

Nehemiah's Prayer

by C.I. Scofield

Nehemiah's prayer is a powerful example of intercessory prayer, where he prays for the restoration of Jerusalem and the honor of God, and reminds us of the importance of confession of sin and failure.

Scripture: Hebrews 5:1

Topics: "Intercessory Prayer", "Repentance"

Description

C.I. Scofield preaches on the powerful prayer of Nehemiah, highlighting the importance of intercessory prayer, putting God's honor first, confessing failures and needs, acknowledging God's chastisement, and clinging to God's promises in times of failure and sin.

Transcript

(Neh. i:1-11.)

I. The Analysis.

1. The evil estate of God's heritage (verses 1-3). 2. The prayer of a man who cared (verses 4-11).

II. The Heart of the Lesson.

Two men, during the 70 years' captivity, were unceasing remembrances of the Lord in behalf of Israel--Nehemiah and Daniel (Dan. ix:1-19). Their recorded prayers are strikingly alike, and each of them is a preciously complete lesson on prayer. Aside from the touching application to the Jewish people, I cannot but think the permanent value of this lesson lies just there--it is a lesson in the divine art of prayer. Let us so consider it.

1. The first fact about this great prayer which arrests attention is that it was intercessory. Most of the prayers preserved for us in Scripture are intercessory. Doubtless the believer is to pray concerning his own life and its needs. Doubtless, though, the divine intent is that such prayers should by no means constitute the bulk of our praying. The New Testament believer is a priest (1 Pet. ii:5-9; Rev. i:5, 6), and "every priest" is "ordained for men in things pertaining to God." He must "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way" (Heb. v:1, 2). And the will of God is that His New Testament believer-priests shall offer "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks," "for all men."

What an interceding believer-priest Paul was! His Epistles are fragrant with the breath of unselfish prayer, often with tears, and often "for as many as had not seen his face in the flesh."

2. Then, secondly, Nehemiah was moved to tears and fasting and prayers for Israel because they were "the children of Israel, Thy servants." It was something that touched the heart and the honor of God that the walls of Jerusalem should be broken down and the gates thereof burned with fire. Jerusalem was "the city of the great King," the "place which the Lord God had chosen." It was His people who had transgressed.

Every wholly right prayer puts God's honor first. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done."

3. Thirdly, it was a prayer which confessed the whole failure and need. There was no silly optimism in Nehemiah's prayer. "Both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee."

Just at that time Nehemiah was in a place of great intimacy and trust at court. All persecution of the Jews had ceased. They had grown rich and influential. A shallow optimism would have pointed--as perhaps many did point-- to the prosperity in a temporal sense of the Jews as reason for gratulation and self-complacency. That is the prevailing note in our day. But the spiritually minded, like Nehemiah, knew that Israel had shamefully failed in her distinctive mission in the world, which was to be a witness to the unity of God in the midst of universal idolatry (Deut. vi:4, with Isa. xliii:10-12), and to illustrate to the nations the blessedness of serving the true God (Deut. xxxiii:26-29; 1 Chr. xvii:20, 21; Psa. cxliv:15). In like manner the Church, to which was committed one, and but one, mission--to evangelize the world (Matt, xxviii:18-20; Acts i:8)--has never in any generation told the story to one-third of the human family, and has turned aside to the production of the mere by-products of Christianity--schools, hospitals, and orphanages. The Church will see a red revival when Daniels and Nehemiahs are moved to weep and confess her sin and failure.

4. Fourth, Nehemiah acknowledged the condition of Israel and Jerusalem to be due to the chastening hand of the Lord, according to His solemn warning in the Deuteronomic covenant (Deut. xxx:1-10). It was no "misfortune" which had "happened" to Israel. The holy nation was captive in a strange land because God was chastising it.

Just such a word is given to the believer. "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi:31, 32).

5. And, lastly, the very failure and sin of Israel but drove Nehemiah to the promises. The Deuteronomic covenant had more than warnings of disaster and of the chastening hand of God, and the suppliant cup-bearer fell back upon the promises of that covenant with unquestioning faith.

May we of the Church age, sons of the Father, remember as we see and mourn the failure of the Church His gracious promise: "If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

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