

Empire Church of the Brethren
Sunday Service Sermons

21 July 2024

Intercessory Prayer

Text: "Let your ear now be attentive, and your eyes open, that you might hear the prayer of your servant."

Neh. 1:6

Wise is the person who in undertaking any work for God seeks to determine the need as it really exists.

It is easy to become involved in that which is peripheral rather than that which is paramount and therefore primary.

Distracting and redirecting is one of Satan's tools for rendering believers impotent.

In *Nehemiah 1* we have a clear example of a man of God who sought to understand the need of God's people in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's method was to interrogate certain men who had been at Jerusalem and had seen for themselves the need as it existed.

Nehemiah's investigation led to intercession and to personal involvement in the work of God.

Our text is the first of many texts recording the prayer of Nehemiah.

In his book we find prayer offered before the work is undertaken, while the work is in progress, and after the work has been completed.

Here is prayer in the quietness of his own room as well as amid the noise of the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

Here is prayer offered both personally and individually.

Nehemiah's prayers were not all of the same nature.

The prayer recorded in our text was intercessory in nature.

By this we mean that it involved specific requests on behalf of God's people and Nehemiah himself.

It is important for us to see the circumstances, characteristics, content, and consequences of Nehemiah's prayer.

It's circumstances.

Here is the prayer of a man who had not lost his love for the land and the faith of his fathers.

Nehemiah's ancestors had been carried into captivity by the Babylonians.

Seventy years had elapsed until the decree of Cyrus had permitted the Jews to return to their homeland.

Initially only fifty thousand had responded, the majority choosing to remain in exile to enjoy their prosperity.

For some reason unknown to us, Nehemiah had remained in the service of the Medo-Persian king.

This prayer is also the prayer of a man who had been placed in the service of King Artaxerxes.

It was not by chance that he was in this position but by providence.

This position would become highly significant in the course of time.

As we further analyze the prayer, we note that this is a prayer of a man living in fellowship with the God of his fathers.

This man's prayer was filled with concern and compassion for others by the acquisition of fresh information about the plight of Jerusalem and its citizens.

The flame of his intercession burned brighter amid the darkness of his times as the fuel of information was placed on the altar of his heart.

Its characteristics.

Nehemiah's response to the news brought by his friends concerning Jerusalem gives us the first characteristic of his prayer: humiliation and brokenness.

He responded "Before the God of heaven."

And this response was marked not by gladness but by grief, not by singing but by sorrow.

Closely allied to this aspect of humiliation and brokenness is Nehemiah's confession of sin.

He recognized that the exile was caused by the sin of God's people.

He confessed his own sin and his father's sins.

As we read Nehemiah's prayer we are impressed by his spirit of faith.

Nehemiah prays confidence without wavering.

He comes boldly to the throne of grace that he might obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

Finally, we note that Nehemiah's prayer is characterized by a reverence for God and a prayer expression of his own relationship to God.

Listen to him pray: "I beseech you, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keeps covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments."

Let's examine our own prayers.

Do we come before God in humiliation and brokenness?

Do we come confessing our sins and rebellion?

Do we come in faith?

Do we seek God's face, remembering that he is the Lord God of heaven and that we are his servants?

Its content.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Nehemiah's prayer is its content.

The content may be summarized by three words found in *Nehemiah 1: 6, 8, and 11*.

They are: hear, remember, and prosper.

"Hear the prayer of your servant."

Nehemiah understood that God was not deaf; he did recognize, however, that God will not answer the prayers of his people when they are not rightly related to him in love and obedience.

Nehemiah drew attention to several aspects of his prayer to God.

His prayer was continual, day and night.

His prayer was definite and specific: for the children of Israel your servants.

His prayer was contrite and repentant: I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against you, both I and my father's house have sinned.

Remember . . . The word that you commanded your servant Moses.

Nehemiah probes the mind of God to remember his word, to keep his word to his people.

God had promised to punish, but he had also promised to prosper.

Nehemiah pleads for that prosperity.

Notice three important aspects of the ministry of intercession: the man of God believes the Word of God in order that the work of God might be accomplished.

The third request is found in *verse 11*.

"O Lord, I beseech you, let now your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants, who desire to fear your name and prosper, I pray you, your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Hear, remember, prosper.

Hear for God is a living God.

Remember for God has spoken.

Prosper for God is a God of action.

Its consequences.

Did God hear?

Did God remember?

Did God prosper?

The remainder of the book of Nehemiah answers these questions in the affirmative.

The secret of Nehemiah's success, then, lay not in his resources as one commissioned by Artaxerxes nor in his ability and acumen as a man and as a leader.

Rather, it lay in his power with God.

The secret of strong leadership is in the ability of the leader to be in touch with the great power of God.

Nehemiah knew this power by personal experience.

You can know this power by engaging in the great work of intercession.

God calls you to be about engaging in the lives of others in a positive way to help them become close to God.

Prayer not only makes a difference for the other person but it also makes a difference in the one who is doing the praying.

Both receive the blessing of being God's person.

It doesn't get any better than this!