

February 22, 2012

Old Testament:

Nehemiah & Daniel: Don't Wait For Hardship To Learn How To Pray

- SERIES: Old Testament
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  - 2 weeks ago: Zerubbabel—How To Be A Leader
  - Last week: Asa— How Well a Plan Works is Not Always a Measure of God's Approval
  - This week: Nehemiah & Daniel—Don't Wait For Hardship to Learn How to Pray
  
- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you told someone that you could do something well, but then you had to prove it, and you had no clue what you were doing?
  - On the show, "Friends," Joey was a struggling actor who embellished his resume, saying he could do things he couldn't do, like speak French...
    - ◇ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7G-LSN9vCs>
      - It's not good when you have to do something in order to keep a job, but don't really know how to do it.
  
- One thing that you don't want to wait to learn how to do is to PRAY!
  - It's very commonplace that when life throws people big curveballs, most people in our country go to God, at least in some way...
    - ◇ 9/11
      - Tons of people in church that never were before...
  - Tonight, we're going to take a look at two different guys in the Bible who didn't wait until life got bad to learn how to pray.
    - ◇ These guys knew how to depend on God even when things weren't bad, so that when it got bad, there was no cause for desperation
  
    - ◇ Tonight is a natural sequel to last week's message—that commitment to God is good, but it's not the same as dependence on God.
      - It's been said before that **"PRAYER IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU FIGHTING FOR GOD and GOD FIGHTING FOR YOU"**
        - Being committed to God, you may be going all out for

him—but depending on God through prayer will cause God to go all out for YOU!

◆ That’s what I want.

⊗ Dependence on God now will keep you from ever becoming desperate for him when times get tough.

Ω We don’t have to get desperate for what we already know full well we have

⊗ Nehemiah and Daniel both depended on God—let’s look at their stories!

➤ Nehemiah’s Story:

- 70 years have passed since Zerubbabel had led Israel to rebuild the temple

◇ Unfortunately, the city’s walls are still down

■ It’s an embarrassment to the city and its people

□ It’s like being outside NAKED

◆ You’re exposed and ashamed

- It’s been 90 years since Zerubbabel first led the first group of exiles back from their “captivity”.

◇ Nehemiah is an exile living in Persia

■ He is pretty high up, though

□ He is King Artaxerxes’ cup-bearer

◆ No power...but much influence

- One of Nehemiah’s brothers, Hanani, comes to him and reports some devastating news to Nehemiah:

◇ Things are not going well for those in Judah

◇ They are in trouble and great distress

◇ The wall of Jerusalem is down and its gates are burned

■ When Nehemiah did this, he sat down and wept

□ And, he did something that was familiar to him:

◆ He mourned, fasted, and prayed.

◇ Why do I say it was “familiar”?

■ People don’t just simply react this way on a whim!

□ Listen to his prayer:

➤ NEHEMIAH 1:5-11

- "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his

commands, **6** let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. **7** We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. **8** "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, **9** but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' **10** "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. **11** O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

- ◇ In his prayer...
  - He appealed to God, “who keeps his covenant of unending love with those who love him and obey his commands”
    - Sounds like personal knowledge!
  - He asks God to look down on him and “see me praying night and day for your people Israel”
    - It’d be pretty stupid to pray that if you’re not really doing it!
  - He talks to God about past dealings with Moses
    - He has intimate knowledge of God’s Word and God’s actions throughout history.
  - Asks God to grant him success as he goes before the king
- So, when Nehemiah does go before the king, something awesome happens.
  - ◇ The Bible says that he had never appeared sad before the king
    - To do so was not wise
      - Around the king, it was as if everyone must present their best—not wanting to discourage the king
        - ◆ REMINDS ME OF THAT KID THAT EVERYONE KNOWS WHO HAS OCCASSIONAL FREAK OUTS!
          - ⊗ Ex: That one kid I went to school with
            - Ω Don’t make him mad!?!
  - ◇ The day that Nehemiah appeared before the king in a sad state— WHICH WAS THE FOLLOWING SPRING AFTER HIS

PRAYER FROM CHAPTER 1—the king asked why he was sad.

■ You aren't sick, are you???

◇ Nehemiah briefly describes the situation...

◇ The king asks, "How can I help you."

■ IMMEDIATELY, THE BIBLE SAYS THAT NEHEMIAH SAID A SHORT PRAYER TO GOD AND THEN GAVE HIS RESPONSE!

□ "Send me to Judah to rebuild the city..."

