

## Kingdom Builders 1 – Passion and Prayer

### I) Introduction – S2 - QR codes on outline, Access to messages

**S3** - Nehemiah 2:19-20a - *But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked us and despised us, and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” So I answered them and said to them, “The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build...*

- A.) In the book of Nehemiah, we’re going to see a godly leader and a people called to a very difficult task: to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem; walls reduced to rubble by the Babylonian army
- B.) We will also see a people called to defend their city and their families against hostile enemies bent on stopping their work
- C.) Finally, we will witness a weary people who finally find rest after completing their task and securing Jerusalem
- D.) We as pastors and leaders have the same calling: **S4**
  - 1) To rebuild broken lives by bringing people to Christ and making them effective and fruitful disciples of Jesus
  - 2) To be warriors who guard our people against false teaching and corrupting influences inside and outside the church
  - 3) To find rest for our souls in the work, after the work and always in Christ
- E.) As we walk through this study of parts of Nehemiah, we’ll learn important lessons from the prophet’s ministry that we can apply as pastors and leaders

### II) Background

Nehemiah 1:1-2 - *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came;*

*and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.*

A.) This takes place in roughly 454 B.C; Nehemiah is one of thousands of Jewish people who live in Sushan, a capital city in Persia.

- 1) They were descendants of Hebrews from Judah who had been dragged away from their homeland by the Babylonians about a 140 years earlier
- 2) Because the people of Judah were copying the evil of the pagan nations around them, God brought severe judgment
  - a) He allowed the forces of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, to invade
- 3) **55** - The assault was horrible...Babylonian forces destroyed the sacred Temple, tore down the walls and towers that protected the city, and burnt much of the city, destroying homes, markets and government buildings
- 4) **5a** - Imagine the terror and deep sadness the Jews must have felt as they were led away in chains by idol worshippers
  - a) They had to watch as their once blessed city was left desolate, reduced to ash and broken stone, and emptied of its population

B.) However, about 60 years later in 537 B.C. , 50,000 Hebrews led by Zerubbabel, a descendent of David, returned to Jerusalem

- 1) God called them to rebuild the Temple, the first step in reviving the Jewish capitol.
- 2) They finished the Temple in 516 B.C. and resumed sacrifices, so Jerusalem was well on its way to prospering once again under God's care

### **III) Nehemiah the Shepherd**

A.) Decades later, however, people from Jerusalem visited Nehemiah and gave him an awful report on the state of the people there:

**S6 - Nehemiah 1:3**: *And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and disgrace, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire."*

- 1) That doesn't sound so great, does it? The Jews had completed the Temple, started the sacrifices, and rejoiced in God's renewed presence; but it didn't last
  - 2) The same problems that brought judgment on the Jews crept in again
  - 3) The priests had become corrupt, the people's worship was lukewarm, and they became socially unjust
    - a) The wealthier ones would give loans with high interest; when the people couldn't pay, they gave up their land and became slaves
    - b) The men also married foreign women, which often led to idolatry
    - c) God is not mocked; you can't play games with God and get away with it; the people become impoverished, hungry, and leaderless
  - 4) Further, without walls, the city had no protection, so they were subject to raids, intimidation and political pressure from foreigners in the area
    - a) Out of fear, they stopped building and became increasingly weak
- B.) So how does Nehemiah respond to all of this; his response to this distressing report shows us the heart of a godly pastor/leader

**S7 - Nehemiah 1:4** - *Now when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

- 1) What do you see here? Nehemiah has intense passion for his people
- 2) Keep in mind he had a high profile job in the Persian court and likely enjoyed at least semi-luxurious living; why should he be concerned for people a thousand miles away and risk his own comfort?

- 3) He could have simply taken the easy route and dismissed their suffering
- 4) “Well, they were unfaithful; they made poor choices; their leaders were greedy and corrupt...they deserve this suffering; they earned it!”

a) Why should I be bothered? They brought on themselves?!

c.) That’s not Nehemiah

- 1) He is crushed emotionally by their suffering and the holy city’s decay
- 2) He wept and mourned for days and fasted and prayed and interceded!
- 3) What incredible love he had for the people of God
- 4) This kind of love isn’t natural...it can only come from God; it was given to Nehemiah to empower him to effectively minister to and lead the Hebrews
- 5) Only God has that kind of love within him; and it is only by the Spirit can we can follow Nehemiah’s example of intense compassion for his people
- 6) I think this lesson is well illustrated in Jesus’ story of the shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep

[Matthew 18:12-14](#) - *“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.*

- a) Remember, this is one of the shepherd’s sheep, one of his own!
- b) This shepherd could have allowed the lost sheep to wander rather than waste time chasing and put the others at risk
- c) However, he loved this wandering, lost sheep so much, he was willing to climb mountains, walk through swamps, and journey through thorny bushes to save the one

