

James T. Jeremiah
Pastor's Conference Devotional: Nehemiah
September 10, 1980

Transcript

James T. Jeremiah:

I know you're enjoying the music of our musicians. The wonderful part of it is they're not imported, they're members of the family. And I have not been asked to do this, and they're not paying me anything for it, but if you need some music some Sunday in your church, these fellows can really be a blessing to your people. And don't hesitate to invite them to come, they'll come and they won't even insist on taking the offering. I think you ought to take one, but they ought not to do it and they'll come and sing.

James T. Jeremiah:

I'm trying to have something a little special for the preacher before we come to the study of the Bible. Today, I want to talk about the preacher's wife. For 44 years I've been married to a preacher's wife. I have a daughter who's a preacher's wife and two daughters-in-law who are preachers' wives. So I have an interest in the preacher's wife.

James T. Jeremiah:

In the shadow of the parsonage stands a figure oft obscure. Just behind the faithful pastor is his wife, devout and pure. She is with him every moment, helping him his work progress, and you can't discount her portion in his measure of success. Off behind the scene of action, often never seen or heard, yet she stands forever ready, just to give a helping word. It is not an act of service that her worth is really shown, but in bearing heavy burdens that to others are unknown. With encouragement and vision, she must urge God's servant on, when the shadows are the darkest she is ever his lieutenant in the battles fought and won.

James T. Jeremiah:

I like that. Have you ever written your resignation on Monday morning, and have your wife proofread it so that you change your mind by Tuesday afternoon? Most of us have. Thank the Lord for those gals who had enough sense to help us in the time of need.

James T. Jeremiah:

We've been talking about Nehemiah as an illustration of the pastor. We mentioned that one of the things he did was to recognize conditions as they are. He didn't change them right away, but he recognized what they were, he had a serious time of prayer before he sought to remedy them, he viewed the problem and considered the possibilities, then he encouraged the people to get to the problem, organize the work. He became very watchful of the enemy, stayed at the task, and he made a whole lot of the book. Pretty good pastor, I would say.

James T. Jeremiah:

In Chapters 2 and 3, we have him now in the process of removing reproaches and in Chapter 2 verse 17, we have a key verse to it all. Then said I unto them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste and the gates thereof are burned with fire. Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem that we do no more, that we be no more a reproach." A reproach is a disgrace.

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James T. Jeremiah:

There are many reproaches today upon God's people, reproach of unanswered prayer, the reproach of the lack of vision, the reproach of open sin. We could go on and list a whole lot of them. There is a good sense, however, in which there should be a reproach and that is the reproach that comes because we trust in the living God. Now to the world, we may be a disgrace by trusting in the living God. May God help us that we should not be disgraces in the eyes of the world for wrong reasons or doing the wrong thing, suffering as a Christian but not suffering as the Bible says, as a busy body, doing things that ought not to be done.

James T. Jeremiah:

Nehemiah was a man with a great burden. May I say to you today, brethren, that unless we have a burden for the work of God and the burden for the people to whom we minister, we probably are not going to be other than just mere religious professionals, just like the world is. I read recently just the other day that the cannibals are complaining because since the ecumenical movement came into process, they don't see any difference in the missionaries, they taste all the same. Well, there ought to be a difference in God's people and we ought to be willing by the grace of God to see to it that we have a burden. One thing that ought to characterize one of God's dear people serving Him is a burden for people, to be people oriented, to be concerned about the needs. Nehemiah was that kind of a man.

James T. Jeremiah:

Let me give you several things as time will permit in these two chapters about his concern, about his courage, about his calculation, a few other things. Let's think about his concern. Chapter 2:1 to 3 shows us something of that concern. It was an unusual thing it seems to me for a man who was a cupbearer in the presence of Artaxerxes the king with affluence surrounding him, with all the needs met, to be concerned about a bunch of Jews back in a ruined city without hope.

James T. Jeremiah:

And when you look out in the picture today and you see how drastic it is, how terrible it is, well, you have to have a burden from God to be concerned about it or else we all could find an easy way to settle down in a world filled with affluence, let it go by, just not be concerned. He was concerned and it was reflected in his general attitude. In verse 2, the king noticed there was something wrong with him, something burdening him. He said, "Why are you sad?" Burdened for his people and the city and the situation made him have a sad countenance.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now I believe you can be burdened for people without being sad, but I don't believe you can be burdened for people without being a participant of their sorrows. In some sense maybe that brings sadness. It was expressed in the presence of an unbeliever. He didn't try to hide it. The king, Artaxerxes, said, why sad, and if you underline the proper words in these verses, you'll hear Nehemiah say, why not sad? Why not sad? Why shouldn't I be concerned? Am I wrong in saying that the key to genuine revival and spiritual blessing today is a genuine concern for lost souls and professing Christians who are out of fellowship with God? How do we expect them to have any concern if we don't.

