

LESSONS FROM THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH

TEXT: NEHEMIAH 1

INTRODUCTION:

1. Prayer is an essential part of every Christian's life.
2. One of the greatest blessings God grants is to allow us to pray for others (1 Tim. 2:1).
3. "My prayers are the one grace which my foe cannot refuse" (Trench).
4. "I can get at him through the God of Heaven."
5. Prayer is powerful...
 - a. James 5:17 – No rain for 3½ years
 - b. Acts 12:5 – Peter delivered from prison
6. May we learn how to pray for others by studying the example of Nehemiah...

I. AN EARNEST PRAYER (vs. 4)

- A. Before Nehemiah prayed he wept, mourned and fasted.
 1. This indicates the earnestness of his prayer.
 2. He was not giving mere lip service (cf. Matthew 15:8).
 3. He was not uttering a "vain repetition" (cf. Matthew 6:7).
 4. He was not just going through the motions.
- B. He was pouring out his heart in his prayer.
 1. Compare this with the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41-44).
 2. It is a fervent prayer that avails much (James 5:16).
- C. May we strive to make all our prayers earnest and sincere.

II. A REVERENT PRAYER (vs. 5)

- A. Nehemiah began his prayer by giving glory to God.
 1. He is Jehovah. {*Not some false, fickle, man-made god*}
 2. He is the God of Heaven. {*Indicating His authority and power*}
 3. He is great.
 4. He is terrible.
 - a. He is worthy of reverence, fear and awe.
 - b. Exodus 19:16-19; Psalm 33:8; 89:7
 5. He is faithful. {*Deuteronomy 7:9-11*}
- B. Certainly, God is deserving of our reverence.
- C. Yet, He is a God who can be approached by His children.
 1. He will hear and answer our prayers (Hebrews 4:15-16).
 2. Yet, our obedience is required (Psalm 103:17-18; Proverbs 28:9; 1 Peter 3:12).

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III. A PERSISTENT PRAYER (vs. 1, 4, 6; 2:1)

- A. Nehemiah did not offer a half-hearted prayer, only once and then become discouraged.
- B. The text indicates that he prayed for days – for four months!
 - 1. 1:1 – The month *Chisleu* was the 9th month of the Hebrew year.
 - 2. 2:1 – The month *Nisan* was the 1st month, also called *Abib*.
 - 3. Nehemiah began praying in our December and did not stop until his prayer began to be answered in our late March / early April!
 - 4. 1:4 – Nehemiah continued his prayers “certain days.”
 - 5. 1:6 – Nehemiah prayed night and day!
- C. Clearly, Nehemiah’s prayers are an indication of his great concern for God’s people.
 - 1. Do we share this kind of concern for the Lord’s church?
 - 2. Do we pray night and day for those who are lost in sin?
- D. God wants His children to pray with persistence...
 - 1. David prayed night and day (Psalm 88:1-3).
 - 2. Abraham begged persistently for Sodom (Genesis 18:23-33).
 - 3. Jesus taught His followers to pray without fainting (Luke 18:1-8).
- E. God promises to answer our prayers...
 - 1. He may answer, “Yes.”
 - 2. He may answer, “No.”
 - 3. He may answer, “Wait.”

IV. AN HONEST PRAYER (vs. 6-7)

- A. Before his prayer could be a prayer of intercession, it had to be a prayer of confession.
- B. Nehemiah did not try to hide or deny his sins before God.
 - 1. He did not pray, “If I have sinned...”
 - 2. Confession is essential to forgiveness (1 John 1:7-10).
 - 3. Repentance is also necessary (2 Chronicles 7:14).
 - 4. Sin must be removed for God to hear and answer our prayers (Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Peter 3:12).
- C. Nehemiah did not try to ignore or cover up the sins of the nation of Judah.
- D. Nehemiah examined himself before he approached God (2 Corinthians 13:5).
- E. Only then did he pray for mercy (vs. 10-11).
- F. If we desire God’s forgiveness, then we must honestly examine ourselves, confess our faults to God and ask for mercy.

