

Prayer That Begins Revival By Mark Bubeck

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

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Scripture reading: Nehemiah, chapter 1.

Our major purpose this hour is to pray, but first I want to direct you to Nehemiah, chapter one, and we will focus on the things that begin revival.

God profoundly touched my life and taught me a tremendous lesson about prayer as a young man of eighteen years, fresh off the farm. I went to the big city of Chicago. My first practical Christian work assignment was to go on Sunday afternoon to the Cook County Hospital, which at that time was the largest hospital in the world.

I was supposed to do two things at that assignment. I was to come early enough to stand in the lobby and welcome people with Gospel tracts and literature and kind words. That part of the assignment I didn't like. In fact, when anyone rejected my offer, I would shrink. It wasn't long before I found myself hiding behind my favorite pillar every week. If anybody wanted what I had, they would have to find me. But I liked the second part of my assignment, which was to go up into the wards and personally deal with people who didn't have visitors. That was always fresh and wonderful.

One Sunday I was standing in my usual concealing way and I looked across the lobby and saw a black man. The thing that arrested me was there was a radiance on him, an unusual shine. It was very obvious to me, and apparently to others, because I noticed that when he handed out literature and would say a kind word--"God loves you, my friend...Here's something to help you...May this encourage you...This will tell you about Jesus, my best friend..." --I never saw a person reject his offer. In fact, I noticed that many of them stopped and just looked at him, and they would take the tract almost with reverence and put it in their pocket.

And I wondered, "What's different about him and me?" I never found the answer to that until the last day of the assignment. Our leader took us on a tour of the hospital. As one of the things that was part of the tour, he pushed open the door on a great corridor, to a little hole-in-the-wall room. It had a desk, a typewriter, a phone and a lamp, and in the corner was an overstuffed chair that had a white sheet over it.

Our leader said almost with reverence that it was Chaplain Lilly's throne chair. Our leader told us that he never sits idly in that chair; he kneels there, or when he sits in it, he prays, sometimes for one, two or three hours, before he goes up into the wards to visit the patients. Then I knew the difference. It profoundly moved me. It marked my life. I've never forgotten it.

One thing will always mark a person --whether man or women, of whatever race--who has power with men and power with God. That person's life will be marked by greatness in prayer. The two go together. You can't separate them.

When I talk about greatness of prayer, I'm talking first of all of what it does in the life of the one who prays. We sometimes have the motto that prayer changes things, but the more important thing is that prayer changes you.

Nehemiah Changed By Prayer

I think that's what prayer did to Nehemiah. He was a cupbearer to the king, obviously a man of great integrity, tremendous leadership skills, and overflowing personality, or he wouldn't have had that position. He probably had a tremendous sense of humor. I'm sure he had some fresh, funny stories to tell the king to keep him in good humor.

But when Nehemiah's brother and others returned from Jerusalem that day and told him what was going on there, God began to move on him. In the place of prayer, God took him apart and He put him back together again with great anointing upon him, so he was probably one of the greatest leaders the nation of Israel ever knew. His profound accomplishments ought to overwhelm us, because compared to what we are facing today, his problems were multiplied greatly.

The second thing prayer does is it changes things. Prayer causes God to do things He wouldn't do if people didn't pray in this way. What is Nehemiah's prayer like? I believe that through Nehemiah's praying, God has taught us how to pray for revival, for this was the beginning of revival in Jerusalem. There isn't time to cover the amazing wonder of how from this small beginning, the whole city was revived and rebuilt and restructured and new government came. It began here, with Nehemiah's praying.

Marks Of Nehemiah's Prayer That Began Revival

What are the marks of Nehemiah's kind of prayer that make such a tremendous difference?

First of all, his prayer focus centered on the greatness of the need. That's so important. Look at the opening verses of Nehemiah, chapter one:

"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chileu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."

I think those words shocked Nehemiah. He expected a completely different report. He knew that the rebuilding of the temple had pretty much been accomplished, and there had been somewhat of a revival under Ezra. He was looking forward to hearing a good report, and the report he heard was completely opposite. He heard about broken rubble for walls and burned up gates and people who were suffering, hurting and under great oppression. The need began to settle down upon him.

