

Nehemiah 1:4-11

⁴As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah and Prayer

- The book of Nehemiah begins and ends with prayer
 - Nehemiah 1:4-11, Nehemiah 13:31
- The book of Nehemiah is filled with prayer
 - See 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 9:5ff; 13:14, 22, 29, 31

Dealing with Prayer

- Often we struggle with good prayer
- Often we struggle with wrong ideas about prayer
 - Prayer is a way of manipulating God
 - Prayer is unimportant
 - Prayer is busy work
- What is the right way to pray?
 - Matthew 6:9 – "Pray then like this:"
 - What is our relationship to the almighty God of heaven?
 - Father
 - We pray as children approaching our father!

Let's take a look at Nehemiah's prayer:

- Nehemiah's Prayer is Continual
 - As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 1:4)
 - let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night (Nehemiah 1:6)
 - How does this affect us? For God's people, prayer is not just something we do but it is who we are
 - And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42)
 - Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Romans 12:12)
 - Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Ephesians 6:18)
 - Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2)
 - I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. (2 Timothy 1:3)

- Nehemiah's Prayer is Knowledgeable
 - *Nehemiah knows God*
 - There is a distinct difference between knowing about someone and knowing someone personally
 - I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments (Nehemiah 1:5)
 - O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." (Nehemiah 1:11)
 - "this man"
 - Who was this man?
 - King Artaxerxes – most powerful man in the world at the time
 - Without the king's permission, his authority to govern, his materials, and his protection this project is destined to fail.
 - Because Nehemiah knows his God he also knows that this obstacle is not insurmountable
 - Knowing God (not just knowing about God) affects the kind of prayers you pray.

 - *Nehemiah knows his Bible*
 - He quotes from Deuteronomy
 - Deuteronomy 4:25-31
 - Deuteronomy 30:1-10
 - Deuteronomy 9:29
 - His knowledge of Scripture affects how and what he prays

 - *How does this affect us?*
 - God does not intend for our heart and head to fight and work against each other, but rather to complement each other.
 - You see Nehemiah's knowledge equipping his heart to pray this prayer
 - Is the God you worship big enough to handle the challenges that you face?
 - We often struggle with prayer and with faith because the God we are looking at is not the God of the Bible.

- Nehemiah's Prayer is Responsible
 - Responsible: answerable or accountable
 - Whose fault is this?
 - When something goes wrong, what is our first impulse?
 - Blame
 - Garden of Eden
 - In the physical world
 - Church
 - Nehemiah does something extremely startling in his prayer.
 - let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. (Nehemiah 1:6-7)
 - What is so startling about these verses?
 - When was Jerusalem destroyed? 141 years ago
 - Why was Jerusalem destroyed? Sin that occurred prior to the destruction
 - What does Nehemiah say?
 - We have sinned
 - Even I and my father's house have sinned
 - We have acted very corruptly
 - Nehemiah doesn't look for someone to blame rather he repents and moves forward.
 - Sin always restricts the forward progress of the Gospel
 - Sins of omission – not doing what we should
 - Sins of commission – doing what we shouldn't
 - What about us?
 - As we see the state of the church, what is our response?
 - Blame?
 - Repentance?

The Good News

- God's work in our world
 - Miracle: God working in a supernatural way
 - Unmistakably God at the time it happens
 - Providence: God working in a normal way
 - Looking back God's providence is very visible and very clear but at the time it happens it is often mistaken for an ordinary every day event.
- At the end of verse 11 Nehemiah drops a bombshell on us regarding God's providence
 - Now I was cupbearer to the king. (Nehemiah 1:11)
- What is a cupbearer?
 - This officer, in the ancient Oriental courts, was always a person of rank and importance; and, from the confidential nature of his duties and his frequent access to the royal presence, he possessed great influence.¹

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

- This important position in the king's court gives insight into Nehemiah's life and character. A mighty monarch such as the king of Persia would select for that position a man who was wise and discreet, and consistently honest and trustworthy. Nehemiah's position alone reveals much about his intellectual capabilities, his emotional maturity, and his spiritual status.²
- The one person (king Artaxerxes) that can make or break the rebuilding of Jerusalem
 - Nehemiah is one of the closest people in the world to king Artaxerxes
 - Before Nehemiah has even begun to pray, God has begun to work!
 - Like Esther a generation before (or Joseph, or Daniel, or David, or Moses)
 - God has placed Nehemiah in a specific place, at a specific time, for a specific task
 - It has been nearly 100 years since the Jewish people left Persia to return home
 - It just so happens that Nehemiah's family doesn't
 - It just so happens that Nehemiah doesn't
 - It just so happens that Nehemiah becomes an official in the king's palace
 - It just so happens that Nehemiah becomes one of the most trusted advisors in the empire
 - It just so happens that Nehemiah was right where he needed to be when he needed to be there
 - As it so often happens, in these events that "just so happen" God was behind it all
- What about us?
 - What will we do with what God has given us?

² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (674). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.