

Introduction: This is the first of six messages from the book of Nehemiah. He is a courageous repairer of the walls of Jerusalem who depended on prayer. *** He was flawed in that he was still living in the capital city of Persia, near the gulf, over one thousand miles from Jerusalem. He chose to have a high level position with the king of a pagan empire over returning with a ragtag remnant to rebuild a destroyed city and Temple. He lived one hundred years after Cyrus issued a decree that all Jews were free to go home. But Nehemiah stayed where he was, far from Jerusalem. *** Still, he had a heart for God and his brother who lived in Jerusalem. When he heard of the need to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem from his brother and a delegation from Judah, he mourned and fasted and prayed for several days. *** What is prayer? It is communion with God in many ways. It begins by listening to God through His written Word and the still, small voice of The Holy Spirit. Sometimes prayers are extended on-on-one conversations in private with God. And, often, prayers are short, silent heart requests in the hustle and bustle of real life when circumstances are critical, and only God can do what is needed. Today's passage shows how Nehemiah prayed both kinds of prayers. *** We will discover what Jesus said about prayer in Mark's Gospel. We will be in the Gospel of Mark from now through Easter. *** Let's dig in.

I. The longstanding distress of the Jews. (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

A. Nehemiah is informed of the state of Jerusalem's walls and laments before God for days. (Verses 1-4)

1. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah. (Verse 1a)

Nehemiah: *N^c-khēm-yāh'* means 'comfort of Yahweh', and *Kh^a-kāl- yāh'* means 'dulled of Yahweh' – in other words: the shock of being exiled will lead to receiving Yahweh's comfort.

2. Then it happened in the month of *Kees-lāw'* ('his confidence'), in the twentieth year, I, even I had been in *Shoo-shān'*, the fortress; then *Kh^a-nāh-nee'* ('gracious') came, one of my brothers and men from Judah; then I asked him about the Jews escaped, left of the captivity, and Jerusalem. (Verses 1b-2)

Time and place: It is the ninth month of the Jewish calendar, November-December of the Roman calendar in 445 BC. Shushan is Persia's capital, one hundred miles northwest of the Persian Gulf.

Brother: Nehemiah asks his brother about the remnant in Jerusalem who returned from captivity.

3. They say those remaining from captivity are in great affliction and reproach, and the wall of the city is being broken down and the gates had been burned in fire. (Verse 3)

Evil: Affliction is often translated evil. Eighty five years after Cyrus the walls are not repaired.

4. Then it happened when I heard these words, I sat and I wept; then I mourned for days; then I am fasting and praying before God. (Verse 4)

Extended grief and prayer: This was not the first time Nehemiah heard the walls were ruined; but, this time he is deeply moved and mourns before God. Why?

B. Nehemiah's long prayer to the Covenant God of mercy is full of honesty about shared national guilt. (Verses 5-11)

1. I said, I beseech Thee now Yahweh God of heaven, the great and fearful God, keeping covenant and steadfast love to those loving Him and keeping His commandments. (Verse 5)

Adoration: He addresses Yahweh as the ruler above all creation, great and fearful; and, keeping His commitment of strong love to all who love Him back in faithful obedience.

2. Please, Thy ear will be attentive and eyes being made open to hear the prayer of Thy servant I pray to Thee day and night for the children of Israel, Thy servants, confessing the sins we have sinned against Thee, both I and the house of my father have sinned; we have been very corrupt to Thee, and not kept the commandments, statutes and judgments Thou commanded Thy servant Moses. (Verses 6-7)

Confession: Nehemiah includes himself with all God's people as being corrupt in disobeying all God spoke to Moses concerning how His people should live. They deserved the captivity of exile.

3. Remember please, the Word Thou commanded Moses Thy servant: You all, even you all, will transgress; I, even I, will scatter you all among the people; and, you all had turned to Me and kept My commandments and did them; when it will be you all having been cast out to the end of the heavens; I will gather them and bring them to the place I have chosen to dwell My Name there. (Verses 8-9)

Remember: He appeals to God's Word to Moses concerning the blessings and curses (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28), the curse of exile; but, if they repent, He will gather them bring them back.

4. And they, Thy servants and Thy people whom Thou have redeemed by Thy great power and Thy strong hand. (Verse 10)

Redeem: He reminds God of the wonders He did in Egypt to Egypt to redeem His people to Himself, 'confessing' God's excellence!

5. I beseech Thee Adonai, it will be, please, Thy ear attentive to the prayer of Thy servant and of Thy servants, delighting to fear Thy Name: Thou must cause to prosper, please, Thy servant today, and Thou must give to him mercy in the sight of this man. (Verse 11a)

Entreaty: Finally, Nehemiah makes his big request, entreating Adonai to make him prosper by causing the king to have mercy on him.

Summary: Nehemiah begins this long prayer with adoration and praise to God as the powerful and sovereign ruler of everything; then, he moves to confessing the sinful corruption of all God's people, himself included, and reminds God of His character, Word and past acts of redemption; finally, he entreats Adonai for success and mercy before the king of Persia.