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- V. A SCRIPTURAL PRAYER (VS. 8-10)
- A. Nehemiah quoted Scripture in his prayer to God.
1. Leviticus 26:33
 2. Leviticus 26:40-42, 44-46
 3. Deuteronomy 30:1-5
- B. Nehemiah's knowledge of Scripture was essential to his prayers.
1. Scripture taught him to pray.
 - a. Genesis 20:17 – Abraham was a man of prayer.
 - b. Numbers 11:2; 21:7 – Moses was a man of prayer.
 - c. 1 Samuel 7:5; 8:6; 12:23 – Samuel was a man of prayer.
 - d. 2 Samuel 7:27 – David was a man of prayer.
 2. Scripture taught him how to pray.
 - a. 1 Samuel 1:10-13 – Hannah's prayer of petition.
 - b. 1 Samuel 2:1-2 – Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving.
 - c. 2 Kings 19:15-20 – Hezekiah's prayer of humility.
 - d. Job 42:7-10 – Job's prayer of intercession.
 3. Scripture taught him God's Will in prayer.
 4. Scripture taught him God's desire to answer prayer.
 - a. Exodus 6:5 – *God heard the prayers of His people.*
 - b. 2 Chronicles 7:14-15 – *God promises to hear His faithful.*
 - c. 2 Chronicles 30:27 – *God will hear His worshippers.*
- C. Thus, Nehemiah's prayer was a prayer of faith.
1. Faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17).
 2. Thus, a prayer of faith will be in harmony with Scripture.
- D. All prayers must be prayers of faith!
1. Complete trust in God is required (Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-6).
 2. One must have faith in His severity (Deuteronomy 11:26-28; Rom. 11:22).
 - a. Thus, we do not pray for salvation without obedience to His Word.
 - b. We pray for mercy, but not in contradiction to His justice.
 3. One must have faith in His love (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9).
 - a. Thus, we pray for longsuffering.
 - b. We also pray for opportunity to teach and help others.
 4. One must have faith in His promises (Hebrews 13:5-6; Psalm 37:25, 28).
 - a. Thus, we pray with confidence, assurance and boldness.
 - b. We also pray, "Not my will, but thine be done."

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VI. A DEDICATED PRAYER (VS. 11)

- A. Nehemiah was dedicated to humility.
 - 1. His attitude was one of pleading to God.
 - 2. Even though he knew God's Will, he did not assume an attitude of arrogance (cf. Exodus 32:9-10; Luke 3:8).
- B. Nehemiah was dedicated to service.
 - 1. His attitude was one of service to God.
 - 2. God had a plan; but Nehemiah (and Israel) would be servants to that plan.
- C. Nehemiah was dedicated to repentance.
 - 1. His attitude was one of reverence with a desire to return to God.
 - 2. His desire was once again to show respect unto Jehovah.
- D. Nehemiah was dedicated to submission.
 - 1. His attitude was one of complete trust in and dependence on God.
 - 2. Even though he was the king's cupbearer, he asked God to prosper him.
 - a. We may have great jobs, but God is the one who prospers.
 - b. We are always dependent upon Him (cf. Matthew 6:11).
 - 3. His prayer was to find favor with the king in the performing of his duties.
 - a. Nehemiah understood that his job was a means of serving God.
 - b. He knew that it could present opportunities to be of service to God.
 - c. Why do we work? (Cf. Ephesians 4:28; Acts 20:34-35)

VII. A FAITHFUL PRAYER (2:1-6)

- A. Nehemiah did not see prayer as an exercise in futility.
- B. Nor did he expect God to "do all the work" for him.
- C. Consider how God did not answer Nehemiah's prayer.
 - 1. He did not miraculously rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem.
 - 2. He did not send angels to drive away the enemies of His people.
 - 3. He did not miraculously take Nehemiah from Shushan to Jerusalem.
- D. Now, consider how God did answer Nehemiah's prayer.
 - 1. He allowed the king to show kindness to Nehemiah.
 - 2. He allowed Nehemiah to find favor in the king's sight.
 - 3. He allowed the king to grant Nehemiah's request.
 - 4. He allowed Nehemiah to travel to Jerusalem and begin leading the people in rebuilding the city and the walls.
- E. The answer to Nehemiah's prayer came through God's ability to use Nehemiah!
 - 1. "Pray as if it all depends upon God; work as if it all depends upon you."
 - 2. If we pray for something, we also must be willing to work for it!
 - a. We pray for the lost – Will we go and teach them?
 - b. We pray for the wayward – Will we go and seek them?
 - c. We pray for the sick – Will we go and visit them?
 - d. We pray for the church – Will we work for it?