

IT HAPPENS AFTER PRAYER
The Kind of Prayer God Answers
Nehemiah 1:4-11
October 22, 2017

Have you ever wondered if prayer really worked? Have you ever questioned the validity of prayer? The truth of the matter is this: all of us have, at one point or another, wondered if prayer works. Well friends, I believe that the story of God's redemptive and miraculous work amongst His people, that is documented in the book of Nehemiah, is evidence that God hears and answers prayer.

Nehemiah is a hired servant to the king of Persia (v.11), he was a cup-bearer. Most would say that he was well off considering the climate of that day for the people of God. Because of Israel's wandering away from God's commands and requirements, God had allowed the Persians to enslave His people. And true to God's character and nature, there is a remnant of people that survived the invasion and capture and had moved back to the city of Jerusalem; worship was restored, the Word of God was taught but, the wall around the city was burned down and the gates were burned destroyed. Now, this may not mean anything to us today, but for Nehemiah and the people of his time, this was serious. The wall around the city was essential; the guards would situate themselves on the wall around the city to watch out for enemies that would try to invade the city. Without the wall, these people were open to foreign invasion. God's holy city was open game for any invader who wanted to take the city. Word of this reaches all the way to Persia and to the ears of this guy named Nehemiah. And Nehemiah was setting good. He worked for the royal court. He worked directly for the king. He was comfortable.

Before we consider the great feat that these people accomplished, the rebuilding of the Temple, or even the awesome work of rebuilding the wall around the city; notice, the heart towards God that started the rebuilding project. Nehemiah was serving the king of Persia as a cupbearer. Let me make this abundantly clear – he was not experiencing slavery like the rest of his Jewish kinsmen; He lived in the palace, he ate the king's food, he wore nice clothing, etc. In other words, he really had no reason to be overly concerned with the plight of the people that had returned to the city of Jerusalem. In fact, he had every reason to be quiet, keep his job, continue to enjoy his comforts, and ignore the problems of others. But, that was not his disposition, attitude, or conviction. It appears to me that Nehemiah had a heart for God, and it was evidenced by his heart for people.

Nehemiah was a Jewish man. He was familiar with the writings of Moses, the Law, the Torah. A piece of his DNA included the love for God; it is expected that Jews recite the "Shema" every day – *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."* On the tablet of Nehemiah's hearts there seems to be these powerful words – etched on the pages of his soul, and ingrained in his spirit, he has this abiding love for God. Friends, the love of God, when it is real and it is genuine, it is wonderful. There's no love in this world like the love that we share with our creator. But, please don't stop with just the love for God. No, let our love for God be the launching pad for everything else that we do in the world.

Please note Nehemiah's response to the news that his people, the Jews that had returned to Jerusalem, the exiles – were in great trouble and shame because of the broken wall and the destroyed gates that were meant to protect the city from foreign invasion. Nehemiah's love for God is evidenced in verse 4 – by his love for people. Look at verse 4 - ***"When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven."***

Nehemiah's sincere commitment to God is evidenced by his passion for people? Nehemiah fasted and prayed before the God of heaven, on behalf of the people! Someway, somehow, Nehemiah was convinced that God answers prayer! And so, he prayed before God. Wow! Notice what he didn't do church – he didn't overlook the plight of those that were suffering. He didn't take lightly the vulnerability of those that were marginalized and oppressed. He didn't look at the situation like – that's those people, not me! He didn't hold on to his

wonderful job, luxuries, and privilege – No, he sincerely sought God for a solution for his people through prayer. And because of that...God heard his prayer because sincerity gets God's attention.

God answers prayer from those that are sincerely committed to Him.

Nehemiah 1:4 "When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven."

By the way, I want you to note something else about Nehemiah – notice the reverence that Nehemiah had for God. Notice how he didn't approach God, initially, with a laundry list of things for God to do for him. Notice how Nehemiah's approach to God – it was with reverence.