Effective prayer moves from adoration to confession to entreaty

Poison tester: I, indeed I had been cupbearer to the king. The king trusted Nehemiah because he sampled every drink for the king so if it was poisoned he would die, not the king. (Verse 11b)

II. The king engages Nehemiah in dialog and grants him grace as a result of his prayer to God;

Jesus tells His forgiven disciples to pray in faith. (*Nehemiah 2:1-8; Mark 11:20-25*)

A. Artaxerxes engages Nehemiah in a three part question and response dialog then grants him grace because of his prayer to God. (*Nehemiah 2:1-8*)

1. It happened in the month of *Nee-sān* ('their flight') in Artaxerxes' ('I will make spoiled boil') twentieth year, I took up the wine and gave it to him; not I had been sad in his presence. (*Verse 1*)
Four months: This is the first month of the Jewish calendar, the month of Passover, four months later.
Result: As he serves the king, for the first time he is 'sad' before him. Again this word is often translated evil. Nehemiah's prayer has not been answered, the evil of God's unprotected city continues.
2. What follows is a series of three questions asked by the king and Nehemiah's reply. (*Verses 2-8a*)
 - i. The king said to me: why thy face sad not being sick, this is sadness of heart; then I was afraid greatly and I said: the king eternally live, why not my face sad when the city of my fathers' graves wasted and its gates consumed in fire. (*Verses 2-3*)
Why sad face: Sad is again the word often translated evil. This evil world makes people sad.
City of fathers: Nehemiah's ancestral home is still wasted as a result of the Babylonian destruction.
 - ii. He said to me: for what thou are making request; and then I prayed to the God of heaven; then I said, if to the king it is good, and if will be found good thy servant in thy sight, thou will send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves and I will build it up. (*Verses 4-5*)
What: The king asks Nehemiah what he is requesting of him concerning Jerusalem.
Prayer: Nehemiah makes a quick silent prayer to God. It flows from his multiple day prayer and fasting four months earlier. As Nehemiah, we must be ready to pray at any time, especially when unexpected turning points occur.
Request: With faith that God is opening the door for him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it, Nehemiah requests this of the king.
 - iii. The king (the queen sitting beside) said to me: until when will be thy journey and when will thou return; it was good before the king to send me and I gave him a time; and I said it is good letters will be given me to governors beyond the river that they let me pass through to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest that he give me timber to make beams for the palace which is the house (Temple) and for the wall of the city and the house which I will enter. (*Verses 6-8a*)
When go for how long: The king wants to know which days Nehemiah will be away to accomplish this great task. (It will take fifty-two days (6:8) plus travel time both ways another ninety days).
Good to king: From his first words to him, Nehemiah determines the king is 'good' with him going to rebuild Jerusalem. He senses the king will grant his request.

Effective prayer moves from adoration to confession to entreaty

Please give me letters: He asks for letters for safe passage and for all the timber he will need.

3. Then he gave to me, the king, according to the hand of my God, good upon me. (*Verse 8b*)
King gave: The king gave Nehemiah all the letters he needed to do what is needed in Jerusalem.
Reason: This was because God's good hand was on him due to his fasting and prayer of adoration, confession and repentance and trust that his entreaty was according to God's will (1 John 5:13-15).
Triple narrative: Many times in Scripture the narrative gives a pattern of three similar words or events. Every time, the third is the longest and settles the matter (see Jesus with Peter in John 21).
With this three-part dialogue exchange, God gives Nehemiah all he asked for – and more.

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B. Jesus commands the twelve to pray by faith in God, but to be sure to forgive as they have been forgiven. (*Mark 11:20-25*)

1. Passing in the morning they saw the fig tree dried from the roots. (*Verse 20*)
Context: The previous morning, leaving for Jerusalem, Jesus cursed the fig tree (verses 12-15).
2. Having been reminded, Peter said, Master, behold, the fig tree Thou cursed withered away. (*Verse 21*)
Result: Peter is excited that what Jesus cursed had been done in one day!
3. Jesus says, you all must be having faith in God; truly I say whoever may say to this mountain thou must be removed and cast into the sea, and not may be doubting in his heart, but may be believing, that which he is saying is coming to pass. (*Verses 22-23*)
Group: Jesus is talking to individuals among His disciples.
Faith IN God: Jesus commands them to have faith in God and His Word.
No doubt: They (and we) must never doubt that God will do all He has said He will do!
4. Therefore, I say to you all as much as you all are praying and requesting, you all must be believing that you all have received, and it will be to you all. (*Verse 24*)
Must continue belief: Jesus also said that when two or more believers reconciled through forgiveness agree in faith on something, it will be done (Matthew 18:19-20).
5. And when you all are standing praying, you all must be forgiving if one (of) you all is having (ought) over someone, that also the Father of you all in heaven may forgive you all the trespasses of you all. (*Verse 25*)
Must forgive: In order to have prayers of faith answered, believers must all forgive each other.
Result: Those who forgive others in faith, will be forgiven of their trespasses.

Believing prayer of the forgiven is powerful – it moves mountains!

Conclusion: Nehemiah mourns before God for many days when he hears the wall around Jerusalem is still in ruins. After fasting he prays to the Covenant God in adoration, confession and entreaty, asking God to help him successfully serve Him. After the king notices Nehemiah's sadness, he engages him in a dialogue in which Nehemiah prays on the spot and the king graciously agrees to send him to Jerusalem to repair the wall. Jesus commands His disciples to pray in faith, forgiving as they have been forgiven.

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