

RESOURCING GOD'S WORK

At a recent Church Prayer Meeting, we turned to the opening verses of the Old Testament book of Ezra to learn some important lessons about the resourcing of God's work, in connection with our building refurbishment project.

➤ **God keeps his promises (Ezra 1.1)**

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah ..."

God had promised through his prophet Jeremiah that the Jews' exile in Babylon would last only 70 years (Jer 29.10). After that, God's people would be restored to the land God had given them under the leadership of Joshua, 700 years earlier. So, because God always keeps his promises (2 Cor 1.20), the day eventually arrived for the Jews to leave Babylon for Jerusalem (Ezra 1.3).

Whenever we are faced with a new kind of challenge, it's good to remind ourselves of the promises God has given us in his Word. Three years ago, God gave DRBC a very clear promise as we sought the Lord's way forward for the Church.

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland ... I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. [Isaiah 43.18-21]

This is the reason for us embarking on the refurbishment project. We believe God has a very positive future for DRBC and for the suite of buildings he has entrusted to our care.

⇒ God wants to make DRBC **a way for people in the desert**. The area around the church is like a desert in so many different ways. It is economically poor and socially deprived. Many are living without hope. They are merely existing, without knowing what life should really be like, because they are out of touch with God, who is the source of true life - *eternal life* (John 10.10; 17.3). DRBC is situated in the midst of a spiritual desert. But we are placed where we are to serve as a way for people to come back to God, through Jesus, God's *new and living way* to himself (John 14.6; Heb 10.20).

⇒ God wants to provide *streams of living water* for the people living in the spiritual wilderness around the church. He wants DRBC to be a fountain of life for people, a place where people can come and experience the presence of the living God for themselves; and so find the living water, God's Holy Spirit, to irrigate their lives, and bring life and fruitfulness to their mere existence (John 4.10-14; 6.35; 7.37-39; 1 Cor 12.13; 14.24-25).

We go back to Isaiah's prophecy as the basis for us embarking on the refurbishment project. God wants to create something new out of the ruins of DRBC - something fit for its local community in the 21st century.

⇒ But as we receive God's great words of promise, we do well to read onto the next verse too, for Isaiah 43.22 is **a call to pray** as never before!

Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. [Isaiah 43.22]

Have we wearied ourselves for God yet, in prayer? What kind of effort have we put into our praying for the future of DRBC? What has our praying taken out of us? God's promises are always a fresh challenge to prayer - real, concerted persistent praying - until we see God promises come to fulfilment.

➤ **God moves people's hearts (1.1,3)**

"... the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing. ... 'Anyone of his people among you, may his God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel.'

God moved the heart of Cyrus, even though Cyrus didn't belong to God's people. He was a Persian, not a Jew. But God was still able to move his heart.

As we come before the Lord to ask him to fulfil his promises and provide for our needs, we need to believe he can move the hearts of those who don't necessarily acknowledge him - those who aren't churchgoers or Christians. Most importantly, God can move the hearts of non-Christian grant managers to provide the resources we need for resourcing His work - because He is sovereign over *every* human being.

➤ **God supplies what his people need**

(a) God supplies the manpower we need (1.5)

The family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites--everyone whose heart God had moved--prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. [Ezra 1.5]

We need to pray that God will similarly raise up people whose hearts are fully committed to building a house for the Lord today - a house built out of *living stones* (1 Peter 2.5). For when a person's heart has been moved by God, that person will work

- with the **right motivation** (i.e. for the Lord, not for their own personal satisfaction or self-fulfilment);
- with the **right conviction** (the work will be seen as a calling from the Lord, not just a job that needs to be done);
- with the **right perseverance** (a determination to complete what the Lord has called them to do).

People fall by the wayside when they are working simply from a human basis ("It seems a good idea", or "I was cajoled into doing it by the minister".) We want people whose hearts have been truly moved by God, as in the days of Ezra.

(b) God supplies the materials we need (1.6-7).

All their neighbours assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god [Ezra 1.6-7].

"**All I have need your hand has provided**", says the well-known hymn, *Great is your faithfulness* – and it's true! God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's resources.

*My God will meet all your needs
according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
[Phil 4.19]*

So we must pray as if everything depends on the Lord – which it does. And we must work wholeheartedly in such a way as to demonstrate our total commitment to the Lord. Then we will prove that God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's resources.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

At our International Fellowship Tea last month, we had an opportunity to hear about my Andrew and Richard's forthcoming overseas travels.

⇒ **Richard** is heading back to **Thailand** once again this summer, to work amongst students in the university city of Phitsanulok. He will be part of an OMF (*Overseas Missionary Fellowship*) team working alongside a missionary couple from the UK. One of his main roles will be helping Thai students develop their conversational English skills with a 'native' speaker (albeit half Scottish!). "I find it tricky enough to speak English as a first language, let alone teach it as a second one," writes Richard in his prayer letter. "Please pray that God will help me in this, and that I will have time to prepare some lessons before I go out. We will have some free time each day to spend with the students. Last year, this involved going to markets and out for meals, and even the occasional game of football. Due to the uncommon sight of a white person on campus, many students asked us why we were there, which led to many Gospel conversations." If you would like to receive a copy of Richard's Prayer Letters, he can be contacted via e-mail (rjah3@cam.ac.uk) or at the address below.

⇒ **Andrew** has just graduated and will be spending the next ten months in **Laos** (just next door to Richard!). He will be based in the capital city, Vientiane, at the ARDA Language Centre.



ARDA stands for the Anglican Relief and Development Agency. Andrew will be one of two recent Cambridge graduates teaching English to young adults at the Centre. Classes are held in the evenings, which will leave part of the day free for working with the local church. The Centre also runs a small village project, providing schooling for young children. Andrew and the other members of the team (four of whom are going to Thailand) will undergo a four-week orientation course in Singapore before heading off for their fieldwork. The venture has been organised in the UK by Crosslinks (formerly BCMS). Andrew can also be contacted via e-mail (A.R.Hunt.01@cantab.net) or at the address below. Please let him know if you would like to receive a copy of his prayer letter and regular updates while he is away.

Please continue to undergird all our work for the Lord in your prayers

David Hunt

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