

Drawing Near to the Body

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity in the Body and the role of the Spirit in drawing us together and enabling us to function in harmony.

Scripture: Mark 10:42

Topics: "Body Of Christ", "Christian Unity"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of unity in the Body of Christ, emphasizing that true unity is maintained by each heart's commitment to the Lord, resulting in an open and free atmosphere for ministry. Using Nehemiah as an example, he illustrates how being drawn to the needs of the Body leads to repentance, prayer, and a willingness to serve. The sermon highlights the responsibility each believer has in upbuilding the Body through grace, prayer, and a simple commitment to serve one another, following the example of Jesus.

Transcript

The Spirit of God moves with power among believers when they are in unity with each other, unity that is maintained, not with rules and disciplines imposed from outside, but by a commitment of each heart to the Lord himself.

Unity in the Body is simply unity around Jesus. Where this unity exists, the atmosphere of the Body is always open, never closed and ingrown. There is a freedom and an ease which enables each member to minister with joy.

This does not mean that the church becomes a "free-for-all." If the connection between the members becomes too loose, you have the picture of a human body walking down the street, when suddenly the right eyeball, attracted to a beautiful Christmas tree, flies out of its socket and goes bouncing across the snow to have a closer look. The left hand notices some dollar bills blowing in the wind, breaks loose from its arm and starts crawling toward the money, until it gets run over by a truck. And so with the feet, the ears the mouth, until the members, separated from each other, die.

When our fellowships truly function as the Body of Christ, the process is reversed. The same Spirit who guides us to function as an open church also draws us together and enables us to function in harmony. The eye,

the hand,
the mouth,
the foot,
are linked together in the mind of Christ.

Consider Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a Jew in exile. He had grown up in Susa the capital of the Persian Empire and had risen to a place of power. Nehemiah was chief security man for the king of Persia. He made sure no one poisoned the king's wine. And Nehemiah never forgot that he was a Jew. He loved God ... he loved his homeland which he had never seen. He prayed every day facing west, toward Jerusalem which was now a devastated city. He figured that that was about all he could do.

Then one day Nehemiah was awakened with a concern for Jerusalem that he didn't know was in him.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

"Now it happened in the month of Chisleu,
in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa
the capital, that Hanani, one of my brethren,
came with certain men out of Judah; and I
asked them concerning the Jews that survived,
who had escaped exile, and concerning Jerusalem.
And they said to me, "The survivors here in the
province who escaped exile are in great trouble
and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down,
and its gates are destroyed by fire."

Nehemiah 1:1-3

Now you might expect that Nehemiah would feel bad about this, shed a few tears perhaps, and then say,

"Well, there's really nothing I can do",

and go on with his job of being the chief security man.

But this news about Jerusalem's broken walls stirred something in Nehemiah which turned him into a new man.

(We're talking about the gathering of the Body. We're talking about the Spirit drawing as we see Nehemiah being drawn....)

When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let thy ear be attentive, and thy eyes open, to hear the prayer of thy servant which I now pray before thee day and night for the people of Israel thy servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. Yea, I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances which thou didst command thy servant Moses. Remember the word which thou didst command thy servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your dispersed be under the farthest skies,

I will gather them thence and bring them to the place which I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' They are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and by thy strong hand. O Lord, let thy ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who delight to fear thy name."

Nehemiah 1:4-11a

Nehemiah was hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. He had never seen Jerusalem, but he knew he was part of it and responsible for it ... he begins to feel drawn to it.

Notice that Nehemiah does not pray,

"They have sinned and that's why they're in this shape."

He says,

"I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against thee and have not kept thy commandments."

If we are part of the Body like Nehemiah was part of Jerusalem ... when we see problems we see the problems as our problems, we see ourselves as part of this thing.

- our weeping,

- our prayers, are never for their sin,

their blindness,

their hypocrisy,

but our sin. We begin to repent and to pray for help.

God bring us to the point where we recognize

what it means to be part of the Body, so that

we fast and pray for it,

weep for it,
repent for it,
love it.

But Nehemiah did more. After he drew near to the Lord God, it became obvious to him that he was going to have to leave his niche as chief security officer and go to that messy place he'd been praying for.

"...and give success to thy servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Now I was cupbearer to the king. In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid.

I said to the king, "Let the king live for ever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "For what do you make request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' sepulchers, that I may rebuild it."

Nehemiah 1:11b-2:5

....hundreds and hundreds of miles away Nehemiah knew that he was part of the body of Israel. Its wounds were his wounds, and now he had to go there and rebuild.

We are like Nehemiah in Susa. Somehow there is a distance between us and Jerusalem.

- A distance of heart.

- A distance of spirit.

"Yes, I know there are problems in the Body, but what can I do?"

Now God begins to open our eyes as he opened Nehemiah's eyes. There comes a new kind of prayer, a new urgency, a new repentance. Those walls of Jerusalem are in ruins because of sin ... our sin... my sin. Now we begin to draw near to the body with our hearts and make ourselves responsible. And as we draw near Jerusalem with our hearts we begin to realize that the time has come to leave Susa and go to Jerusalem and rebuild those fallen walls to begin serving our fellow servants with all their hang ups and problems in a way we've never done before.

So how do we leave Susa, the capital of this world, and go to Jerusalem, the City of God? What does it mean for us to draw near to the Body of Christ and rebuild? Jesus builds his church, but he does it through us.

But grace was given to each of us, according to the measure of Christ's gift And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes for bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Ephesians 4:7-16

- Each of us is given grace.

- Each of us is given a measure of Christ's gift to bring to the Body for its upbuilding.

1. For the upbuilding of the Body, the Lord is calling us to draw near with our hearts.

"But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Now we bring that grace near. We offer it up to the Lord for the edification of the Body.

- We begin to care with our hearts.

- We begin to take hold of the burden with our hearts.

"If this is the place you've put me to serve, Lord, then I will put my heart into the needs of the saints those broken walls of Jerusalem ... I will come in your name to help, to encourage,

to strengthen."

It's a thing of attitude.

And now my vision of the Body of Christ increases when

I see that God has included me in his plan for the Body.

He has tied its upholding to saints like us.

2. For the upbuilding of the Body, the Lord is calling

us to draw near with our prayers.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They

shall prosper that love thee."

"...making supplication for all the saints."

What an awesome privilege God has given us ... that he

pours life into the Body as we pray!

If the church is going to have more of the Holy Spirit,

this will happen as people begin praying for it.

"How much more shall the heavenly Father

give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him...."

- individually,

- corporately.

If it needs more laborers, this too is tied to our prayers.

"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out

laborers into his harvest."

We need more joy,

more praise,

more mercy,

more compassion... so we pray for it!

3. For the upbuilding of the Body, the Lord is calling

us to draw near with simple commitment to serve our

fellow servants.

Nehemiah didn't head for Jerusalem to start a new career; his career was in Suza. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to serve the servants of God who were there.

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

John 13:12-15

The Spirit builds up the Body through us as we commit ourselves to serving the servants,

serving each other.

Our gospel for the world can only have a clear ring

when we're serving each other,

"By this all men will know that you are my
disciples, if you have love for one another."

So into the Open Church comes the call of Nehemiah...

the call of a man who drew near Jerusalem with his

heart loved it,

wept for it,

repented for it,

prayed for it,

served it ... and made himself responsible

before God to rebuild those broken walls.

God help us to follow in his steps.

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