

PP Nehemiah: 4D Praying**Nehemiah 9:32-37**

Part 32-April/20-21, 2013

Illus A new missionary, Herbert Jackson was assigned a car that would not start without a push. As he would drive around ministering to people, he'd either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He did this for two years, until health issues forced him to leave the field. He explained to the missionary who came to replace him how he would start the car, and while he did, the man looked under the hood. Almost immediately, the man said, "Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable." He tightened the connection, stepped into the car, turned it over, and to Jackson's astonishment, it started right up. The power was there all the time. It was a loose connection that kept Jackson from putting that power to work.

Do you know that for many of us, the lack of deep, intimate prayer is our loose connection? And it is robbing us of spiritual power and effective service to God in our lives!

We've been looking at direction praying from Nehemiah 9, and seen two of the 4 directions
PP Direction #1 Look Up and exalt the perfection and attributes of God with hearts fixed on Him

PP Direction #2 Look Back and see that though we have been unfaithful, God has been gracious and merciful to us working to change us to becoming like Christ

PP Now, starting in verse 32, the direction changes again, and we are moved to '**Look In**' to our present, difficult circumstances

So let's start immediately practicing this same direction

The book of Nehemiah is about rebuilding broken lives that have fallen into disrepair

*Have those mistakes, sins and times of unfaithfulness created a mess of your life?

*Are you in such financial ruin that you can no longer see a way out of it?

*Have you, as Pastor Matthew taught us last week, drifted away from God?

*Perhaps your marriage is in trouble and either the grind of enduring it or divorce is looming

*Maybe you are so caught up in an addiction that you've given up on gaining freedom from it

I talked with someone several weeks ago who is so beaten down and his dreams so crushed, he lies defeated at the bottom of a pit of depression

Almost all of those situations I just mentioned, were shared by God's people in Nehemiah 9
 How do we **look in** at our circumstances through prayer and reconnect to the power of God?

PP First Principle: Look In with confidence! (9:32)

"Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day." Nehemiah 9:32

The shift is noticeable with the word 'Now', as they move from the past to the present

But notice how they look at their circumstances through the lens of faith: '**our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God**'

Their God is great, mighty and awesome!

They are slaves in their own land, they have come through decades of ruin, exile, shame and distress, yet they grab their minds, and hold them to truth

They are tightening the connection to the power of God!
 Those attributes are Who God is, but they affirm that through what God does: He ***'keeps covenant and steadfast love'***
 He guards His promises to them, loving them even when they are not faithful!

Friends, as we shift to looking in and seeing the difficulty of our trials, and situations, we must do so affirming our mighty, faithful God Who always keeps His promises to us!
 It is this confidence in their God's love which moved them to ask Him for help!
 Not until verse 32 have they even asked God for anything: ***"let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us..." 9:32***

How simple and honest they are in this one and only request of the entire prayer!
 When our sin, or another's, brings us suffering, it is natural to wonder if God even loves us
 Friends, do you pray honestly to God?
 If you doubt His love, tell Him.
 If you are angry with Him, confess it to Him
 He knows everything in your heart, He won't be shocked
 Pour your heart out to God, not cursing Him or praying irreverently, but honestly!

When we truly understand the faithful love and mercy of our heavenly Father, our racing hearts quiet down and begin to shift in quiet trust and confidence
 Christian brothers and sisters, Look up and exalt God's perfections; look back and see His faithful, merciful fingerprints alongside our sins and failures; look in with the power of confidence and hope that He will continue to be faithful to us

PP Second Principle-Look In through the Gospel! (9:33)

Look at the confession of these praying Jews: ***"Yet You have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for You have dealt faithfully..." Nehemiah 9:33***
 Can you affirm this truth in your life: *No matter what has happened, God has been righteous and faithful to me!*
 Even those times of great pain and difficulty?
 Affirming God's righteous actions connects us to the incredible power of biblical confidence
PP God is ***'righteous'*** meaning He always acts consistently with His nature, doing what is right!
 It is the perfect union between Who God is and What God does
 His righteousness means that He has always been faithful to Himself in all His dealings
 If He promised His eternal love, then He would be unrighteous if even once stopped loving us

PP But there is more about this word ***'righteous'***, as in the Bible, it is the same word for ***'justice'***
 God always does what is right, and what He does is always perfectly just!

PP ***"The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He."* Deuteronomy 32:4**

Are you with me so far?
 We look up in prayer to exalt our great and mighty God and praise Him above all
 We look back and see His fingerprints of faithful mercy all through even our worst mistakes

We look in and re-examine our situations and circumstances that we are struggling with, and remember that God has *“been righteous in all that has come upon us, for You have dealt faithfully”* 33

Accusations of God being unfair, of not being good to us, begin to break apart under the truth
PP *“God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one.”* James 1:13

But let's take the truth of God's righteousness to a deeper level and anchor our minds to it!
 If God is to act in accord to His character, He could never ignore when we *‘acted wickedly’*
 God must punish all sin, for it does not deserve reward, it is wrong and deserves punishment
 He would be out of His holy, perfect character if he ever, even once gave a pass to sin
 Never once has He said of a sinner, *‘I'm feeling happy today, I'll let that one go!’*
 Sin is intolerable to Him, it is the greatest blight against His absolute purity, it is high treason
 God always, without exception punishes sin and the one who bore it!
 If God did not treat the sinner as he deserves, then God would be unrighteous, unless some other
 means of punishing sin can be seen

