

When God's People Are in Ruins

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome to those watching online.
- B. Slide1-4 FHC (next week). FPU (honor God w/finances/starts Sun).
Foundations (understanding of biblical doct/starts Sun-10am/also online).
5 Love Languages (7-week, AP & team, Wed nights, begins 9/23).
- C. Slide5 Prayer: gfgh

II. Slide6 Intro: When God's People Are in Ruins

- A. Brian, why study Nehemiah specifically? I'm glad you asked. We study Nehemiah to learn about **godly leadership**. Nehemiah also illustrates how **God places His servants in strategic positions** among the nations. *Believers in Marketplace Vocations, who know God's Word, pray before acting, and take calculated risks, play a vital role in accomplishing God's purposes.*
 - 1. Also the book also teaches that **opposition** to God's work is **inevitable** in a sinful world. Finally, the **Great Revival** in Neh. 8-10, warrants close study for revival attempts today.
- B. Have you ever seen something **broken** and immediately wanted to **fix it**?
 - 1. Some of us are wired that way. We see a problem, and we start **developing a plan**. We identify what needs to change, decide who needs to help, and begin putting the pieces together.
- C. Nehemiah is often remembered as a **builder** and a **leader**. He organized people, confronted opposition, solved problems, and helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in only 52 days.
 - 1. But that is not where his story begins. - Nehemiah's story **does not** begin with **a hammer** in his hand. It begins with **a burden** in his heart.
 - a) It **does not** begin with Nehemiah talking to the **king**. It begins with Nehemiah talking to **God**.

2. Before **Nehemiah** ever **rebuilds** the wall, **God** begins **rebuilding** **Nehemiah**.

D. That is important because when we see brokenness ... in *our lives, families, church, or community*, our first instinct is often **to do something**. We want a strategy, a solution, or a set of steps.

1. **But** Nehemiah 1 teaches us that God's work of **restoration** often begins long before **the visible work starts**. It begins when **God** **opens** someone's eyes, **breaks** someone's heart, **and** **brings** someone *to their knees*.

III. Slide 7 1. **GOD OPENS NEHEMIAH'S EYES TO THE BROKENNESS (1-4)**

A. 1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." 4 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

B. **Nehemiah is living in Susa, the capital city of the Persian Empire (Iran).**

1. He is far from Jerusalem, serving as **cupbearer** to King Artaxerxes.
2. **This was a position of great responsibility and privilege.** Nehemiah lived in the palace and had access to the most powerful person in the empire. His life was secure and comfortable. [then his brother Hanani arrives from Judah]

C. **Nehemiah asks him about two things:** the Jewish remnant who had survived the exile **and** the condition of Jerusalem.

1. **The answer is devastating.** The people are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem's wall is broken down, and its gates have been burned.
 - a) **In the ancient world, a city without walls was vulnerable.** It had *no protection, no security, no dignity*. The broken walls were a visible reminder of Jerusalem's defeat and the people's shame.

D. But notice that Nehemiah had to **ask**. He **could have** remained comfortable in the palace. He **could have** avoided hearing about Jerusalem. He **could have** decided that the problems were too far away and belonged to someone else. [*no*, Neh wanted to know!]

1. That is often where God's work begins: with **a willingness to see**.
2. It is possible to spend our lives **avoiding** anything that might disturb our comfort. We can **ignore** the struggling marriage, the wandering child, the lonely neighbor, the division in the church, **or** the spiritual needs of our community.
 - a) Sometimes we do not see the brokenness because it is hidden. Other times we do not see it because we have learned not to look.

E. Nehemiah **looked**. He **asked**. He **listened**.

1. And when he heard the report, he did not remain emotionally detached. Vs.4 *As soon as I heard these words I **sat down and wept and mourned** for days, and I continued **fasting and praying** before the God of heaven.*
2. **Nehemiah sits down** because the news stops him in his tracks. **He weeps** because the condition of God's people matters to him. **He mourns** because God's city is in disgrace. **He fasts and prays** because he knows this problem is greater than his ability to solve.
 - a) Nehemiah's burden was *more than* **an emotional reaction**. His grief moved him toward **God**.

F. There is a difference between being **bothered** by something and being **burdened** by it. We can be **bothered** because a problem inconveniences us. **But a spiritual burden moves us** to seek **God** **and** offer ourselves to Him.

1. So we should ask, **What has God allowed us to see** that we have been **trying to ignore**? What brokenness should cause us to sit down and weep?

G. **We** live in a culture that teaches us to **protect our comfort**. **But** following **Jesus** means we *cannot* be indifferent to the pain around us **or** the spiritual condition of others. - The question is not simply, "*What is broken?*" The deeper question is, "**God**, why have You allowed **me** to see it?"

