

Time to Rebuild – Where Does Change Begin?

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Where does change begin?

When an individual changes the direction of his or her life

When an organization takes a new direction or opens a new product line

When a country introduces a new legislation

Where does that change begin?

This is a really important question

Because we all live in a world in need of change

Einstein taught us

That our world is constantly going from order to disorder

That's the second law of thermodynamics

That's why your house doesn't STAY clean

That's why your yard doesn't STAY mowed

That's why your kids don't STAY disciplined

So – our world is constantly in need of correction

In need of change

But where does that change begin?

Closer to home:

I think a lot of us look out at our world these days

Coming out of covid

Coming out of all of the racial unrest

Coming out of all of the political nastiness

And very likely getting ready to go back into the political nastiness

And we recognize

That our world needs a change

So where does that change begin?

Even closer to home:

We just come out of a season

That causes people to reexamine everything

The combination of Thanksgiving and Christmas

Followed by New Years

Causes people to have a level of dissatisfaction with their life

That is more than any other time of the year

Closer still:

Researchers are telling us that mental health

Is at a crisis point in our world

So all of the normal struggles

Are probably magnified *this* year

Our world needs a change

So where does that change begin?

Turn to Nehemiah 1

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4

Nehemiah got a report back from his friend

That the wall in Jerusalem was in ruins

This doesn't mean much to us today

But a wall

In ancient society

Represented strength

And protection

A wall allowed

Farmers to plant without fear of invasion

Shopkeepers to invest without fear of confiscation

Families to play without fear of abduction

A wall was essential for a healthy society

And Jerusalem had no wall

Jerusalem had no protection

In the next couple weeks

We're going to look at how Nehemiah rallied the people to rebuild the wall

And we're going to use it as a metaphor

For the ways we'll rebuild broken parts of our lives

But today, I want us to notice where that movement started

Look at those four verses again

They're short – take a look

When did the wall begin to get rebuilt?

When did the arc of history take a turn?

Hang on to that a second

Let's set some context of Israel's history

I think this is the fuzziest part for a lot of Christians

We read about Adam & Eve

We skip ahead to Noah

And then to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

We work through the judges and then a couple kings

And then

Well, then we just kind of skip ahead to Jesus

Because we don't really know what happened

But there's a lot in there

Because King David died just after 1,000 BC

So almost a thousand years happened between David & Jesus

Let me fill in a couple of those blanks:

In 605, Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king

Babylon - that's modern day Iraq

In 605, Nebuchadnezzar seized control of Jerusalem

And exiled some of the best & brightest to Babylon

The Prophet Daniel was among this first group

Fun fact – when Saddam Hussein lead Iraq

He often referred to Iraq as Babylon

And to himself as Nebuchadnezzar

Nebuchadnezzar was a highpoint in Iraq's history

Fast forward 19 years

And in 586, Nebuchadnezzar exiles a 3rd and final group to Babylon

And Jerusalem is completely destroyed

Including the temple

586 – remember that date

That's a big date in Jewish history

In 539, Belshazzar, the king of Persia

Conquers Babylon

Persia, by the way, is modern day Iran

So the Iraq / Iran conflict did not start in the 1970's

This battle was 2500 years ago!

Belshazzar's reign didn't last long

He died and was replaced by Darius

Who allowed the Jews to begin to return to Jerusalem in 538

When Darius died

Cyrus took his place

Those who returned were allowed to rebuild the Jewish temple

And it was completed in 516 under King Darius

By the way, don't get confused

But this Darius wasn't the same as the other Darius

It's like the Caesars or the Pope's or the Bushes or Clintons

There's lots of people with the same name

This was a new Darius

Then there was King Xerxes

And King Artaxerxes who began to rule in 465 BC

And in his 20th year

In 445 BC, we get to Nehemiah chapter 1

For larger historical perspective

113 years later, a Macedonian leader named Alexander

He was like the 3rd Alexander

So he called himself Alexander the Great

Alexander took over the Persian Empire and began controlling Jerusalem in 332

When Alexander died

A different leaders and factions jostled for power

Until Roman general Pompey took over Jerusalem in 63BC

He chose to use a siege

Because he said the walls were so strong

The walls that Nehemiah built all the way back in 445

First century historian, Josephus, records Pompey's perspective:

