

Nehemiah's Burden

Text: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Introduction:

1. Historical Background
 - a. In Jeremiah's day, the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem (586 B.C.), burned the city gates, broke down the walls and took many Jews captive. People like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Ezekiel were among the captives.
 - b. At the end of 70 years according to Jeremiah's prophecy, the Persians conquer the Babylonians and the remnant is allowed by King Cyrus to return to build the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. 50,000 Jews return. Discouraged, the Jews abandoned work of rebuilding the temple after the foundation was complete.
 - c. About sixteen years later, when people had settled down to dwell in their own homes, God raised Haggai and Zechariah, to exhort the people to complete the Temple. The temple was "completed" some 20 years later. (520 – 516 B.C.)
 - d. 60 more years passed during which more Jews returned under Ezra in 458 B.C. Final restoration of Temple vessels, the training of priesthood and some finishing touches of the building were completed under Ezra.
 - e. "... for more than ninety years after the first Jews returned from Babylon the walls of Jerusalem remained desolate and the people of God lived in affliction and shame.. It was at this juncture, in the year 445 B.C., that a man was raise up of God to match the need of the hour. Fourteen years after Ezra's return, God spoke to Nehemiah, prepared him for the task and called him to serve the Lord in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem."
Alan Redpath (Victorious Christian Service)
2. Nehemiah documents the rebuilding of the walls. Walls speak of separation and protection. The temple represents propagation; the place where God's light to the Gentiles was disseminated. The walls represent separation and distinction from the Gentile nations. **Both** work together, both are vital!
3. The impact of Nehemiah:
 - a. It is a Book of **Rebuilding** – there are many principles we learn for Christian service such as the necessity of prayer, planning and united effort.
 - b. It is a Book of **Resistance** – it shows us the type of opposition that we can expect as we build for God; opposition that comes both from without and within.
 - c. It is a Book of **Revival** – we see the centrality of the Word of God in bringing about a spiritual renewal and awakening in the people of God.

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I. Nehemiah's Identity (Vs. 1)

A. His Pedigree (Vs. 1)

1. Little known except for the fact that he is referred to as “the son of Hachaliah”
2. He is obviously a Jew by the reference to his brother from Judah in Vs. 2.
3. The time referenced is the month ‘Chisleu’ which would equate roughly to December on our calendar.

B. His Position (Vs. 11)

1. Nehemiah held the position of cupbearer to the great Artaxerxes Longimanus who ruled Persia from 464 to 423 B.C.
2. A cupbearer was more than a lowly waiter; his was a high position of influence with the king. His duty was to test the king's wine before giving it to the king to ensure it wasn't poisoned. This meant he had to be someone of the highest integrity; someone the king could trust with his life. This made a man in this position a confidant of the king.

II. Nehemiah's Inquiry (Vs. 2-3)

A. The Request (Vs. 2)

1. He enquires of the people
2. He enquires of the place
3. Note: Nehemiah held a high and respected position but he cared about the state of the people of God enough to ask! Some prefer to bury their heads in the sand and plead ignorance. Not with Nehemiah.

B. The Report (Vs. 3)

1. The people – are in affliction and reproach
2. The place – walls and gates still in an broken down position

C. The Response (Vs. 4)

1. He sorrowed
 - a. He sat down
 - b. He wept – a type of Christ who wept over Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives
 - c. He mourned
 - d. His sorrow was caused by the report he heard.
 - e. Question: Do we have a heart burden for the work of God? Are our hearts burdened for lost souls, broken by sin? Are we burdened for believers who through their backslidings have allowed the walls to be smashed in their lives?
 - f. Illustration: Christ's compassion towards the multitudes – Matthew 9:36 *“But when he saw the multitudes, he was **moved**”*

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with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”

- g. Samuel Hadley: From a book called, *Down Water Street*. One late night, Sam Hadley of the Waterstreet Mission, took a friend down town to see the state of the city. As they walked through that derelict area, they saw sin in the raw - drunks lying in the gutter, immorality, cursing. All of a sudden, Sam slumped against a gas-light pole and began to convulse. At first his friend thought that Sam was having a heart attack. No, Sam was not having a heart attack; he was in a paroxysm of grief over the sight of the human wreckage before him. He was heard as saying, “Oh God, the sin of this city is breaking my heart.”
2. He sought the Lord.

III. Nehemiah’s Intercession (Vs. 5-11)

* A true work of God must begin in prayer, be sustained through prayer, and finish with prayer. This marks the first of 12 instances of prayer in the Book of Nehemiah. The Book starts with prayer and finishes with prayer! Nehemiah sought the ear of his Heavenly King before seeking the help of the earthly king. “There’s too much working before men and not enough waiting before God.” (Redpath) We note 4 key elements to Nehemiah’s prayer.

A. Passion (fervency) (Vs. 4)

1. James 5:16 “...*The effectual **fervent** prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*”
2. ‘fervent’ = comes from the root word meaning to energize. English word fervent means hot, boiling.
3. E.M. Bounds: “Without continuance the prayer may go unanswered. Importunity is made up of the ability to hold on, to press on, to wait with unrelaxed and unrelaxable grasp, restless desire and restful patience. Importunate prayer is not an incident, but the main thing, not a performance but a passion, not a need but a necessity. Prayer in its highest form and grandest success assumes the attitude of a wrestler with God. It is the contest, trial and victory of faith; **a victory not secured from an enemy, but from Him who tries our faith that He may enlarge it: that tests our strength to make us stronger**...There is neither encouragement nor room in Bible religion for feeble desires, listless efforts, lazy attitudes; all must be strenuous, urgent, ardent. Inflamed desires, impassions, unwearied insistence delight Heaven. God would have His children incorrigibly in earnest and persistently bold in their efforts...Our whole being must be in our praying; like John Know, we must say and feel, “Give me Scotland, or I die.” (Purpose in Prayer P. 46)
4. Psalm 126:5 “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*”

B. Adoration (Vs. 5)

1. God’s exalted position – “LORD God of heaven”
2. God’s majestic person – “great and terrible God”
 - a. ‘great’ = in position and power

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- b. 'terrible' = means to fear. Reference to the fact that God is to be revered, honoured and respected.
- 3. God's faithful promises – "keepeth covenant and mercy"
- 4. Note: True prayer must begin with a lofty view of God.

C. Confession (Vs. 6-7)

- 1. Israel's sinful condition (Vs. 6)
 - a. Nehemiah recognizes that sin is first and foremost an offence against God – "we have sinned against thee" (Vs. 6); "We have dealt very corruptly against thee" (Vs. 7)
 - b. Nehemiah includes himself amongst the people of God (humility) Isaiah had a similar experience. Isaiah 6:5 *"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."*
- 2. Israel's specific corruptions (Vs. 7)
 - a. They were corrupt
 - b. They were disobedient (hence the reason for their judgment)

D. Petition (Vs. 8-11)

- 1. The basis of the petition (Vs. 8-10)
 - a. Nehemiah pleaded with God on the basis of the promises He had made to His people.
 - b. Nehemiah's prayers were Scripture soaked!
- 2. The focus of the petition (Vs. 11)
 - a. That God would hear their prayer
 - b. That God would prosper him
 - c. Like Esther, Nehemiah needed God's power to work in the heart of a very powerful and heathen king.
 - d. "It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone"
(Hudson Taylor)

Conclusion:

- 1. Do we have a heart burden for the work of God?
- 2. Are we praying for the work of God?
- 3. Will we volunteer to be a vessel for God to use in His work?