

**Articles and Sermons :: Burdened And Blessed For The Lord's Work -carmicheal****Burdened And Blessed For The Lord's Work -carmicheal - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2008/3/17 22:26****Burdened And Blessed For The Lord's Work***by Rich Carmicheal*

Scripture Reading: The Book of Nehemiah

In light of the many problems that face nations, communities, churches, families and individuals, we can well identify with the trouble in Nehemiah's day: "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned..." (Neh. 1:3). Just as in that day, the Lord desires in our day to work through His people to repair what is broken and help bring salvation and revival to people's lives.

If you are to be used by the Lord in this crucial hour, the beginning point may very well be the same as Nehemiah's beginning point. Notice his distress when he, while in service as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, received the news about the terrible conditions in Jerusalem: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (1:4). As the truth of the miserable conditions in Jerusalem settled deep within Nehemiah's heart, he realized more than ever how desperate the situation was and how great the need for the Lord's intervention.

Just a few miles from the Herald office is located a ministry that helps people find freedom in Christ from various addictions and other problems. A main factor for accepting someone into their program is whether or not the person is desperate for change in his/her life. If there is no sense of desperation, then the person is probably not ready to surrender to the Lord and to submit to the changes necessary to turn from a life of sin to a life of righteousness and fullness in the Lord. But if there is a sense of desperation, then the person is much more likely to be ready to turn from the old self and old ways to the Lord and His ways. People who are desperate are ready to seek the Lord wholeheartedly because they are deeply aware of how great their need is and how much they need Him and His grace and help.

Nehemiah was desperate. He felt the weight of the "great trouble and disgrace" of God's people. He mourned, fasted and prayed. The problems in Jerusalem became his problems, and the burden upon his heart was so great that even the king noticed and asked: "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart" (2:2).

Do you have a burden on your heart for the broken conditions in other people's lives? Are you broken over the unsaved, the prodigals, the needy, the sick, the hungry and those who are suffering? Are you broken over the devastation that sin is bringing into lives of individuals, families, churches, communities and nations? Are you broken to the point of mourning, fasting and praying for the help of God? Are you desperate for the intervention of God in the lives of those around you, as well as in the lives of those in other places? If you are not carrying such a burden, ask the Lord to soften your heart and let you begin to experience more of the concern and compassion He has for others. Just as with Nehemiah, the Lord will work through your concern and compassion to bring hope and healing to others.

**Confidence in the Person and Character of God**

Nehemiah's burden caused him to turn to the Lord, and in the Person and character of the Lord, Nehemiah found the hope, faith and courage to take action and lead God's people to rebuild the wall and repair the gates of Jerusalem. The beginning of his first prayer clearly reveals how he focused on the Lord: "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and keep His commands..." (Neh. 1:5). Though Nehemiah was greatly distressed and concerned about God's people and the conditions in Jerusalem, he fixed his attention upon the "God of heaven, the great and awesome God." He knew that the problem was not with God, but with His people, and if they returned to God and obeyed Him, He would be faithful to bless and help them.

Our understanding of God and our confidence in Him determine how much impact we will make in the midst of the brokenness around us. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king, and yet, because of his high view of God and confidence in

Him, he stepped out in great faith and determination. Though there were physical dangers, limited resources, and ongoing resistance to the work – all of which made the task of repairing the wall and gates seem impossible – Nehemiah believed that because of his God, it could be done. And so he prayed and moved forward in the Lord's will with the assurance that the gracious hand of God was upon him (Neh. 2:18).

Are you facing any God-sized challenges? If so, you may find much encouragement in Nehemiah's confidence that God is "the great and awesome God." You may also find encouragement in these other wonderful reminders of the Person and character of God:

"The God of heaven will give us success" (2:20).

"Our God will fight for us!" (4:20).

"the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10).

"You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship You" (9:6).

"But You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love..." (9:17).

"Because of Your great compassion You did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them..." (9:19-20).

"From heaven You heard them, and in Your great compassion You gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies" (9:27).

"But in Your great mercy You did not put an end to them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and merciful God" (9:31).

"In all that has happened to us, You have been just; You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (9:33).

"Our God...turned the curse into a blessing" (13:2).

#### Confidence in the Promises of God

Nehemiah's hope, courage and faith were also based on the promises of God. Again, this truth is embedded in Nehemiah's first prayer: "Remember the instructions 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...'" (Neh. 1:8-9). Nehemiah knew that God is faithful to all of His promises, and so he was confident that God would be faithful to help and bless His people if they would return to Him. Nehemiah also knew that a key issue in returning to the Lord is turning away from sin, and so he prayed, "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, 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" (Neh. 1:6-7). Throughout the Book of Nehemiah, the issue of sin is treated with utmost seriousness, and God's people are called to wholehearted repentance. As we deal with the brokenness around us, we dare not water down sin. As the prophet Isaiah points out, sin is the heart of the problem: "...your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you..." (Isa. 59:2).

With God's Person, character and promises as his foundation, together with a call to repentance, Nehemiah moved forward and rallied God's people to repair the wall. The accomplishment was so amazing, he reported that "our enemies... lost their self-confidence because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God" (Neh. 6:16). Through Nehemiah, the Lord had indeed led the people out of "great trouble and disgrace" (Neh. 1:3) and into great rejoicing: "On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away" (Neh. 12:43).

In the midst of the great trouble and disgrace of our day, what might the Lord have you do to impact the lives of others? Any significant work He may have for you will require faith, hope, courage, sacrifice and perseverance. Though the co

As to you will be great, the blessings others receive will be far greater. As you give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, you can be confident "that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Perhaps the Lord has already laid on your heart a burden for certain people, or a particular situation, or even for a nation. Please do not underestimate what the Lord can do through you as you entrust yourself to Him and His work in keeping with His Person, character and promises. Your prayers, your generosity, your hard work, your faith and your encouragement will make a difference in the lives of others. By the power and gracious hand of God, what is now broken and in disgrace, can be repaired and filled with joy. After all, our God is indeed "the great and awesome God!" (Neh. 1:5).