IV. SlideX 2. NEHEMIAH REMEMBERS WHO GOD IS (5)

A.5 And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

B. Nehemiah sees a great problem, but he begins his prayer with a great God.

1. Nehemiah does not begin by telling God how **large** the problem is. He begins by remembering how great God is.

2. Jerusalem’s walls are **broken**, but God is still the God of heaven. The people have been **unfaithful**, but God remains faithful to His covenant. The situation appears **hopeless**, but God’s steadfast love has not changed.

a) This is one of the purposes of prayer. *Prayer does not inform God about circumstances He has overlooked. Prayer brings our hearts back under the truth of who God is.*

C. Perhaps some of us have been measuring God’s faithfulness by the condition of our walls.

1. We look at **something broken** in our lives and conclude that God must have forgotten us. We look at a **delayed answer** to prayer and wonder whether God still cares. We see the **consequences** of human sin and question whether God is still in control.

D. Nehemiah reminds us that our *circumstances* may change, but God’s character does not. *He is still great. He is still faithful. He is still loving. He is still the God of heaven.*

E. Before we ask God to **change our circumstances**, we may need Him to **correct our vision**. We need to see our circumstances in light of **who He is**.

V. SlideX 3. NEHEMIAH HONESTLY CONFESSES SIN (6-7)

A.6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.

- B. After recognizing **God's greatness** and **faithfulness**, Nehemiah confesses the sins of Israel. He prays: *Confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.*
1. Notice the pronouns. **Not, They have sinned. But, We have sinned.**
- C. Nehemiah could have blamed previous generations. He could have said, *"I was not the one who caused the exile nor the tearing down of these walls."*
- D. He continues: *"We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses."*
1. Nehemiah does not make **excuses**. He does not **soften** the language. He does not **blame** their *environment, circumstances, or enemies*.
 2. He calls sin what it is. That is essential because **genuine restoration** requires *genuine repentance*.
 - a) We often want God to repair **the visible damage** without confronting **the deeper spiritual problem**. We want Him to fix our *circumstances* without changing our *hearts*.
 - b) **But** Jerusalem's broken walls were not merely the result of military weakness or poor leadership. They were part of the **consequences** of Israel's repeated rebellion against God.
 - c) If Nehemiah only repaired the wall without acknowledging the people's **sin**, he would address **the symptom** without addressing *the disease*.
- E. **The same is true for us.** Some things are broken because we live in a fallen world. Not every hardship is the direct result of a particular sin. But when sin is involved, restoration requires more than regret.
1. **Regret** says, *"I am sorry this happened."* **Repentance** says, *"God, I have sinned against You."*
 2. **Regret** focuses on consequences. **Repentance** agrees with God and turns toward Him.

a) **Renewal** begins when we **stop saying**, “Look at what *they* have done,” and begin praying, “Lord, *we* have sinned.”

- F. What might change in our homes if we were **quicker to confess** than *accuse*? What might change in our churches if we were more concerned with **our own repentance** than with *assigning blame*? What might God do in our lives if we **stopped defending ourselves** and became *honest* before Him?
- G. The good news is that Nehemiah **confesses sin** because he knows he is praying to a **merciful God**. Confession is **not** an attempt to *persuade* a reluctant God to forgive us. It is the response of people who **trust His covenant love**.
1. We **do not** have to **hide our sin** from God. We can *bring it into the light* because **God’s mercy is greater than our failure**.

VI. SlideX 4. NEHEMIAH TRUSTS GOD’S PROMISES (8-10)

- A. 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are **unfaithful**, I will **scatter** you among the peoples, 9 **but** if you **return** to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will **gather** them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ 10 They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.
- B. Here Nehemiah remembers what God had spoken through Moses. **God warned that disobedience would lead to scattering**. **But** He also **promised** that if His people **returned to Him**, He would **gather them again**.
1. Nehemiah is praying with an *open Bible* (so to speak).
 2. He is not trying to force God to support Nehemiah’s personal plan. He is building his prayer upon what God has already said.
- C. He essentially prays, “*God, You warned that this would happen, and You were faithful to Your warning. But You also promised to gather Your people when they return to You. So I am asking You to be faithful to that promise.*”

1. Biblical prayer is shaped by biblical truth. When we know God's Word, we learn to pray according to God's heart. His **promises** give us confidence, His **commands** give us direction, and His **character** gives us hope.

D. Nehemiah then says, *"They are **your** servants and **your** people, whom **you** have redeemed by **your** great power and by **your** strong hand."*

1. The people are living in disgrace, but they still belong to God.
2. Their city is broken, but they are still His people.
3. Their condition does not look like redemption, but Nehemiah remembers what God has already done. God redeemed Israel from Egypt by His great power and strong hand.

E. Nehemiah's hope is not found in the people's ability to rebuild. His hope is found in *the God who redeems*.

1. **Our hope** is grounded in that same truth: we belong to God because He has acted to redeem us.
2. We are not defined ultimately by *our ruins, failures, or present circumstances*. Those things are real, but they are not the final word over those whom God has redeemed.

