

Nehemiah Principle:

Change Your World Through Prayer

Nehemiah 1:3-4



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FOCAL Nehemiah 1:3-4 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. {4} And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven ..

Have you ever noticed that *children* can do certain things much better than adults? I saw a child the other day do something called a "split". That's where you sit down and point one leg extreme north while pointing the other leg extreme south. I could probably do a "split", but you'd have to call an ambulance crew in to get me up afterward, and that would really distract from today's message. Children can, in most cases, climb trees better than adults. Children can take a fall a whole lot better than adults. I saw a child the other day running across our auditorium. He slipped, falling hard on the concrete floor, got up, dusted himself off and resumed running. Kids are resilient.

Adults can do certain things better than kids. We can complicate our lives by getting hooked on things we ought never to have tried. The older we get the easier it is for us adults to become consumed by negative emotion like anger, envy, and bitterness. We are told in Scripture

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

God wants us to **be understanding and focused like adults**, but in areas of sin and division we are to **be like children**. God wants us who are His by faith to

Ephesians 5:1-2 Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: {2} And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.

unify in our faith and in our love. He wants us to obey Him **as little children (Matthew 18:3)**, trusting Him implicitly in all that He commands. God uses those people who will make themselves available to Him. He uses the available. There are many Christians who are never used of God, or else are used only in a very limited way because they will not live lives surrendered to Him. When God calls we make excuses, or else we do *other things* for we fear that which He has called on us to do. We turn away from the call to reach out in love and tell others about Jesus for fear of what they might think of us. We fail to live in the power of God's love, and because of this never do great or memorial things for God.

How sad such a life is!

Someone once said that the things we do for ourselves dies when we die. The life lived for self and selfishly is not a life that leaves a mark on this old earth. John the Revelator trusted God in spite of Caesar's anger against him. As a result John was allowed to look into, and write about Heaven. John saw that in Heaven

Revelation 21:4 ... God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;

Could some of the tears that God dries from our face be tears wept over lost opportunities? Christians, we were left on this earth following our salvation so that we could lead others to Christ. The Apostle Paul labored hard for the Lord because **he did not want to waste the Grace of God in his life (1 Corinthians 15:10)**. You were given a great Grace so you could do great things for the Lord. God blessed you when He gave you life; He doubly blessed you when He gave you eternal life. Do not waste the days of your lives doing nothing. Use what God has given you for His glory. Reach out, and learn what Nehemiah found out: God will use the lowliest person to accomplish the greatest work if that person will live his or her life yielded to Him.

May God touch your hearts with His Word!

1. What Can One Person Do?

The book of Nehemiah is one of my favorite books in the Bible. Sadly, few of today's Christians have read this Book. You've robbed yourselves of a blessing! Nehemiah has a lot to teach us about dealing with a fallen nation. Israel, like America today, was a fallen nation. When God blessed Israel and led her into the land of Canaan He warned her not to worship the false gods of that land. He warned:

Deuteronomy 28:15-20 But it shall come to pass, if

thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: {16} Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. {17} Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. {18} Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. {19} Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. {20} **The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.**

God expects His people to love Him and to follow Him. But Israel refused to do so, and began to worship the pagan gods of the unbeliever. In time the Lord allowed **Babylon** to overthrow Israel, and **Persia** to overthrow Babylon. The Israel of Nehemiah's day was largely in exile in Babylon and Persia, though a remnant of Israel remained in Jerusalem.

When Nehemiah's friends came by the palace one day he asked them "**What news do you have of Jerusalem?**" Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel. As the capital goes, so goes the nation, for Jerusalem was the place where God's Temple was. The news that Nehemiah received was shocking. They said:

FOCAL Nehemiah 1:3 **The remnant that are left**

of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

The good news was **there is a remnant**. **Easton's Bible Dictionary** mentions that **Ezra, a contemporary of Nehemiah** actually led a group of Jews to Jerusalem *fourteen years* before this time. This is perhaps part of that remnant. But the **remnant that are left of the captivity are in great affliction and reproach**. Jerusalem is surrounded by enemies, and the enemies are very active. We read that:

the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. Ancient cities were often surrounded by protective walls to keep cutthroats and thieves away. The gates - the way of coming and going into the city - were destroyed with fire. God's Jerusalem was at the mercy of every evil person and warlord who came that way.