"For he saw the walls were so firm, that it would be hard to overcome them; and that the valley before the walls was terrible; and that the temple, which was within that valley, was itself encompassed with a very strong wall, insomuch that if the city were taken, that temple would be a second place of refuge for the enemy to retire to." – Josephus, The Wars of the Jews 1:141

Let me finish the loop here

The temple that Darius allowed the Jews to build in 516

Was completely renovated and expanded

By the Roman governor Herod in 37BC

That would have been the temple

The Bible refers to

During the time of Jesus

Herod also added some retaining walls

During the renovation

One of them – called the western wall

Survives to this day

So let me ask again:

When did the wall begin to get rebuilt?

When did the arc of history take a turn?

In verse 4 {Read Nehemiah 1:4}

When Nehemiah heard that the walls were down

The wall started to get rebuilt

When Nehemiah heard about it

And here's the thing

The wall was knocked down

And the gates burned

141 years earlier

141 years!

It would be like someone today

Returning from Washington DC and announcing that "Abraham Lincoln has been shot?"

The wall had been in ruins for all of Nehemiah's life

He undoubtedly knew about it

So what changed for Nehemiah?

His heart changed

Change always begins in the heart

We're going to look at some great things that Nehemiah did

We're studying his life 2,500 years later

Because he did some astounding things

But that movement began in his heart

Today – as it was then

Change always begins in the heart

So if we want to have change

Come into our lives

Into our world

When will the arc of history change for us?

When will the arc of history change in our family?

Or in our community?

1. See

Nehemiah knew about it

He had, at some level, accepted it

As just the way things are

But for some reason

On that day

He saw it

As if for the first time

What is there, in your life, that God needs you to “SEE”?

It maybe something pretty new

It may have been true your whole life

It maybe something that our culture is really moved by

Or it maybe something that our culture is completely blinded to

What is it that God needs you to see?

Maybe parts of your life that are not submitted to God

Maybe it's an old habit or character flaw that you've just grown to accept

You don't even see it anymore

Other people see it... but not you

Maybe it's needs in our community

God has dreams of *new* ways to reach *new* people

Maybe its needs around the world

Nehemiah didn't walk past the broken down walls of Jerusalem
everyday

In fact, he probably never had!

Nehemiah – from the other side of the world

Had a vision to impact people he had never met

Because he saw them

What does God need us to see?

We need to ask God to shows us these things

I love this prayer from the Old Testament:

2 Kings 6:17b – Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.

Something that jumped out to me about this passage in Nehemiah

There was no overt call from God

Think about it

We never read where God called Nehemiah to do something

At least not any more overtly

Than He was calling everyone else

Sometimes we see that:

Moses was called

Gideon was called

John the Baptist was called

Each of the disciples were called

But we don't see it here

And I think that's because it didn't happen

I assume that God may have been prepping his heart

Prompting him as he prayed

But there was no major life event

Where God appeared to him from a burning bush or something

And asked him to address this problem

He just saw it

And because he saw it

And had the ability to do something about it

That was enough

Sometimes people will come to me

Asking what grand thing God wants them to do

And sometimes you get that

I can tell you where I was standing

When God called me to plant WellSpring

But other times

You just become aware of something specific

That's broken down

And you just get burdened by it

And no one asks you to fix it

But you pray about it

And God provides what you need

We did that with JetPacks years ago

We learned that there were kids in our local schools

Who had free & reduced lunch during the week

But didn't have enough to eat on the weekend

We were horrified by the thought

The school didn't ask for help

The families didn't ask for help

But today – through the ministry of the Well

And lots of generous people

Every student in Spring Hill

Elementary, middle, and high school

Every student in Spring Hill

Has food on the weekend if they want it

And now the Well is expanding deeper into Maury County

And WellSpring is sponsoring 2 Columbia schools

In addition to Chapman's Retreat

Here across the street

What if we get to the end of our life

And stand before the Lord

And we have to confess to Him about the needs around us:

"I just didn't see it"

As a church, collectively, what if we get to the end of our lives

And we stand before The Lord

And we have to confess:

"We just honestly didn't see them"

First, friends, we have to "see"

2. Feel

Nehemiah did more than see the problem

He felt it

Down in his gut

Re-read verse 4

This reminds me of Jesus

Matthew 9:35-36 - Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

It starts by Him seeing

But then it moves to compassion

The original word translated compassion

Is the Greek word σπλαγγνίζομαι (splagnizomai)

Which literally means – moved in the bowels

Jesus was moved

Down deep

By the plights of people

And Nehemiah was moved

Down deep

By the broken down wall in Jerusalem

What, in our life, generates that kind of response?

We can't be moved by everything every day

But if you & I are never *that* broken over *something*

We're just moving too fast to *really* see

We need to see and feel

3. Pray

Notice the first thing Nehemiah actually *did* was pray...

"for some days"

We are far too quick to jump to conclusions

About what we need to do

Or how we need to help

Without first going to God for His power and authority

Before Nehemiah does *anything*

He prays "for some days"

Jesus did the same thing:

Matthew 9:36 – When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

He sees it

He's moved by it

But what's He have the disciples *do*?

Matthew 9:37-38 - Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

Jesus – God in the flesh

Says before we move

We need to pray

If Jesus – God in the flesh

Needs to pray before He acts

We certainly need to do more of that

John 15:5b (NLT) – Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

We need to pray

And we need workers thrust out into the fields for work

But it comes through prayer

Nehemiah was just an ordinary guy... a cupbearer

So there was no way that he could fix the problems of broken down walls

He was 750 miles away

He had no supplies

He had no help

He had no authority

Nehemiah knew that He could only address this God sized problem

With God sized help

Our problem is that we just settle

For only tackling problems we can fix on our own

That's what everyone had done in this story until Nehemiah

For 141 years

Everyone said "we can't fix that" ... "we can't fix that"

Everyone until Nehemiah

Nehemiah was moved

Moved enough to spend "some days" in prayer

Mark Batterson - "Bold prayers honor God; and God honors bold prayers."

Our world today has God-sized problems

Problems we can't fix with our power

And the world needs the church to be moved

Moved enough to pray for God-sized solutions

So Nehemiah had eyes to see

He was moved

He prayed

Before we get to the 4th step

Let's acknowledge a key point here

We have many advantages over Nehemiah

We live in the freest, most prosperous nation in the history of the world

We have more access to travel

More ways to communicate

More expendable income than any other culture, ever

We have many advantages over Nehemiah

Nehemiah had a large vision

But no game

Many of us could make a significant impact in the world

But we have no vision

Or our vision is consumed with things that don't matter

On top of our abilities and our freedom

Jesus has given us spiritual authority

Matthew 28:18-20 – Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus is going to be with us

He's bringing all authority in Heaven and on Earth with Him

And He's already commissioned us... to GO!

We need to see and feel and pray

But then we sometimes just need to go

Read Nehemiah 2:1-4a

He's been moved at a deep level for people he's never met

He's been praying fervently for four months that God will do something powerful

And now he's approaching the king and asking for help

Read Nehemiah 2:4-5

And God works in the King's heart

He inspires the king to give Nehemiah time off

He gives Nehemiah materials for the wall and gates

He even gives Nehemiah wood to build a house

I don't think I pray enough

And the king sends him with workers to help *do* the building

And all of the sudden

With God's help

Nehemiah has the ability

To do what seemed impossible before he prayed

It didn't start with Nehemiah's ability

It never starts with our ability

It always starts with his eyes

He saw the walls

He saw the need

He was moved to pray

He was moved... to move

So what about us?

Where does change begin?

When will the arc of history change for us?

In our eyes

In our gut

As we're moved enough to pray

And finally in our feet

As we are moved enough to obey God

And go where He sends us

To make changes as He provides