VII.SlideX 5. NEHEMIAH DEPENDS ON GOD AND PREPARES TO ACT (11)

A. 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give **success** to your servant today, and grant him **mercy** in the sight of this man." - Now I was cupbearer to the king.

B. Nehemiah ends his prayer with a specific request: *"Give **success** to your servant today, and grant him **mercy** in the sight of this man."* "This man" is the king.

1. Humanly speaking, Artaxerxes is the most powerful man in Nehemiah's world. But after spending time in the presence of the God of heaven, Nehemiah simply calls him "this man."

2. Nehemiah understands that the king may hold earthly authority, but God holds *the king's heart*.
 3. Nehemiah needs: the king's **permission** to leave, and **resources**, **protection**, and **authority**. But Nehemiah cannot *manufacture* the opportunity. God must open the door.
- C. So Nehemiah prays. But his prayer is *not a substitute for action*, it is *preparation for action*.
1. Nehemiah is about to approach the king and risk *his position, security, and possibly his life*. Prayer prepares him to take that step with humility and courage.
 2. Sometimes people say, "*All we can do is pray*," as though prayer were the *smallest or weakest* response available.
 3. Nehemiah would say that prayer is the **first and most important work**. Prayer places the burden in God's hands, **brings** our hearts into alignment with His will, & **prepares** us to obey when He opens the door.
 - a) We should not use prayer to avoid obedience. But neither should we attempt God's work *without depending on God's power*.
- D. The pattern is clear: Nehemiah **sees** the need, **feels** the burden, **seeks** the Lord, **confesses** sin, **remembers** God's promises, **asks** for help, and **prepares** to obey.

VIII.SlideX JESUS THE GREATER RESTORER

- A. Nehemiah's story points us toward *a far greater work* of **restoration**.
1. Nehemiah heard that his people were living in trouble and disgrace, and their condition moved him deeply. Although he lived in the comfort of a royal palace, he was willing to become **personally involved** in their suffering. This gives us a glimpse of what Jesus has done, but Jesus is **far greater than Nehemiah**.
 - a) Jesus did not merely **hear about** our ruin from a distance. He **entered it**.

b) **He** left the glory of heaven and came into *our broken world*. **He** lived among *sinful, suffering people*. **He** saw *our deepest problem* - **not** merely broken circumstances, **but** our separation from God because of sin.

B. **Nehemiah** would risk his life by approaching *an earthly king*. **Jesus** gave His life to bring us to *the heavenly King*.

C. **Nehemiah** would help rebuild the walls of one city. **Jesus** died and rose again to reconcile us to God, restore ruined lives, **and** build a redeemed people who will live with Him forever.

1. **The gospel is not that** we can rebuild our lives if we develop a strong enough plan. **It is not that** we can repair the ruins through determination, leadership, or religious effort. **The gospel is that Jesus entered our ruin, bore our judgment, and rose again to make us new.**

D. **Conclusion:**

E. **Nehemiah 1** ends without a single stone being moved (the walls are still **broken**. The gates are still **burned**. The people are still living in **disgrace**).

1. **But something has begun.** **God** has begun His work in the heart of Neh.

F. **That may be where some of us are today.** We can see the **ruins**, but we cannot yet see the **rebuilding**.

G. **This chapter teaches us how to begin:**

1. ***Allow the brokenness to burden you. Bring it honestly before God.** Remember who God is. **Confess your sin without making excuses.** Stand upon God's promises. **Ask for His help.** **Then** prepare to **obey** when He opens the door.

a) **Before God rebuilds what is broken around us, He often begins by rebuilding what is broken within us.**

H. **Pray:**

I. Keywords: brokenness, sin, rebuilding.

IX. Ezra/Neh (1 book in Hebrew Bible)

A. **World Powers:** (biblical time) **Egypt**/Exodus. **Assyria** (superpower N/Is.). **Babylon**. **Mede/Persian**. **Greeks**. **Rome**.

1. In a Divine twist of irony - **The Lord** raised up a nation (Persia), to overthrow the nation (Babylon), that **He** allowed to overthrow His nation.

B. Where does **Ezra** fit in World History? **Gautama** (GOW-tuh-muh) **Buddha** the Indian mystic/founder of Buddhism, was in **India**. **Confucius** was in **China**. And **Socrates** was in **Greece**.

C. Why Babylonian captivity 70 years? - see 2 Chron.36:21.

1. Jer.29:10 **Prophecy & Promised Restoration!** - *This is what the Lord says: "You will be in **Babylon** for 70 years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have **promised**, and I will bring you home again.*

D. **Ezra** covers the **1st 2 returns** to Israel. **Nehemiah** covers the **3rd return** to Israel.

1. **Return 1** - Zerub gov. leads. Purpose? Rebuild **Temple**.
Return 2 - Ezra is in, 80 yrs. later] Purpose? Rebuild the **People**.
Return 3 - Neh leads 14 yrs. later. Purpose? Rebuild the **Wall**.