What did Nehemiah do? **What can one man do?** He is no more than a **cup bearer for the king (Nehemiah 1:11)**. **Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer**. He didn't have the best job in the kingdom. You see, the **cup bearer was a human guinea pig**. Ancient kings were often the targets of assassins, and poisoning was the easiest way to kill a king without exposing yourself. If you were caught killing a king you usually suffered a grizzly death! The cupbearer tasted all of the king's food and drink before the king ever touched it. If the cupbearer lived, the king was free to enjoy his meal. If

the cupbearer died, the king killed the cook and then found another cupbearer! Nehemiah was a man who loved the Lord but was in a miserable job. What could he possibly do?

What can one person do? One person can destroy the world if he decides to surrender to Satan. Say the name "Hitler" or "Stalin" and you immediately think of the great evil that these men, followers of Satan, brought to this earth. **By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin (Romans 5:12).** But, always remember that

1 John 4:4 ... greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

God is greater than Satan, and **God is with His people.**

Someone - I think it was **Dwight L. Moody** - once said that the world has yet to see what one person totally surrendered to God can do. I don't believe that's true. The Bible is filled with the accounts of people who - though they were only one - stood up with God and made a difference.

What can one person do? One person, **Noah, obeyed God and saved humanity from certain destruction.** One man, **Abraham, followed God, and brought blessing to all nations by his obedience.** One man, **Moses, led Israel out of Egypt and to the brink of the Jordan.** One man, **Joshua, destroyed the enemies of Israel and planted Israel in the Promised Land.** One man, **David, killed Goliath, destroying Philistia's dominance over Israel.** One man, **Elijah, stood up**

against the false gods of Israel, and caused Israel to turn away from such folly. One woman, **Esther, stood up for Israel against the Persian King Xerxes I, and saved Israel from complete annihilation.** One woman, a little virgin named **Mary was willing to be used of God in the birth of Christ Jesus.**

What can one man, a displaced Jew in a crummy job in the **Persian palace of Shushan, the King Artaxerxes II¹** do? He can do what Nehemiah did.

2. One Person Can Seek God's Face In Prayer

FOCAL Nehemiah 1:4 **And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,**

Note what Nehemiah did. He didn't wring his hands and bemoan the state of affairs of Israel. He didn't immediately look for *something to do* to make things better. Nehemiah **heard the words, sat down and wept and mourned certain days.** He empathized, feeling the pain of fallen Israel. But he didn't just empathize. We see that he **fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven.**

Dear friends, God will not use you to do a mighty work for Him if you are not constant in prayer. God uses people who have a *living and loving relationship with Him.* Listen Beloved, **God blesses people who bless Him.**

¹ Artaxerxes is not a name, but a title. According to Fausset, the Artaxerxes at this time in Persian history is Longimanus, son of Xerxes, who reigned 464-425 B.C.

God's Israel often forgot this great truth. When Israel had received the Law by the hand of Moses they went about *three days journey* out from Mount Sinai. We read:

Numbers 11:1-3 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. {2} And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. {3} And he called the name of the place **Taberah**: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.

God had been blessing Israel, and have moved among His people in a very visible cloud. But Israel began to complain and look away from God's glory - causing God to punish His people. As God's fire began to smite Israel the Lord's friend **Moses** began to pray for them - and the curse of God's fire was removed.

God hears the prayers of His saints. He hears the prayers of those who love Him. When Israel once more began to **speak against God and against God's friend Moses** we see that:

Numbers 21:6-7 ... the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. {7} Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from

us. And Moses prayed for the people.

Moses prayed for the people. How could one man called **Nehemiah** make a difference? **He prayed for the people!** Look at Nehemiah's prayer.

CONTEXT Nehemiah 1:5-6 ... I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: {6} Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

Nehemiah *glorified God, prostrating himself before the Lord.* Look at how he addressed God. **LORD God of Heaven.** Nehemiah used the holiest name of God, YAHWEH ELOHIYM, the Eternal Triune God. Nehemiah called upon the *promises* of God. He said "**you are a covenant keeping God Who shows mercy to those who love Him and observe His commandments**". Notice also that Nehemiah confessed **both his sins as well as the sins of Israel before the Lord.** He said "**we have sinned against You: both I (personal) and my father's house (corporeal) have sinned.**"

Nehemiah prayed:

CONTEXT Nehemiah 1:7 **WE have dealt very**

corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

WE are at fault! God's people are at fault! Why has America fallen? Preachers and pulpits throughout our land cry out "It's the fault of the atheist, the fault of the homosexual, the fault of the criminal, the fault of the corporations. It's *somebody else's fault* that our nation has fallen." Dear ones, it was the fault of God's people when Israel the nation fell, and it is the fault of God's people that America has fallen today. The Lord said:

2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

The land is sick because Christ's Church - **the Church against which the gates of hell could not prevail (Matthew 16:18)** - has not stood up for the Lord.