The greatest example of His righteousness and justice can be seen in the cross of Jesus Christ
 The Bible says that sin has brought death, and that without the shedding of blood, there can be no
 forgiveness of sin, and no offer of eternal life with God
 Friends, the biblical phrase, *‘shedding of blood’* means to bleed to death!
 They would not nick that lamb, or goat or bull, and extract a thimble full of blood, and throw it
 against the altar of God for atonement
 The animal had to die and be placed on that altar, but no blood of an animal could take away
 human sin!
 Someone who had never sinned, Who was entirely innocent, had to die in our place!
 So our righteous God, Whose wrath against our sin could not be satisfied without the shedding of
 blood, sent His willing, perfectly sinless Son, Jesus, to die for our forgiveness
 There could be no pass for sin, God's righteousness demanded justice for all people because all
 people had broken His perfect, holy law
 God did not turn a blind eye to our sin, He poured it out on Jesus, Who took the just punishment
 on Himself, until there was nothing left but the offer of grace and forgiveness to all who
 would believe on Him
 Perfect righteousness met perfect justice in the death of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ

Now, God's same righteousness guarantees that He will treat us as His fully pardoned, blood-
 bought children, adopted and given His faithful love and blessings
 Illus Let's say that my bible represents Christ, this pencil represents the believer. Before, you
 represented yourself before God and even your best works were not good enough when
 compared to God's perfection and holy standards. Yet the moment you believed on Christ, God
 took you, and put you in Christ, into His righteousness and perfection, and closed the book
 around you sealing it with the power of His Spirit. Now His righteousness guarantees His favor
 on you, His blessings for you, His never-ending mercy to you, and His grace-filled power to give
 you new desires that will produce new living, so you will become righteous as well!

This is truth, this is the gospel, and this is the way we must look in to our own lives!
 We have been unfaithful yet God has remained faithful to us!

PP And through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, *“He is faithful and just (righteous) to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

1 John 1:9

In this great prayer of Nehemiah 9, the people turned to God in faith
And their faith in His righteousness, that He would be true to His covenant of grace, brought the confidence to ask Him to move on their behalf

What power this reconnection to the gospel brings into our lives!!

Our painful circumstances are not God’s fault...it is the result of sin, ours and others against us
Our God is righteous, and just, He will act, and He will deliver and restore His people

PP Third Principle-Look in with responsibility (9:34-35)

“Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works.” Nehemiah 9:34-35

If we just read these verses, without their admission in verse 33 that they themselves had acted wickedly, it would seem they are blaming everyone else for their present difficulties
But they know there is a universal tendency that when God blesses us, we drift away from Him:

‘amid your great goodness...they did not serve You’

The Levites aren’t blaming others and they aren’t blaming God for their circumstances, they are accepting responsibility for the righteous, just discipline of God

Are you blaming God for your situation?

If so, it is robbing you of the power of joy and hope, and you are stuck in your situation!

Look up and see the greatness of God; look back and see His faithfulness and mercy; and look in to see that God is not the author of your misery and find hope!

Take responsibility for your actions, and reconnect to the hope of His grace and power to restore!

PP Go deep with God in prayer, and ask Him to *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* Psalm 139:23-24

This will lead to seeing our situations with...

PP Fourth Principle-Look in with truth! (9:36-37)

“Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.” Nehemiah 9:36-37

The Jews were in great distress, they were an enslaved people because of their sins!

Slavery in the bible points to the strong, imprisoning power of sin

The people of God in Nehemiah’s time were crying out for a deliverer and we are in no different circumstances

PP Listen to the Apostle Paul, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* Romans 7:24-25

PP *“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves...But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy...”* **Titus 3:3-7**

The moment we put our trust in Jesus Christ Who died on the cross to pay for our sins, He set us free from the bondage of sin, opened the prison door and walked us out
But there is an interesting problem facing former prisoners called *recidivism*
Going from a daily, predictable, tight structure called prison, to a wide open, life of choices is often terrifying and overwhelming
Recidivism is when the former prisoner commit crime again to get back within the safety of a tightly structured prison

The church is plagued with this problem as Christians struggle to live free in Christ!

Christian, do you know who you are in Christ?

You have been purchased by Christ and set free to love and serve Him
You belong to God, born of God and no power can take you out of His love
You are a friend of Jesus, a dwelling place for God in the Person of the Holy Spirit
You have been adopted by the heavenly Father and give the rights of His Son Jesus
You have been forgiven all your sins, past, present and future
You have all you need in order to be happy and satisfied in life
You have been given eternal life as a gift, and free from condemnation
You have direct access to the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ: God not only hears your prayers but loves it when the two of you talk together
You are a work of art that God is still perfecting in order to bring fame to His name
You can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you
You have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind

PP *“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”* **Galatians 4:7**

All of these truths about who a believer is in Christ, are not yours if you have rejected Him!
Those who reject Christ are slaves to sin and under the wrath of the righteous God!
Friend, if that is you, believe on the Son of God, the righteous one, Who died for you
When you do, that very moment, the charges are dropped, God forgives you, and immediately, instantly, and forever you begin to enjoy all the benefits I shared!

Let's Pray!