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Nehemiah 1

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 7

“Helping the Troubled and Disgraced”

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In the opening chapter of the book of Nehemiah, we see Nehemiah weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying. He is heart-broken over the condition of his fellow Jews living in “trouble and disgrace.” So he put his grief to work and rolled up his sleeves to help them in their broken condition. He serves as an example to us about being a church that helps those who are troubled and disgraced. May we be an extension of Jesus’ love and grace in our world!

Historical Background

1. The book of Nehemiah is a continuation of the book of Ezra.
2. The book was compiled from Nehemiah’s memoirs, but was most likely written by Ezra.
3. The timeline for the book starts in 445BC.
4. The book of Nehemiah is chronologically the last of the Old Testament books, with the exception of the book of Malachi.
 - a. Malachi was a prophet who ministered about 400BC.
 - b. Some Bible scholars believe Malachi ministered during the time of Nehemiah or a few years after Nehemiah.
5. All of the books in the Bible that come after the book of Nehemiah can be inserted within the timeline found in the books of Genesis through Nehemiah.

6. The events of the book of Nehemiah mark the countdown to the first coming of Christ into Jerusalem.
 - a. [Daniel 9:24-25](#) - “ *“Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One [Christ], the ruler, comes, there will be seven “sevens,’ and sixty-two “sevens.” It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.’ ”*
 - b. From the issuing of the decree the Bible tells us there will be sixty-nine blocks of seven years, or 483 years.
 - c. This prophecy, using the Babylonian calendar that was common in that day, brings us to 32AD, when Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday!

Nehemiah

7. In Hebrew, Nehemiah’s name means, God comforts.
8. He was a Jew who was born and raised among the Jewish exiles in Persia, which was formerly known as Babylonia.
9. He traveled to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding of the city.
10. He was appointed governor of Judea, for the twelve years he lived there.
11. Nehemiah was a man of prayer, and the Bible includes twelve recorded prayers.
12. According to [Nehemiah 1:11](#), he served in the palace of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, as his cupbearer.
 - a. A cupbearer was not just a “drink tester,” although that may have been necessary from time to time.
 - b. A cupbearer held a position of high honor in the court of the king, and would have been a trusted confidant and advisor of King Artaxerxes.
 - c. Nehemiah would have been trusted in all matters.
 - d. It is not known how he was promoted to such a prominent position.
13. Nehemiah had no idea how the exiles that lived in Jerusalem were doing, until he received word from his brother and several other men who brought back a first-hand report.

14. When Nehemiah heard their account of all that was taking place, he was heartbroken.
15. Nehemiah was a godly man who was both a tender man and a tough man.
 - a. [Nehemiah 13:25a](#) - *"I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair."*
 - b. [Nehemiah 1:4a](#) - *"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept."*

We Must Always Have A Heart For People Who Are Troubled And Disgraced

16. [Nehemiah 1:3](#) - *"They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'"*
17. A brief historical review includes the following:
 - a. In 586BC, King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and completely destroyed the city, taking the Jews into captivity in Babylonia.
 - b. The Babylonians were succeeded by the Persian Empire.
 - c. King Darius decreed that the Jews could return to their homeland.
 - d. Zerubbabel led the first wave of exiles that returned to Israel (approximately 50,000 Jews), approximately 100 years before Nehemiah.
 - e. Ezra led the second wave, approximately 15 years before Nehemiah, and an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 people returned to Israel.
 - f. Nehemiah had never been to Israel, because his family stayed in Persia.
 - g. The first thing they did was built the altar, which demonstrated their seriousness about being in right relationship with the Lord.
 - h. The city was in ruins, other than the Temple, which they rebuilt.
 - i. The people lived on the outskirts of Jerusalem.
 - j. Pastor Gary said, "The broken condition of the city is representative of the broken condition of their lives. And when your life is broken, you don't repair other things that are broken around you."
 - k. In [Nehemiah 1:5-11](#), we read Nehemiah's prayer of personal and national confession and repentance.
18. Nehemiah was motivated and brokenhearted for two reasons:
 - a. He had a sense of patriotism for the land he loved.
 - b. He had a sense of compassion for the people he loved.
19. Pastor Gary said he considered it to be noteworthy that Nehemiah had compassion for people he didn't personally know, and a city he had never visited, and a land he had never seen!

20. Only the Lord could have put these concerns and feelings on Nehemiah's heart, and this is true of people who are called to be missionaries in a foreign land.
21. Pastor Gary encouraged us to remember that we too must have a heart full of compassion for people who are troubled and disgraced, and we, as a church and as individuals, must be willing to help them because of their broken condition.
22. Having a heart of compassion for troubled and disgraced people is a philosophy of ministry at Cornerstone Chapel that will never change.
23. Pastor Gary said there are a lot of people today who think their life is normal, because they are unaware of their broken condition, having become desensitized to their life and circumstances.
24. There are other people who have no illusions, and they are painfully aware that sinful choices and decisions they've made, brought them to a greatly troubled and disgraced place life.

Jesus' Heart Of Compassion For Troubled And Disgraced People

25. [John 8:1-11](#) - *"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' they were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said, to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.' "*
26. Pastor Gary said this was a 100% "set-up" designed to trap Jesus, and this time they stooped to an all-time low, because they humiliated a woman in the process of trying to discredit Jesus.

27. This event took place during one of the Feasts, and it was typical for the Rabbis to teach in the courtyard of the Temple.
28. There may have been dozens or hundreds of people gathered around listening to Jesus teaching, when suddenly, the religious leaders forcibly brought this woman in front of the entire group of people.
29. It's hard to imagine the level of humiliation, embarrassment, and feelings of disgrace she must have felt.
30. It's worth noting that the person missing from this account is the man, who is believed to have been in collusion with the religious leaders.
31. The Law of Moses, in Leviticus, required both the man and the woman to be stoned to death.
 - a. [Leviticus 20:10](#) - *"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife - with the wife of his neighbor - both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death."*
 - b. [Deuteronomy 22:22](#) - *"If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel."*
32. We don't know what Jesus wrote, but we do know that his response was brilliant!
33. Jesus was not "soft on sin," because he said, *"[go] and leave your life of sin."*
34. The people disgraced her, but Jesus "graced" her!
35. Pastor Gary said, "I want our church to always be a place, where like Nehemiah, we weep over the troubled, disgraced lives of people, and like Jesus, we minister grace to those people. We can't only be known as a church of truth, we must also be known as a church of grace and truth; where troubled, disgraced people can come [and allow the] love of the Lord Jesus [to] shine light on their broken condition. [They will realize their broken condition] and come to a place of confession and repentance before God, [who] loves them and forgives them, and shows them his grace."

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Nehemiah 1:1-11](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. How has the Holy Spirit helped you become a godly person?
4. Do you think others would say you demonstrate the tenderness of the Lord?
5. What are some of the ways you are intentional about having a heart of compassion for people who are troubled and disgraced?
6. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about the ways the Lord helped them become aware of their broken condition, and how he brought them to a place of confession, repentance, and healing.
7. Read and discuss [John 8:1-11](#).
8. What do you think Jesus wrote in the dirt?
 - a. Some have suggested that Jesus wrote the 10 Commandments or an I.O.U. for the woman's sin or the details of their individual sins, or something else?
9. What are some examples of times when you intentionally "graced" a disgraced person?
10. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about Cornerstone Chapel and the people of our church. (See #35 above)
11. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).