That is what has to happen before we do anything about the conditions we're in today. We need to be able to look at the brokenness of our culture. We need to be able to understand the troubling of our churches and our Christian people, and how they are searching and looking for answers, but somehow they are not ready to come like Nehemiah did. There has to be a focus on the greatness of the need. I personally believe it is good to write it down as God gives you insight into the need. Otherwise you won't pray about it.

The second thing he focused on was the greatness of God. Maybe we should have put that first, but somehow I don't think it came first. I think that as the need settled upon Nehemiah, then he began to look for the answer for it. You will notice he gives it to us very clearly. Look at verse five:

"...and [he] said, I beseech Thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible, awesome God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments..." He saw God as Isaiah saw Him, as the great and awesome One, as the high and lofty One who inhabits Eternity, whose Name is Holy, who dwells in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite one (Isaiah 57:15). Nehemiah focused on the greatness of God. I believe that prayers in which we are asking God to bring revival must focus here.

I'm so thankful for how the Lord has worked in my life and in my prayer life. I had a covenant with the Lord when I pastored that I would go three or four mornings a week to the church early in the morning, and I would always mark out an hour and just walk and pray audibly in that place. I remember in those early days it was a tremendous struggle for me to stay in prayer for a whole hour without being redundant and running out of something to pray about.

Then God taught me doctrinal praying, where you begin to focus upon who God is. There are tremendous books that help us appreciate who the Lord is, and that begins to lift our sights from the need, as important as that is, and to focus our sights on the Lord as the answer, as the only answer. We begin to get the joy of worship as we pray through our union with Christ and the wonder of what He's done, and the power of His cross. All that has to come into focus in this kind of praying--the greatness of God.

Greatness of Burden

Thirdly, in this kind of praying there has to be a focus centered on the greatness of burden. Notice again what happened to Nehemiah after he learned about the broken walls and the burned up gates and the affliction of the people. We read in verse 4: "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven..."

I believe God was sharing with Nehemiah His tears. Nehemiah wept as His brothers told him about the deplorable condition of this great city that had once been the jewel of the world, the most powerful government in the world and the most powerful and wealthy kingdom in the world. Now it was in a shambles, and the people who had once been perhaps the most honored and feared people in the earth because of their military and economic power, now were in disgrace. People laughed at them and mocked them, and they were weak. The tragedy of that broke Nehemiah and he began to cry. It didn't last just a little bit. It was for days and weeks. In fact, if I understand it, it went on about four months.

Much of the time he was fasting and groaning, because God was groaning over the broken walls and the wounded, hurting people, and nobody seemed to care, until God touched a man, Nehemiah, and he was where he ought to be, and he started to cry. He was broken. I am thrilled to hear some of you praying with me since you've been here, that God will give you tears, and that He will make us hunger for God more than we hunger for food, and even sleep. You'll notice in verse six it went on "day and night."

This wasn't Nehemiah's burden; it was God's burden. If we ever get in touch with God in what's happening in our culture, in our churches in our days, we're going to cry. We're going to groan. We're going to want Him more than we want food.

Nehemiah's praying is also focused in great repentance. Look at verse six: "Let Thine ear now be attentive, and Thine eyes open, that Thou mayest hear the prayer of Thy servant, which I pray before Thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel Thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against Thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandest Thy servant Moses."

Who is going to repent? It's the repenters who have to begin it. Oh, dear friends, here in America and around the world, we have blood on our hands. We have people under the curse of shedding the blood of little innocent, unborn children by the millions! Who's going to repent over that if we don't, and over the violence, the drug addiction, the apathy, the indifference, the business as usual in our churches, seeking other answers rather than seeking God.

In repentance, we must cry out to God for Him to change us. You'll notice Nehemiah didn't confess only his own sins. That was tremendously important, but he confessed the sins of his nation. And he didn't include only what was going on at that time. I think he started way back at the time of the Babylonian captivity, and he began to repent for the terrible wickedness of their worship of Baal and their sacrifice of their children to the idols. There was grief in the repentance.

