from Tyre assisted Solomon with the building of the temple (1 Kings 5:1-6). It occurs again here.

Second, **Cyrus provides for Israel the temple instruments.** Look at verse 7. *Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of goods. Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.*

Ezra contrasts two foreign kings in this verse. Nebuchadnezzar when he destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. took away some of the implements used for temple worship. He took away the incense altar, the table for showbread, the lampstand, and other tools used in temple worship. They served as trophies of his victory. Marduk defeated the God of Israel.

But Cyrus returns every item. Now of course, the ark of the covenant is unaccounted for. It's not in the Well of Souls in case you were wondering. This allows Israel to begin their worship soon after the temple is rebuilt.

God stirs up both the Gentile populace and Cyrus to provide the returnees with what they need to rebuild the temple and restart temple practices.

When feel stirred up to do God's work, **we pray that God would also provide people that provide the resources necessary to do the work.** Recall my example of a group of guys getting together to pray and study the Bible together. But they don't know what they should study together. One of them feels prompted to write to the pastors. Hey! Some of us guys are planning to get together to study the Bible together. Do you have any thoughts of what to study?

A pastor writes back. That's great! How about starting out with the book of Ephesians. It reminds us of our salvation and its implications. God provides a resource.

Remember that short-term mission trip to Japan. They'll be doing a vacation Bible school for the Japanese community near the church. But they don't know what VBS material to use. They pray about it. Someone suggests: why not reach out to Mr. Frank? They contact Mr. Frank and he connects them with different material. Or later, someone else joins the team who has done a VBS before. God provides not only the resource but a person with experience.

The college student doesn't have the financial means to fund the short-term trip expenses. This prompts her to write to other believers to share about how God has directed her to serve on this trip and to see if God might lead them to financially support her. God provides people with financial resources to fund her trip.

Again, what happens when we feel stirred up to do something for God? Pray. **Pray to see if God would stir up other people.** There are three types of people that God will stir up. People with the same vision. People who will do the work with you. People who will supply what is needed to do the work.

How do we know that God will do this? How can we trust that God will stir up such people? Think about this. God has a vision that all of humanity might glorify him by imaging him. Yet sin prevents humanity from doing this. God then sends his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does the work of redeeming man by dying on the cross for our sins and rising three days later. God sends us out to share this news with others. But he empowers us for this work with the Holy Spirit. If God has stirred up our heart do something for him that accords to his will, then he will stir up others to help us because he wants to make his name known.

If God does not raise up such people to help, then we must have the humility to recognize that maybe our vision doesn't align with God's will. If that's the case, then we need to ask God: what do you want me to do instead? Give me a vision that aligns with yours.

Let me close with this. **After Hudson Taylor felt God's stirring to begin mission organization to reach the interior of China, God provided sixteen laborers to join him in this work.** His organization would later grow to fifty-two workers in 1876. It would comprise of a fifth of the missionaries working in China. When Taylor died, there were eight hundred and twenty-five missionaries working in the eighteen provinces of China. China Inland Mission changed its name later to OMF. It also expanded its work from China to encompass all of East Asia. OMF celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015. This makes the organization by count, 159 years old. Its mission has expanded from seeing the Chinese evangelized to seeing all the

unreached people groups in East Asia reached with the gospel. Their mission statement is

“Through God’s grace, we aim to see an indigenous, biblical church movement in each people group of East Asia, evangelizing their own people and reaching out mission to other peoples”.

This is what God did through Hudson Taylor after stirring up his heart when he thought of the unreached in China. What is God stirring you up to do?