

## Series: Transforming the World in which God has Placed Us

VBC

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October 15-16, 2005

Nehemiah 1:5-11

### “Prayer that Leads to Success”

All of us must own some vision

- A vision for our lives, a dream for our church
- A vision is what buys us “life space”
- Without a mission, a vision, we’re trespassing

In Nehemiah Chapter 1, Nehemiah was in the process of buying life space

- Something, someone, inside him was telling him there’s more to life than tasting wine
- He was gaining God’s vision for his life

How does this happen?

1) A holy vision is conceived out of a holy discontent (verses 1-4)

- Something that says, “This is not right, this cannot remain”
- Nehemiah was in his comfortable Palm Springs setting, but God came and made it very uncomfortable
  - With a bad report
  - There was nothing but devastation and ruin to report
- And the news more than rocked Nehemiah’s world
  - IT WRECKED HIM!!
- The effect was so overwhelming that it can only be described as a moving of God (verse 4)
- But visions go nowhere if they stop at the point of mere discontent
- More than conceived, a vision must be grabbed, confirmed, owned
  - Which is where prayer comes in
  - In prayer, a summons is often heard
  - A summons that says “This is what I made you for”
  - Nehemiah’s prayer changed everything
- THIS IS WHAT MAKES PRAYER DANGEROUS!!
  - In prayer, concern is transformed into calling
  - We are moved out of our present into God’s future
  - We are moved from something conceived, to something confirmed

2) A holy vision is confirmed out of holy prayer

- What sort of prayer confirms, solidifies a vision in one's heart?

A) PRAYER THAT IS CONVINCED GOD IS ABLE (verse 1:5a)

- Nehemiah's opening words reveal a man who, in spending time in the quiet, was learning something foundational to any vision

1. That GOD CAN DO ANYTHING!!

- Behind "great" is the conviction nothing overwhelms and nothing intimidates Him

- Devastated ruins do not overpower nor overawe God

a. World kings are simply instruments in His hand

- The hearts of rulers are like channels of water that turn whichever way God wills (Proverbs 21:1)

b. Broken walls do not tax His account: "Listen, I am the Lord God of all people - IS ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT FOR ME?" (32:27)

c. Strong opposition is of no account, as Job declared; "I know that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted" (42:2)

- This is God who speaks the world into existence

- Who scatters the stars, ignites the sun, amasses the mountains

- All of nature bows to His will

- In Him all things hold together, He never has to ask for permission

- The power required to do all that God wills to do lies within His undiminished fullness

2. Confirmed in Nehemiah's mind is not only God's greatness, but God's terror

- "Awesome" has become so commonplace, so pedestrian, we use it to describe everything from a new pair of socks to a menu item at Taco Bell

- But that would miss the meaning here

- This word speaks of someone, something dreadful, terrifying

- In the context of prayer is a man with a bit of a bone chilling, earth shattering, gut wrenching, knee knocking, heart stopping, life altering fear in his heart

- Face to face with God left Nehemiah somewhere between paralyzed and passionate

- This was not a nice, non-threatening, user friendly God

- But a God capable of both calming storms and putting us in them

- A God who, when He chooses to summon His own, assumes one response: "YES!!"

APPLICATION - Somewhere we have lost this

- "How did we end up so comfortable with God?" (Yaconelli)
- How did our awe of God get reduced to a lukewarm appreciation?
- How did God become a pal instead of a heart stopping presence?
- Lose sight of a God whose very presence smashes our egos into dust, burns our sin into ashes, strips us naked to reveal the person within, and calls us to world changing assignments?
- Out of the quiet, Nehemiah was confronted with divine greatness and divine fear
  - Because of who God is, I CAN!
  - Because of who God is, I MUST!

A prayer that confirms a vision is...

B) PRAYER THAT IS CONVINCED GOD IS WILLING (1:5b-9)

1. Nehemiah was convinced God was able, but more, God was willing to change the situation
  - Retracing the ways of God, he understood this about God
  - That this is also a God who loves
  - A God who is faithful, He loves to keep His promises, keeps, watches, preserves His covenant of love (verse 5b)
  - His character will allow Him to do nothing less
  - The only thing that gets in the way IS US!
2. So Nehemiah got bold
  - He determined to lay hold of, even more, release God's willingness and ability to act in this world
    - For that's what prayer is
  - "Prayer is a sincere, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised, according to His word" - Bunyan
3. Nehemiah realized that the gap between broken walls and rebuilt cities is REPENTANCE
  - SO HE PRAYED
    - a. "HEAR US, GIVE ME AN AUDIENCE" (verse 6a)
    - b. FORGIVE US (verses 6b-9)
      - i. Nehemiah came as we come, EMPTY HANDED (verses 6b-7)
        - Emptying ourselves of ourselves
        - Laying our failures at God's feet
  - He recognized that renovation of a city begins with a renovation of the heart
    - We have "sinned to sin," "acted corruptly to act corruptly" (verse 7)

- We have been unfaithful, going after debased gods, bringing idols into the holy temple
- Sacrificing young children periodically to Baal
- The priests and prophets becoming hopelessly corrupt, condoning immorality
- Leading to deserved pestilences and reversals
  - The destruction of the temple, the abrupt termination of the kingship with all of its unrealized hopes
- The oppression of the people and the utter devastation to the city
- And the scattering of people like so much seed tossed to the ground, banished from His presence
- "We have blown it from every angle," the phraseology amounts to everything God has written (verse 7b)

#### C) PRAYER THAT RESTORES US

- Nehemiah saw what we must see
  - Grace always holding out
  - Mercy always waiting in the wings
  - That if there is a turning of the heart, God will rush in to stand with His own
  - That He will gather, restore, even if we are at the ends of the heavens, the perimeters of the horizon (which is what Susa felt like)
  - God still offers a future (Jeremiah 32:2-15)
- He will rebuild His city, He will restore His rule

A prayer that confirms a vision, is convinced of one more thing

#### D) PRAYER THAT IS CONVINCED GOD IS READY (1:10-11)

- By the end of his prayer, Nehemiah sensed his call, his summons
  - God's vision
  - And God's time

Illustration - SF coach "Why don't you wear a watch? THE TIME IS NOW!!"

- Today, this day, give your servant success by granting him favor, compassion
- Moments come and go, as well as the opportunities within them, they wait for no one

God is summoning us; He is able, willing, and ready

- The question is, are we able, willing, and ready?