- d) When he finds it, he doesn't punish it; he doesn't complain about all the work it took to find it; he doesn't care about the searching, he only cares about rejoicing because he found it
  - e) Have the same heart in our ministries...part of the building process is to love and be patient with those who go astray
  - 7) **Lesson 1:** I pray the Lord would give us the same passion for our people; the same deep affection, even for those who test our patience
  - 8) It's easy and natural to become frustrated and disappointed with failures in our people, such as slow growth or unfaithfulness...don't despise them, intercede for them!
- D.) Let's look at Nehemiah's prayer; he is going to plead with God on behalf of his people; the prophet provides a model for intercessory prayer...a model for us to follow: **Lesson 2 – effective prayer on behalf of God's people**

#### IV) Next: Nehemiah's prayer in-depth

[Nehemiah 1:5-12](#) - *LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

*“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”*

A.) Nehemiah begins with the character of God – S8

- 1) Nehemiah opens his prayer by declaring who God is: “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love...”
- 2) S9 - Before asking God to do anything, Nehemiah reminds himself of who God is — holy, powerful, faithful, and merciful.
  - a) True prayer starts with worship
  - b) Too often we rush into prayer focused only on our crisis; Nehemiah teaches us to focus first on the greatness and faithfulness of God
- 3) 9b-e - We must keep God’s ATTRIBUTES first and foremost in our minds
  - a) Don't let the enemy, the flesh, worldly distractions diminish Him in your mind
  - b) Worship gives us the proper perspective for our requests...it gives us the humility needed to recognize our complete dependence on an awesome God to do His will
  - c) Gives us confidence that we serve a big God who can accomplish all in His power, not ours

B.) 10b - He addresses the root problem, not just the symptoms

- 1) Nehemiah does not simply pray for relief from suffering or protection from enemies; He understands that Israel’s condition was the result of spiritual failure
- 2) The broken city and lack of food were only outward signs of a deeper issue: the people had broken covenant with God.
- 3) Rather than blaming others, Nehemiah confesses: “We have sinned against you... Even I and my father’s house have sinned.”

- 4) This is the language of repentance; Nehemiah identifies with the sins of the people instead of distancing himself from them
- 5) Daniel was a uniquely godly man, yet his prayer was similar:

[Daniel 9:5-6,18](#) - *We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land...Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.*

- 6) **Lesson 3** - Godly leaders do not stand above the people in pride; they stand among the people in humility and recognize their own part in national or even a church's failure...David doesn't blame Israel alone

#### C.) Confession and repentance must come before restoration

- 1) Nehemiah understood a spiritual principle: God does not bless his people who are unfaithful; before they could rebuild, they had to repent
- 2) Israel's healing would not come merely through stronger walls, better leadership, or improved conditions; the nation first needed a restored relationship with God.
- 3) Nehemiah confesses sin because he knows revival begins when God's people humble themselves and return to Him...want revival, repent!

#### D.) **10c** - Nehemiah prays the promises of God

- 1) One of the most powerful parts of this prayer is that Nehemiah reminds God of His covenant promises to Moses:
- 2) "If you return to me and obey my commands... I will gather them..."

- 3) Nehemiah knew Scripture, and he prayed Scripture; He understood that God had already revealed both the consequences of disobedience and the promise of restoration for those who repent.
- 4) Faith-filled prayer stands on the promises of God.
- 5) When Nehemiah prayed, he was not demanding something unreasonable or new; he was appealing to what God had already promised to do
- 6) God wants His people to stand on His promises...to trust that He will be ever faithful to His own Word

E.) Effective ministry is built through reliance on God

- 1) Before Nehemiah ever rebuilt a wall, he first built an altar of prayer
- 2) We do not move forward in ministry by relying on human strength alone; we move forward by staking everything on the faithfulness of God
- 3) Prayer prepares us for action
  - a) After fasting, weeping, confessing, and seeking God, Nehemiah was ready to step into the assignment God had placed before him.
  - b) Nehemiah ends his prayer by asking God for favor before the king.
  - c) Prayer prepared him for the task ahead by verifying the cause with God and trusting in God that He would see the work though no matter the challenges
  - d) Real prayer changes us before it changes circumstances.

E.) **10d** - Finally, pray for success that the Lord be glorified

- 1) We can avoid unnecessary stress and disappointment if we remember that God starts the work, God fuels the work, and God brings the fruit.

- 2) Rest in this! Don't think that God's work is dependent on you. But rather, you are dependent on God's work.

## **V) Summary**

A.) Pastors are called to be builders...to raise up churches full of people who are being built up in the image of Christ

- 1) Our first responsibility is to have a shepherd's heart – to care for the sheep with God's passion – a passion we can ask for and is put there by the Holy Spirit
- 2) Our second calling is to pray as Nehemiah prayed: a prayer of worship, repentance, remembering God's promises, and praying that He be glorified in you and your congregation