

In 1886, a young man got up during an evangelistic meeting and said, *'I am not quite sure—but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.'* The music conductor at the meeting wrote his words down and sent them to a friend. The friend wrote a hymn. The music conductor a tune. The first verse and chorus: *When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way! While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.* In the complicated lives of twenty first century Christians those words may seem trite and simplistic. But they truthfully speak of the joy and blessing of walking in the word of God. Walking in the word is a strange phrase to us. In a number of places in the New Testament, Paul uses the word 'walking' to describe living the Christian life. Human history is littered with tragic examples of ignoring God's word. Thankfully, human history is redeemed by glorious testimonies of people walking in the word. **Ezra 6** is part of that history. Brothers and sisters, which side of history are you walking in? The story of Ezra so far. A dispirited, discouraged group of God's people lose confidence in God's promises. Grow weary in obedience. Act in their own interest rather than for the purposes of God. God in his grace and mercy perseveres with his people. Sending them prophets to again speak his word into their lives. The powerful word of the Lord renews them, gets them back on track. Even moves and shapes the people and events around them. Under pressure to stop rebuilding God's temple, the Jews claim the backing of Cyrus, mighty King of Babylon. Government officials send a letter to King Darius asking him to check out their claim. In today's reading, King Darius orders a search of the royal archives. In God's providence the Babylonian officials have a first-rate filing system. Decree of Cyrus found. Clearly backing the claim of the Jewish leaders. Darius issues an order. No government interference with the temple rebuild. Treasury funds to be released for the building and for establishing worship. Temple completed, dedicated. A joyous Passover celebration follows. The hand of God at work through his powerful word. Grace and mercy of the highest order. It is important to understand that human beings are not robots directed into action by the command of God, their creator. Nor puppets whose every move manipulated by the hand of a divine puppeteer. We have the ability and freedom to make choices. So in Ezra, the people of God have decisions to make. In response to the grace and mercy of God, will they be another tragic example of people ignoring the powerful word

of God. Just like their descendants. Or will they write another chapter of glorious testimony. Men and women choosing to walk in the word. They choose to walk in the Lord in the light of his word. *'So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. v14* The people of God doing what the word of the Lord commanded. Prospering in the fullest sense as they do. Enjoying fullness of life. Walking in the word now the pattern of their life. *'And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.'* **v18** God's word the blueprint for ordering their life of worship. Sisters and brothers, what is being written into the current chapter of your life? A tragic example of ignoring the word of God. Or a glorious testimony of walking in the word. One biblical encouragement in choosing to trust and obey is the reminder of the blessings of walking in the word. Three of those blessings on display in this passage. **First**, God's provision. In this instance: abundant finances and gifts in kind to ensure the temple completed and worship enabled. **v8-10** God's current provision for those who walk in the word is not unlimited finances for your dream home or for expanding church facilities. Far richer than that. In Jesus' words, speaking of practical and personal needs, *'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'* **Matthew 6:33** Brothers and sisters, walking in the word is costly, guaranteed suffering, loss in many forms. But it comes with a clear promise from our Lord. He will provide our needs as we walk in his word. **Second**, God's protection. In this passage: through the protection of the King; no interference in the rebuilding; implied promise of personal safety for the builders **v6-7** You may be surprised. Jesus doesn't promise personal safety for his disciples. But suffering for all and death for some. He does promise God's eternal protection. Through resurrection. Jesus says, *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.'* **John 6:39-40** **Third**, God's joy. A gift of God as his children walk in the word. Joy in what God is doing. Joy expressed in celebration with other sisters and brothers. *'For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of*

*the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.’ v22*

Walking in the word is the lifestyle for those saved by grace through the death of Jesus. Living that lifestyle is only possible because of the benefits of the death of Jesus on our behalf. Including his dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit. As they experience the blessings of God, the people of God in Ezra 6, celebrate the Passover. Remembering that night long before in Egypt when God saved their ancestors from judgement and set them free from slavery. Spared by the blood of the Passover lamb painted on the doorframe of their homes. God's people observed the Passover festival in the rebuilt temple as a reminder of God's mercy and protection. We who walk in the word joyfully celebrate the Lord's Supper. In remembrance of our salvation through the once for all sacrifice of Jesus, our Passover Lamb. During the reign of King Darius, the people of God in Jerusalem modelled walking in the word. Enjoying the blessing of God along the way. They chose to walk in the powerful word of the Lord in difficult and challenging circumstances. Sisters and brothers, what choices are you making? What word are you walking in? Think with me for a moment. Each day whether we are conscious of it or not, we are walking in some word. For our lives deeply shaped by words. Positive, affirming, true, false, deceitful, cutting, painful, diminishing. Words cultivating a sense of self- importance. Affirming selfish and sinful desires. Words, promising happiness and fulfilment or undermining our value and purpose or satisfying our need for love and significance. Endless words. Competing voices. Whose words are shaping your life? Beyond the noisy words competing for our devotion is the powerful word of the Lord. A word calling us to walk in a narrow way. The way of life. At odds with the voices of the world that claim happiness is found in breaking free of God's boundaries. Like the young man at the evangelistic meeting, you must decide. Decide to walk in the powerful word of the Lord. To keep on walking in the word. For your own sake. For the sake of our youth and children who look to us for direction. Growing up with competing voices speaking all kinds of words. How will they find the life-giving word of the Lord if our model is one of failing to walk in the word? Remember Jesus says, *'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.'*