James T. Jeremiah:

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Nehemiah was a pastor with a broken heart, with a concerned heart, that produced in a very real sense a sad countenance because he couldn't get away from the awful conditions that prevailed in the city of Jerusalem. Now it's one thing to have a concern. I suppose a lot of people do wring their hands, weep their eyes out, and sit still. But he not only had concern, he had courage.

James T. Jeremiah:

In Chapter 2:4 through 11, we notice that he was not only concerned but he was not afraid to step out and attempt to do something about it. He had courage to pray and he prayed in the presence of the king. Verse 4, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." The king said, what can I do? So I prayed.

James T. Jeremiah:

I don't know that he got down on his knees to pray. Don't think that he lifted his eyes to heaven to pray maybe, or he didn't go through some prayer ritual, but he prayed and we can pray. And we better learn to pray in hours of crises without having to go through some kind of a religious ritual to have it done. Pray as you go along the highway.

James T. Jeremiah:

I remember hearing a man say one day he came to a stoplight and it turned green, he went on through according to the rules, somebody else didn't see it, and as he got out halfway in the road, he found this man was about ready to knock him out of the street. And so he prayed. Said as he came through it unscathed, "I'm glad I was prayed up to date so in the time of emergency, I could pray without having to go through some ritual to do it." It's a good thing to pray without ceasing.

James T. Jeremiah:

He was a man who had courage to pray and he had courage to ask an unusual petition of the king. Verse 5, he said to the king, "Send me into Judah." Isn't that nice? The famous cupbearer, the fellow who has been tasting the wine to keep the poison from the king. The king said, "What can I do for you, Nehemiah?" He said, "Send me to Judah." He asked an unusual thing, an unusual petition. But I suppose he had the idea in mind that if I don't tell the king, how will he know? So he just simply asked. Maybe we not only need to ask of God in the matters of serving the Lord, but asking in regard to things that pertain to the work of God in the general rule of things. He asked.

James T. Jeremiah:

Then he attempted a humanly impossible task. You can you read that for yourself in verses 6 to 11. Let me just briefly state that he had to have permission from the king who had authority over him. That was not easy, like going to Washington to get permission to do something, and he did that. He had to have materials. In verse 8, and the Lord provided materials, timber to build the gates and the walls to do the work there. He had to find acceptance with the governors. In verse 9, the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with him. That means he had protection. He had courage to do something. Ladies and gentlemen, we are living in a day that demands God-given courage to do something besides sitting around and letting the world go to hell without attempting to do something.

James T. Jeremiah:

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He was a man of courage. Matthew Henry said, "Our prayers must be seconded by our serious endeavors or else we mock God." That was said a long time ago, but it comes right down to where I live today. Real godliness is not incompatible with earthly success. Here was a man who was a godly man who prayed and he had courage to put some feet on his prayer and start down the road to see something happen for God. Oh, I'd like to be a preacher like that, wouldn't you? I'd like to be a pastor like Nehemiah who had concern and compassion and he had courage.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now he had all of that, but he didn't do it without calculation. In verses 16 to 26, we see what he did now in that passage of scripture. He began to do some interesting calculations, seeing what was going on. You know, I think some people, some of us, let me say it about me, I suppose more times than not, we live in a fool's paradise because we refuse to believe things are as bad as they are. And I'm a pre-millennialist. A pre-tribulationist. Have you got any argument? Don't bother because I'm too old to be convinced otherwise. And I believe that the world is going down the drain and the prophetic scripture says in the last days, it's going to get worse. I know that. But it hasn't gotten so bad that God isn't in heaven. It isn't so bad that God can't do something.

James T. Jeremiah:

Nehemiah said, "It's a bad outlook." He went to see how bad things really were. When he got into Jerusalem, he did some working on it. You'll notice in verse 12, he said, "I rose in the night, I and some few men with me. Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart." He had a spiritual outlook. God had been dealing with him and he had an honest outlook. In verse 13, he saw that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates were consumed with fire. He made a complete survey of the place. In fact, it wasn't easy. There was so much rubbish in some parts around the wall that his donkey couldn't even get over it. But he made a complete circuit. He made sure to get a total picture of what was going on.

