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SERMON TITLE: Be Honest & Follow the Vision

Rebuilding a City: Trusting God & Each other

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:1-11

DATE: May 10, 2020

Online service at www.fpcd.org.

READ also Hebrews 11:1-2, 6. Watch online at www.fpcd.org

Have you ever prayed about something you were so upset by that you actually couldn't or wouldn't eat? You were so upset that there was no one else to turn to. So you called out to God. You had not done that for a long time.

Perhaps you didn't even know how to pray.

But what else could you do? You were in mourning. Something you loved was shattered. Perhaps this is your reality right now in your family or in your schooling or in your business or in your retirement due to the coronavirus epidemic.

Last week we asked three questions. Our present circumstances legitimize the need for them:

- Do you think God is involved in the world's troubles?
- Do you think God helps people, cities, and nations overcome adversity?
- Do you think God takes action with the intent to rescue, protect, and rebuild people and cities when calamity hits?

Those are the questions of our series "Rebuilding a City: Trusting God and Each Other." The questions relate to the beloved city of God's people which had been devastated and failed to recover during the 70 long years after the exile of God's people. Hear the story. READ Nehemiah 1:1-11

This wasn't a "Good morning, God" or "God, I pray for my friend Bob—help Bob" or "Now I lay me down to sleep" prayer. This was down on the ground, on your face, all night long desperation.

Have you ever been so devastated by some news or circumstance that you turned to God even when you did not know whether God was even there?

Was God involved in this calamity? Could God help them overcome this adversity? Would God rescue, protect, and rebuild them?

Don't we also wonder in these times:

- "Who caused this to happen?"
- "If only our leaders had done this or that."
- Finally, the self-reflection – "What did we do wrong?"

Ever prayed like that?

When I was a child, my mother used to send me to my room with these words: "You go in there and think about (whatever it was I did wrong) and give yourself a good talking to." Nehemiah did just that.

This time of reflection would last for a period of three to four months.

This was not rote prayer. This was not perfunctory tradition. This was not sixty seconds of confession and then move on. He lost weight over it. He became depressed during it. He saw no other way. Here's what he prayed:

- I've done wrong God
- I don't even know you. I've treated the Bible like it's a meaningless fable.
- I've ignored my nation's history. It's a faint and empty memory.
- I have no conception of spiritual life.
- Neither does my family. What happens at church anyway? Why go now?
- We think for ourselves—believing in God seems like child's play and nursery rhymes.
- I've ignored you for more important things.
- My nation has ignored you and the Bible, God.
- My schools/educational system blocked God out for more "relevant" subjects.
- The next generation only has a faint hint of what it took for us to even become a nation.
- Our government dismisses you, your law, and thinks of faith as an exclusive, biased, unintelligent waste of time.
- These are deep offenses to you and failures on our part.

You must be honest if you want to know God. You must face yourself. It is the first step to rebuilding, and the step Nehemiah took. But as he assessed himself and his nation, he remembered these things about God:

- God is the God of heaven.
- God is awesome in size and divine in nature; to be feared, revered, and held in honor. God must be contended with, not ignored.
- God keeps covenant. Do you have any friends who keep covenant? They do what they say and say what they do, always? Keeping covenant means God is careful over, watchful, protects, always observing and retaining the covenant. God's covenant does not shift or morph like shifting sands.
- God maintains love and gives favor, loyalty, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, grace to the community of those who love him and keep his commandments.

You've got to understand these things about God to reconnect with God. The reconnection happens through being honest directly with God in prayer. Do you think that when things go horribly wrong that God has abandoned us and we should give up our faith? Let's think deeper than that! When things go wrong, it's the time to take an inward look.

When Nehemiah listened and reflected, he realized the cost of ignoring God:

"Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples;' (Neh 1:8)

There are consequences for going it alone.

But with God there's always hope. The verse continues:

'if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' (Neh 1:9)

So prayer brought to Nehemiah's mind his wonderful spiritual heritage:

He realized God have given some significant promises
He saw that God is good. God is not driven by whims nor sin.
He remembered God always has hope.
He discovered God is a key player in the world.

The loss was great. Without God, there's no recovery. BUT with God, as they turned to God, no matter how far away they fell, no matter that they felt like outcasts, no matter that they had no resources as displaced people, *God will bring them back and restore them.* This is synergy.

With God, $1 + 1 = 3$ (or more!)

Synergy – "the interaction of elements that when combined produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements."¹

When we pray and get honest with God, that's when God plants the vision. The vision was to restore.

Nothing in Nehemiah's reality affirmed that vision.

But with God, the impossible can happen. With God we have synergy.

Today in our own calamity we can stay in guilt and failure. We can focus on our loss. We can blame others. We can live paralyzed with fear and recovery will be very difficult.

Or we can be honest and follow God's vision of revival.

God always wants to build. God always hears prayer, restores, and revives. This reality fills the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. But Jesus reflected:

"Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, *will he find faith on earth?*" (Luke 18:7-8).

Will God find someone who is willing to connect with God and follow the vision? Will someone have faith to act?

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Faith is the synergy between God's vision and your action. It is the most valued character trait to God:

"Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval."

The Bible reiterates:

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Heb 11:6)

In our own nation's disastrous time, instead of dissolving into tears or fear, blaming and shaming, what if we, like Nehemiah, dissolved into prayer? What if we were honest with God? What vision might we be given?

Nehemiah took a bold step of faith and went for that gain at the end of his prayer: "Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Synergy: Nehemiah + God. The faith that, "*Hallelujah, He will deliver me!*" as we sang. Let's ask for true vision. After all, it is the year 2020! ☺

If Nehemiah had born the burden alone we would not be reading his story today—but he served the king, the real King.

Which king do you serve? Yourself? Or the King of kings?

AMEN

¹ Dictionary.com