

This section of the ***Bible e-Study*** is on lessons from Nehemiah.

**Today we look at Nehemiah about an attitude of prayer.**

*<sup>4</sup> When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Neh 1:4*

**NUGGET** – We look at the Old Testament historical book of Nehemiah, former cupbearer to a king while in exile, now turned revivalist! How this change can be accounted for involves the attitude of the heart expressed by this faithful man of God. When you read the first three verses of Nehemiah you learn of the plight of Jerusalem and the remnant left behind in the exile that took Nehemiah to Babylon.

What we then read in our verse today is Nehemiah's response to the news that Jerusalem's walls are broken and her gates are burned down. These are signs of both disgrace and loss among the once mighty city. Nehemiah's response is a gut reaction; it's a reflex in Nehemiah that to such news the only way to react is to weep, fast and pray... for days.

Nehemiah takes this reaction that comes from his heart and turns to the only source of consolation, the God of heaven. He knows that:

- God will hear him
- That God will not shrink from Nehemiah's sorrow
- And that God will act according to His promises.

In verses 5-11 we hear the prayer that Nehemiah prays after his days of fasting, weeping and praying. It is a good prayer to read and learn from regarding how to pray. But for now just focus on what Nehemiah did when he hears the bad news, he prayed.

We've all heard the expression that there are no atheists in foxholes. People always want to turn to God when things go wrong. But in Nehemiah's attitude we see that turning to God when things go bad is not so that he can blame God or accuse God. No, this is not a reaction borne of self pity. This is a reaction of dependence and trust.

In his prayer to God that concludes his days of weeping and fasting, Nehemiah makes clear that he knows and trusts that God is good. That God redeems His people according to His mercy and not according to His wrath against their sin (which he readily acknowledges in both his people and himself.) He goes on to repeat God's promises back to God and then asks God to guide him as he steps forward to act.

Remember this prayer followed days of prayer and fasting. Nehemiah prepared before he acted. (As we see in chapter 2) And he prepared by prayer that reflects an attitude of dependence, not despondence.

*Going Deeper together. We meet in the **Fellowship Hall** during the Education Hour for discussion and prayer with all those who're able to come. If you're not able to make it Sunday, please feel free to e-mail me with your comments or questions so that we can have the benefit of sharing them together.*

Peace in Christ, Pastor Tom Rhodes

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## GOING DEEPER

Nehemiah's prayer and fasting didn't end for Nehemiah with only one prayer. He continues to show dependence on God as he goes to see the king and do his duty. When he arrives before the king, the king comments on Nehemiah's obvious sadness and asks why. Nehemiah, though he was scared in his heart, nevertheless, prays and forges ahead in his discussion with the king.

Nehemiah prays as he acts. (When in the last week or month have you had a similar thing happen?) He reflects dependence on God even as he does what he believes he should be doing. He shows a trust in God that overcomes the fear in his heart. He takes a risk in revealing to the king what has caused him sadness when he speaks of what has happened to Jerusalem, and what God has put in his heart to do. (See verses 5-8 of chapter 2).

Notice in verse 8 that Nehemiah attributes success with the king to God's gracious hand and not Nehemiah's own cleverness. This is man who knows that he is God's man. He is not ashamed to declare his reliance on the God of heaven in all things. How many of us, if we were writing the story of a great success that we were in charge of would write it up the way this man has.

In our society today we all understand the need for self-promotion. We know how spin things so that we end up looking good. (What are some ways you've seen that happen?) Nehemiah's concern was not spin or focusing the spotlight on himself. He was focused on getting on with the vision, the purpose, which God had placed before him. And that God was the one with the 'good press.'

Nehemiah wanted to make sure that God was first in all that he said and did. That is what makes Nehemiah such a great example for us. Look at verses 9-20 of chapter two and see how they end. Again Nehemiah demonstrates trust in God and acts according to that trust.

He spends much of these verses in gathering information so that he can organize the work to be done. This is a cupbearer to the king of Babylon planning the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem! This man was working out of an attitude of dependence on God to accomplish things, and not on his own strength or wisdom.

Notice that in verse 20 Nehemiah says that God will give us success. He is not only not seeking the spot light for himself, he is also seeking to show that others too are depending on God for the success of what they are about to do. (Have you ever seen someone give away the spotlight to others so that they can be noticed and appreciated?) He uses the vision God has given him to grow faith in others. He has placed before them what God has put on his heart to do and some respond with faithful trust as Nehemiah had. But there are those who wish to dissuade him. They are heard, but not given a part in what is to come.

What do we take from all this? As we said earlier, much of what we learn here is attitude. We learn to throw our total dependence on the God of heaven and His word. We learn to act according to what God has prepared for us to do. (See Eph 2:10) We also learn to not let other voices turn away from focusing on God's plans.

We can see in Nehemiah a sort of fore-runner of Christ. What we just said we learned from Nehemiah we see exemplified in the life Jesus on earth. He too declared dependence on the Father in heaven (Mk 1:34-36) and His word (Lk 4:16-21). He acted according to the will of God that He knew He was to do. And He also didn't let friends or foes (Mt 16:21-23) turn Him from accomplishing God's will.

That then gives us hope. If we can see in Nehemiah someone who reflects what Christ did, then perhaps we can begin to see ourselves that way also. We see that we too can reflect the life that Christ lived as Nehemiah did by dependence on God in prayer, faithfulness to God's will in our actions and steadiness of heart though others try to turn us away. Nehemiah was a cupbearer, a servant to an earthly king, an earthly employer. God took this man and shows us through him that we too can serve Him faithfully and well, it's a matter of an attitude of dependence on the Father in heaven.

(What are ways to incorporate into your daily life this attitude - what helps you to rely on God each day?)

**APPLICATION** - Consider the following about your attitude.

1. When trouble comes on any given day take a moment later in the day to review your reaction to whatever the bad news was. Don't do this as a matter of seeking where you went wrong, but to recall at what point in hearing the news you came to realize, like Nehemiah, that God was with you in your trouble.
2. As a way of keeping Nehemiah's attitude at the ready in your life, remember that he was cupbearer to the king. When you pick up a cup of coffee, or tea, or water, be reminded of Nehemiah and share with him a dependence on God in all things

**PRAY** – copy Nehemiah's pattern for prayer this week which is ACTS. Adoration of God for Who He is; Confession of sin; Thanksgiving for God's words of promise and Supplication – asking for God to meet the needs you place before Him.