James T. Jeremiah:

And he did it independently. And I rather like this, the rulers knew not. Verse 16, neither told I the Jews, the priests, or the nobles. We've been listening this week with great encouragement and help to counseling and I'm for what we're hearing. It's been a help and an encouragement. But there are some times we preachers ought to do something without counseling with somebody and go to counsel with some old guy that's about half dead anyway and it can't be done. That's what they would have said if he'd ever gone around and said to the nobles and to the kings or the rulers and the priests and the Jews. Let's build the wall. It can't be done. Do you have any people like that in your church? Do you have anybody like that in somebody else's church? Probably.

James T. Jeremiah:

This man got his message from God and he got out to see what it was all about. That's not to say now that we ought not to seek and encourage and want the help and the cooperation of people. I'm not saying that. But God help us if we guide our ministries by some old person, young person who's old, whatever, who has no vision beyond the length of their nose and somebody cut half of that off.

James T. Jeremiah:

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He was out to look it over, brother, and I would suspect anywhere we are today if we look out a little bit beyond where we are and see the tragic situation, we can also find the God of hope who can see us through it and help us to go on.

James T. Jeremiah:

Next thing, number four, he was a man who accepted a challenge. Verses 17 to 18, he had a vision, he challenged the people to have one. "You see," he said, verse 17a, "You see the condition of the walls." He was a man who challenged them to action. Let us build. And challenged them to faith. He said, "I told them the hand of my God was good upon me," in verse 18. There is no winning without working and warring.

James T. Jeremiah:

Well, he was a man of confidence. Verse 19 and 20, the God of heaven will prosper us. Not a boast of his plans and how well he'd outlined it and how well he'd organized it. The God of heaven will prosper us. If he purposed any good, it was because God put it into his heart. If he did or received any good, it was because the good hand of God was upon him. If he expected any good, it was because he earnestly prayed God to remember him for good. That's a quotation out of a book that every preacher ought to have, The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. A whole big book full of references. Every once in a while that book puts in something that's worth quoting and that's one of them.

James T. Jeremiah:

At a time of crisis, faith deals with God. He said the God of heaven will prosper us, deals with self. We as servants will rise and build. [inaudible 00:17:15] the enemies. We're going to talk about the enemies tomorrow. Don't go home before we talk about the enemies. You have no portion or right in Jerusalem.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now I wanted really to get to the place this morning where I could talk about the building, the concentration on building in Chapter 3. I think that's one of the most interesting chapters that sounds a little bit like one of the biographical references in the Bible where begat so-and-so and so-and-so, but it's very interesting because in this chapter, there are the names of 10 gates. And I know this is not typology, so don't look up Fairbairn[?] or somebody and try to test whether this is a type, it isn't. But it's an illustration. And I found a lot of blessing in the gates.

James T. Jeremiah:

For example, if you go down through the passage in Chapter 3, he talks about the sheep gate, the fish gate, the old gate, and so on, and each of these gates. If I can use a little bit of trusted taking the text out of the context or [inaudible 00:18:21] the context or whatever, I think they represent some spiritual things in life. The sheep gate speaks of the sheep, salvation through the Lamb of God. The fish gate represents service. When you get saved, the first thing, and it's very interesting, right next to the sheep gate is the fish gate. When you get saved by the lamb, you ought to go fishing. Go fishing. That's not a bad thing to do. Go fishing for men.

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The old gate speaks of the Lordship of Christ, who is the ancient of days. The valley gate suggests to us the idea of submission or humility in the Christian life or yieldedness in the Christian life. The dung gate speaks of cleansing from defilement. The fountain gate speaks of the filling of the spirit. The water gate, the place of the word of God in the life. The horse gate refers to the warfare and the victory of the believer. The east gate suggests something about the coming of the Lord who one day went through that gate or in the general area where that gate is.

James T. Jeremiah:

And then the last one is the gate Miphkad, means assignment, designated place, a census. And let me tell you friend, there is a day when the census will be taken and we stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

James T. Jeremiah:

Listen, every once in a while in my problems with the walls, I find these gates need to be rebuilt and repaired, and our people have the same situation and it's our business to see to it that we do our best as pastors to repair the gates. When you think about the concentration of this man's effort also, next to him, it's an awful repetitive thing, isn't it? But it shows something that everybody was involved in doing his thing for God when that thing needed to be done, and if somebody who was next to him decided to go fishing, for fish, not for souls, decided to go fishing, the wall would have a break in it. They all worked together for the cause. So you have last of all then in Chapter 3 the idea of cooperation.

James T. Jeremiah:

Anyhow, he's quite a preacher, quite a pastor I think as I consider him today. We want to pray. Yesterday I mentioned to you that in Adrian, Michigan, there were six teenagers who were killed in an automobile accident. Yesterday, the seventh one died. My son-in-law had the funeral for two of them, and out of that service or out of the dealing of Christian people in this, there were five people, five kids I guess, who have already been saved.