

Sermon Outline

“A Broken Heart Over Broken Walls”

Nehemiah 1 – Joshua Harris – January 30, 2011

Background

1. Nehemiah was a Jewish man who lived in the Persian city of Susa. He was cupbearer to the king and author of this book of the Bible.
2. In the history of God’s people, the events recorded in Nehemiah happened...
 - a. 1,000 years after Moses led God’s people out of slavery in Egypt (1446 B.C.).
 - b. 590 years after David defeated Goliath (1035 B.C.). During this time, Jerusalem became the Holy City. It was the special place God chose to dwell among his people. Later David’s son Solomon built the Temple. To rightly worship God, you had to go to Jerusalem and worship at the Temple.
 - c. 160 years after Daniel was exiled to Babylon (605 B.C.). After David and Solomon, the people’s sin and the wickedness of many of the kings brought God’s judgment. The kingdom was divided. The northern 10 tribes of Israel were exiled, and eventually the same happened to the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. In 605 B.C., Judah was attacked by the Babylonians, and many were exiled to Babylon. But Jerusalem was not destroyed.
 - d. 141 years after Jeremiah prophesied (586 B.C.) the destruction of Jerusalem because God’s people would not forsake their wickedness. God used the Babylonians to level the city of Jerusalem, burn and topple the walls and destroy the Temple.
 - e. 33 years after Esther was made Queen of Persia (478 B.C.). It is possible that Nehemiah’s life was one of those saved because of Queen Esther’s courage.
 - f. 13 years after Ezra led a second group of exiles (458 B.C.) back to Judah. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah basically function like one book—they’re two key parts of the same story. Ezra tells how the temple was rebuilt. Nehemiah shares how the city wall was rebuilt.
3. Theme of Nehemiah: Nehemiah teaches us how God works in and through his people. Our series is entitled “When God Revives His People” because Nehemiah is the story of God *reviving* and *reforming* his people so that they have the courage, conviction and clarity to step forward to both pray and act as the people of God for the glory God.

Sermon Outline

Nehemiah's Response to News of Broken Walls (verse 4)

1. Nehemiah's response to the broken walls of Jerusalem was a broken heart. He loved the people of God and the glory of God. He was in anguish because God's special people were unprotected, shamed and humiliated. He wept because the glory of God was obscured. Verse 4 tells us that he sat down and mourned for days.
2. Those walls had been in ruins for 141 years. And likely this wasn't the first time that Nehemiah heard that there had been no real progress in rebuilding the walls. So what explains Nehemiah's response to the news about the walls of Jerusalem? The only real explanation is that God was at work in Nehemiah's soul. He felt God's heart toward the shame and weakness of God's people, and he wept.
3. What does that mean for us today? The city of Jerusalem points ahead to the church of Jesus Christ. Like, Nehemiah, we should care deeply about its condition. If we love the glory of God, than we will be people who care about the well being of God's people.
 - a. There are things broken in the church today—dissension, a lack of love, bitterness, a lack of forgiveness, hypocrisy, moral failings among church leaders, rampant pornography, divorce rates as high as the world, and out-of-control materialism. In so many ways, the church thinks like and acts like the lost world.
 - b. Where God's Word is ignored in the church, then holiness, justice, generosity, love of enemies and the fulfillment of the great commission are lacking. A paucity of these things constitutes "burned gates" and "gaping holes" in the walls of the church.
4. When God's Spirit begins to move among his people, they see the broken walls and *begin to care*. They turn from indifference, and their hearts are broken over what doesn't glorify Jesus in his church. They take ownership of their own compromise. They cry out to God and ask him to intervene.

Redemption Remembered (verse 10)

1. In verse 10, Nehemiah describes the people of God like this: "They are your servants and your people, whom you have *redeemed* by your great power and by your strong hand."
2. When Nehemiah used the word "redeemed," he was referencing God's buying the people back from slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon. But when we read that word "redemption," we understand the ultimate meaning is fulfilled in Jesus. We are God's people who he has redeemed and bought back from slavery to sin by the blood of his son, Jesus Christ! The reality of our identity should do two things:
 - a. First, it should make us hate to see sin and compromise in the church.

Sermon Outline

- b. Second, it should fill us with an incredible confidence that if we turn to God and cry out for his help, he will help, revive and reform his people.

Fellowship Starters

1. Why was Nehemiah's soul in anguish when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down? Have you ever responded similarly to the condition of your own soul or to the condition of the church?
2. Josh shared that when God's Spirit begins to move among his people, they see the broken walls of sin and compromise in the church and begin to care. Has your heart ever been broken over the state of today's church? When was the last time you prayed for revival and reformation?
3. Are there areas of your life that you struggle to surrender to Jesus, i.e. work, leisure, entertainment, music, the internet, relationships, marriage, etc.)? What blessings has God promised when we surrender all to Jesus?
4. Why can we have confidence that if we turn to God and cry out for his help, he will help, revive and reform our lives and his church?
5. Take time, as a care group, to pray. Ask for God's forgiveness for areas of sin and compromise in our church. Ask the Lord to revive and reform our lives, individually and corporately.