Nehemiah did not rush into God's presence making demands, or with his long list of needs and wishes. No, in fact, Nehemiah doesn't make a request until the very end of his prayer. Nehemiah began his prayer with worship and adoration and praise and appreciation and love! Nehemiah had a loving relationship with God and it shows. Nehemiah recognized the magnitude of the great God that he would be asking to bring change to the situation in Jerusalem. He didn't approach God like he was the mayor, or the governor, or even the president – No, Nehemiah approached God in the way that God should be approached – with Awe and Wonder! Nehemiah cried out **"O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of unfailing love with those who love Him and obey His commands."** Nehemiah acknowledged the Majesty of God, and the Faithfulness of God. In the New Testament, you find this same type of reverence when Jesus is teaching His disciples how to pray. He begins the prayer with **"Our Father, which are in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name."** He begins the prayer acknowledging and revering the Father. We need to be doing the same thing. To address God as "the man upstairs" is degrading the position of the Holy One of Heaven and Earth. If we are looking to God for answers to our prayers we need to be reverent toward the One we are coming before.

God answers reverent prayer

Nehemiah 1:5 *Then I said, "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands"*

When you pray, do you acknowledge God for who God is? Do you respect God and understand that none of us are on God's level? Friends, our God is to be revered. H.B. Charles Jr. comments in his book "It Happens After Prayer" that *"We are prone to become nonchalant about the Father in heaven. We suffer from a low view of God. We do not recognize God's sovereign authority over our lives, as we should. And this lack of reverence is often demonstrated in how we pray."*

It says that when he received word of the plight of his people that he sat down, he cried, and he prayed. There is something about the posture of his heart. He was not haughty before God but, humble. Too often, I believe that we are haughty before God. Maybe not intentionally, but unintentionally and probably subconsciously, we approach God like we are on God's level. The danger of singing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is that we can forget that God is Holy, and powerful, and majestic, and awe inspiring. If we are not careful, we will reduce God to the same status as all the other friends we have and fall into a place where we only talk to God when it is convenient, or when we have a current or upcoming need. It amazes me how people can go months and months without worshiping God in a church community, hearing God's word in community, singing God's praises in community, taking the Lord's supper in community, and especially without praying in community with other believers – but when catastrophe hits, then all the sudden we expect God to answer our prayers. Friends, let's not do God like that. God wants more for us and demands more from us that just being buddies. Nehemiah knew that along with a long list of others in this Bible who knew it too.

He knows that sin has separated him from God, so before he goes too far into his request he asks God for forgiveness. Not only for his sins, but for the sins of his family. He admits their guilt and their failure to follow the Word of God proclaimed throughout the Law of Moses. Nehemiah knew that the people of God were in slavery due to their inability or unwillingness to obey Scripture. Now, don't judge these people CrossPoint. Nope! Don't do it. There are things in God's Word that we all struggle to obey. Not one of us have a pass

here. I love how Paul says it in Romans when he says, ***"the good that I would do, I find myself not doing."*** Wow! Is that just me, or can you all relate?

We all struggle to obey God's standard even though we know that God is good. But here's the reality: when we fail to obey God's Word, we end up hurting ourselves and others. We live in an age where, as an old preacher once said, *"confession is good for the soul, but bad for the reputation."* And friends, if we are not careful, we will not only lie to one another about our entanglements in sin, but we actually and ashamedly take those lies into our prayer closets with the Lord. And CrossPoint, there is no reason to fake it with God. John says in 1 John 1:9 ***"if we confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** In other words, it makes no sense to lie to God. It makes all the sense in the world to be honest with God. God is looking for people who are honest in their prayers because God can answer an honest prayer.

God answers honest prayer

Nehemiah 1:6-9 "listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.⁸"Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth,^[a] I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored

Nehemiah knew that the proper approach to God was honesty; but friends, Nehemiah also knew that he served an honest God. Nehemiah uses God's own words in his prayer. Look at verse verses 8-9 ***"Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored."***Nehemiah is calling on a God that could be depended on to keep His Word...a God that when He speaks it will happen. Friends, Nehemiah began to pray the Word of God, because he knew that the Word of God contains the Will of God – and when we pray according to the Will of God, God answers and performs His Will.

So, here's my question – do you believe that if we pray committed, reverent, and honest prayers that God will answer them?

Nehemiah didn't pray as a preacher, or rabbi, or teacher, or scribe – Nehemiah didn't pray as an evangelist, missionary, praise and worship leader, or hospitality team member – Nehemiah didn't pray as a scholar, or theologian. Nehemiah prayed as a believer and Nehemiah believed that...

God answers prayer

- Against all odds – God is able!
- God honored Nehemiah's prayer in such a great way because Nehemiah had great faith in God. He walked by faith and not by sight.