Nehemiah knew that Jerusalem was fallen, and Israel was desolate. Rather than blame the Babylonians and the Persians Nehemiah went to the source of the problem. Israel was where Israel was because Israel had neglected the Lord their God. Nehemiah went on to pray:

CONTEXT Nehemiah 1:8-9 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: {9} But if ye turn unto

me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

Nehemiah calls upon God's promise as he asks forgiveness for the nation Israel *as well as for God's people*. Oh that we who are God's children by faith would call as boldly upon His promise today. God is faithful to His promise, and every thing He has said He will do. God saves His people because He loves His people. As the Psalmist said:

Psalms 105:37-45 He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. {38} Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. {39} He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night. {40} The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. {41} He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. {42} For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. {43} And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: {44} And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labor of the people; {45} That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD.

God saves a person so that they might have a relationship with Him. He loves us. He loves us! God loves to save.

God does not delight in the destruction of His children. Nehemiah repented. He repented for himself, but he also *repented for his nation*. He wept, mourned, and opened up himself to God in prayer.

3. Prayer That Changes Things

We are used to the concept of confessing our own sins - but the idea of confessing the *sins of others* sounds strange. Yet this is a type of prayer that occurs elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, **the Prophet Daniel** prayed:

Daniel 9:4-11 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; {5} We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: {6} Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spoke in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. {7} O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. {8} O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. {9} To the

Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; {10} Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. {11} Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

Daniel 9:4	Nehemiah 1:5
"O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments"	"O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments"

The prayers of both Daniel as well as Nehemiah are almost *verbatim*. Both men are asking forgiveness for their sins *as well as the sins of the people*. Both men are pleading with God, and basing their pleas on the promises of God. Both men recall Deuteronomy 7:9 where God is called "the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments".

Why pray that God forgive the sins of others as well as yourself? Because God alone can change hearts. The Scripture tells us:

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

Nehemiah wanted a door of opportunity to open. He wanted the Lord to open a door whereby Israel could be restored. For this to happen the King of Persia would have to do something, and Israel herself would have to do something. Nehemiah used the one weapon he had at his disposal to set in motion the restoration of Israel. He used prayer.

ILLUSTRATE The Christian Church in America outnumbers all other religions by a margin of 10 to 1. You would expect to find the largest church in the world located in America. It's not. To find the largest Christian Church in the world you need to go the Republic of Korea (ROK). Most of South Korea follows the teachings of Buddhism. Yet the 7,000,000 Christians in ROK have made a positive impact on their country. Though outnumbered 5 to 1 by the Buddhists, people are open to the Gospel of Christ. The **Full Gospel Church in Seoul** - originally a tiny mission outpost - has grown to *over 150,000 members*. During the six Sunday services 10,000 people stand in the Sanctuary while 15,000 people stand in overflow halls watching **Pastor Cho** on closed circuit televisions. This evangelical, conservative Church is sending missionaries all over the world. As a matter of fact I read a few years ago that the Korean Church is now sending missionaries *to America*. Why? Because America has fallen and it cannot get up.

Dear friends, we - Like Nehemiah and Daniel - need to seek God's face in prayer. We need to pray for the sins of the Church, the apathy of the Church, and the failures of the Church in this country. God can make a difference in America. We can see the tide turn, and return from whence we've fallen.

We must take Christ to America. Every believer must pray, repenting for himself, herself, and for others. It is our job as God's people to represent God to a lost and dying world. **Dick Halverson** said "**No where in the Bible is the world exhorted to 'come to Church'. But the Church's mandate is clear: she must go to the world.**"²

Will you go with me? Will you pray with me that God will open a window of opportunity where we, as His Church, can impact this generation for Christ?

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1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 5:1-2; Matthew 18:3; Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 15:10 _____

1. What Can One Person Do?

Deuteronomy 28:15-20; Nehemiah 1:3; Nehemiah 1:11; 1 John 4:4 _____

2. One Person Can Seek God's Face In Prayer

Nehemiah 1:4; Numbers 11:1-3; Numbers 21:6-7; Nehemiah 1:5-6; Nehemiah 1:7; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 16:18; Nehemiah 1:8-9; Psalms 105:37-45

3. Prayer That Changes Things

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Deuteronomy 7:9; Proverbs 21:1 _____

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