Focus on God's Promises

The fifth thing is this prayer was focused on God's promises. I love this. Friends, you'll never be the same once you begin to pray promises of God back to Him. I set out to memorize one out of every ten Psalms, and now the Lord is taking me through the second time. The greatest thing that ever happened in my life spiritually was when God taught me to memorize the Psalms and passages like John, chapter 17, and Romans, chapter eight, and then get alone with God and pray His word back to Him. We really don't have anything else to pray. It's what God has said that matters. You'll notice that's how Nehemiah prayed.

In verse eight we read: "Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: but if ye turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do them [obedience]; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there. Now, there are Thy servants and Thy people Whom Thou has redeemed by Thy great power..."

Oh, dear friend, when God hears you begin to pray that great truth about the people He bought with the blood of His own Son, and you begin to talk with God about what the word says He wants those people to be, Heaven is shaken. God is interested. God will move. But it's His word, not your emotions. It's His burden and it's His promises.

The final thing is, this prayer was focused on great expectancy. The final verse of chapter one says a little about that. It says: "O Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant, and to the prayer of Thy servants..." [by this time, more people had joined him]... "who desire to fear Thy name: and prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's

cupbearer."

If we didn't read it in God's word, we would almost think it was made up what this man who was the cupbearer to the king had the audacity to expect God to do. He expected that God would so touch the heart of a heathen king that he would put Nehemiah in charge of a great company of people who would go back to Jerusalem, and God would give him the strength to inspire the people and challenge the people and lead them to rebuild all those walls, to rehang those gates and to re-establish a viable, God-honoring government among His people. The beautiful thing is, God did it!

The burden was from God; the promises were of God; and the yielded servant of God was available. When you have that, revival's coming! I believe it's coming! God's going to do it, not because of our worthiness but His. I believe when it comes it's going to be the greatest movement of God the world has ever known. I believe that God's going to give us what He's put in our heart to believe Him for and to pray for.

Putting the Pattern into Practice

I want you to join me in prayer. Find three or no more than four with whom you can pray. I want you to pray over the things that Nehemiah did. One in your group pray over these things as I mention them, and then we'll move on to the next thing. We'll pray through Nehemiah's focus of prayer, and we'll believe God to initiate what He's wanting to do through His people gathered here.

Someone in the group lead now, focusing on the greatness of the need. Share with God the broken walls, the burned up gates, the people in disgrace that you see in our condition today, and have a time of quiet intercession....

Now someone in the group lead in prayer where we worship the majesty and greatness of God. Let this be a "Hallelujah!" time. Focus on His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence; focus on His holiness, His justice, His truth, His mercy, His love....

Now would someone in the group lead in intercession for God to share the greatness of His burden with our hearts, that God would draw near to us, where we can weep His tears, where we can groan, where we want Him more than we want food and other things in life that take precedence over the great need of the day....

Next someone in the group now begin to express repentance before God for the sins of our nation and our brethren, sins of our churches, our families. Express repentance over the divorce scandal, the wounded children....

Concerning the promises of God, I quote a prayer from the Psalms: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy unfailing love, according to Thy great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are proved right when You speak and justified when You judge. Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones You have crushed rejoice" (Psalm 51:1-8).

"Oh, Father in Heaven, thank you for breaking David. Thank you for bringing him to the place where you brought Nehemiah. Thank you for the wounding that You enabled him to put into words to help us, in your precious word.

Expectancy for Revival!

"Lord, we want to be a people who are expectant. We want to see the mighty, mighty hand of God, encouraging Your people. Lord, sometimes when we pray, we see things get worse, and that happened to Nehemiah. He saw things as he got to Jerusalem get worse before they got better. But You were always there in the crisis. You taught him to know that You win!

"And so he just aligned himself with his God and went on doing the work. We thank You that You build expectancy into our hearts. Indeed we can see even in this late hour, mighty revival awakening blow like wind through Your people, and come like fire upon them, to bring about that great movement of grace, that final moment as You bring the last ones into the fold and humble the nations and the arrogant unbelief and the noisy

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clamor of resistance, humble it by the mighty movement of God!"

IÂ'm sure it is obvious to all of us that we cannot rush through this kind of prayer, but I believe that Nehemiah under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has shared with us the beginning place of revival as far as intercession is concerned, so I commend this to you and trust that you will follow it.