◆ The prayer was:

⊗ An **automatic** reaction to a God-moment

Ω This was a reaction that he'd obviously had to situations in life before this time

⊗ An understanding of the need for God's direction in that very moment

Ω "Here's where you can help, God."

◇ At a later time, while the rebuilding of the city was underway, a group began to mock Nehemiah and the Jews.

■ Again, Nehemiah went immediately to God.

➤ NEHEMIAH 4:4-5

• Then I prayed, "Hear us, O our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! **5** Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in the presence of the builders." (NLT)

◇ In that instant of persecution, Nehemiah gave over the job of revenge to God alone.

■ These automatic, natural, and short prayers that we see Nehemiah giving to God in life's everyday moments are his way, and OUR way, of opening the door for God to do things HIS way rather than us trying to do things for him OUR own way.

◇ What I like about Nehemiah is his AUTOMATIC reaction to going to God in prayer in life's everyday moments.

➤ Another man was powerful, in part, because of his commitment to regularly scheduled times of prayer to God everyday.

• Daniel was placed in authority over the entire empire of King Darius'

- rule.
- ◇ He was really #2 in line to the king.
    - Others were jealous, and they knew the only way to get at him was through his conviction to follow God.
  - These evil men came before King Darius and said...
    - ◇ DANIEL 6:6-9
  - “Long live King Darius! **7**We administrators, prefects, princes, advisers, and other officials have unanimously agreed that Your Majesty should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human -- except to Your Majesty -- will be thrown to the lions. **8** And let Your Majesty issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” **9** So King Darius signed the law.
    - ◇ DANIEL 6:10
  - But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. **11** The officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. **12** So they went back to the king and reminded him about his law.
    - ◇ Daniel’s prayer was so regular that these other men **KNEW** that he would go home and pray, and so they followed him and “caught” him.
  - Eventually, most of you know the story...
    - ◇ Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den
    - ◇ God protected him through the night
    - ◇ The next day, the king saw that he was alive and believed in the God that Daniel served
  - While Nehemiah was devoted to God and it was showcased in continuous and spontaneous prayer, Daniel was devoted to go for regular and scheduled prayer.
    - ◇ To be sure, both men likely did both kinds of praying...
      - You won’t have one without the other in the long run
      - You **NEED** to have both in order to really find God’s favor!!!

- 1. Prayer is the difference between YOU FIGHTING FOR GOD and GOD FIGHTING FOR YOU.
  - 2. Prayer turns appointments into DIVINE APPOINTMENTS.
  - 3. Pray like it DEPENDS ON GOD and work like it DEPENDS ON YOU.
  - 4. If you don't establish a PRAYER HABIT you'll never break the SIN HABIT.
  - 5. Prayer is the difference between THE BEST YOU CAN DO and THE BEST GOD CAN DO.
  - 6. The more you HAVE TO DO the more you HAVE TO PRAY.
  - 7. You are only ONE PRAYER away from a totally different life.
  - 8. The MORE YOU PRAY the MORE YOU DREAM and the more you dream the more you HAVE to pray.
  - 9. WHO YOU BECOME is determined by HOW YOU PRAY.
  - 10. 100% of the prayers you DON'T pray WON'T get answered.
  - 11. God honors BOLD PRAYERS because BOLD PRAYERS honor God.
  - 12. The greatest tragedy in life are the prayers that go UNANSWERED because they go UNASKED.
- The two men we talked about tonight understood that prayer was the only way to having God's direction and favor on a continual basis.
- We also saw that prayer must be done in two ways to be effective:
    - ◇ Continually
    - ◇ Regularly
      - We need times to grow deeper and closer with God as we would a good friend
      - Then, we need times to just depend in the moment on God, also as we would a good friend in a time of need
        - God will be there for us, but we must have a relationship

with him first

◆ That starts with regular prayer each day

- Then, when we call on him in the moments of life that matter most, we know where to find him, and he knows us and will answer our call.

◇ The question tonight:

- Do you have a regular and constant relationship with the Lord?
- Are you seeking Him actively every day, and not only when “times are worst”?
  - You’ll never get the most from Him if you’re not giving your most to Him!

➤ PRAY

- 1) I want to make prayer an automatic reaction to everyday life situations. I know I need to constantly depend upon God, and I want to begin lifting up prayers to him continually throughout each day.
- 2) I want to commit myself to at least one 5-minute time of prayer with God each day, giving him my heart and my desires and my needs, and opening the door to more close interaction with him on a continual basis.