

## Restoring Part 5

George was 28 years old, single, and still living with his parents. One Sunday morning, George told his mother he wasn't going to church. "First," he said, "I'm tired. Second, the people there don't like me. And third, the sermons are dull." But George's mother wouldn't take no for an answer. "George," she said, "you have to go. First, we always worship on Sunday. Second, it doesn't matter whether they like us or not. And third, you are the pastor!"

Great illustration of leadership: In serving God, we don't seek out positions of leadership, they seek us.

- And today we turn our attention to the final act in God's three-part process for restoring His children
  - The final step of restoring leadership, through a man named Nehemiah
  - Last week we examined step 2, restoring teaching
    - Our central conclusion was that God desires to bring about in His people a full knowledge of Himself through a study of His word
    - We remember the writer of Hebrews saying unless we devote ourselves to the practice of studying God's word
      - We will not have the ability to discern good from evil
    - So if His people are to move forward in pleasing their Lord, then they must walk in the knowledge of Him
  - The reason for addressing teaching separately from leadership is simple
    - A godly leader must lead according to God's word
    - He must give direction and place expectations on the people trusting that those people will follow his command
      - And if the leader is going to exhort the people on the basis of God's word
      - Then he must expect that those people have a similar respect and appreciation for God's word
    - Ex: Our president can command authority in our land because the people he leads agrees that the Constitution rules over us all

- Similarly, the leader God appoints is called to rule according to the word and the people must receive him on that basis
- Sadly, a knowledge of God's word won't eliminate the schemes of the enemy
  - The enemy and the world he controls never ceases in their attacks against God's people
    - Even when we are taught God's word, our flesh is still capable of being draw away from a walk in that truth
    - This is exactly what began to happen to refugees who had returned to the land of Israel
  - And the story of that stumble sets us our studies in Nehemiah

[Ezra 9:1](#) ¶ Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

[Ezra 9:2](#) "For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

- Remember when the first group of Jews returned to the land under Zurababble how they felt?
  - They were afraid for the people living around them
  - They were surrounded by the pagan cultures that had re-established themselves in the land after the Israelites had been taken away
  - Now, some 60-70 years after they've returned to the land, here they are intermarrying with these culture
    - At first, we might be tempted to dismiss this as a minor indiscretion
      - After all, it's just a marriage

- Do you remember why the nation of Israel had received God's punishment in the first place?
  - God brought Neb and took the nation into captivity because they had played the harlot in worshipping false idols and gods
  - And that idol worship began with Solomon taking foreign wives
    - Those women brought a corrupting influence into the kings court and the nation
    - And when a leader becomes unfaithful, it's only a matter of time before those under him follow
- In verse 2 we hear that this particular offense included the princes and rulers of the clans and tribes
  - Here again, the pattern of sin that had been responsible for the previous stumbling of the nation seems to be repeating itself yet again

[Ezra 9:3](#) When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled.

[Ezra 9:4](#) Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.

- Ezra steps into the gap
  - And he shows his immense displeasure and astonishment and fear of the Lord for the sake of the sinning Jews
    - Ezra knew what this meant
    - It was an act that would almost certainly provoke God's anger
      - They had just been restored to the land not 70 years earlier, and here they are starting the very same mistake again
    - What do you think God was prepared to do in response to this offense?
      - Ezra doesn't want to find out

- And when the people see Ezra's response, those who feared God's wrath gathered to Ezra
  - And they all sat perplexed
  - Finally, Ezra speaks to the people

[Ezra 9:5](#) ¶ But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God;

[Ezra 9:6](#) and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.

[Ezra 9:7](#) "Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings *and* our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as *it is* this day.

[Ezra 9:8](#) "But now for a brief moment grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.

[Ezra 9:9](#) "For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

[Ezra 9:10](#) ¶ "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,

[Ezra 9:11](#) which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end *and* with their impurity.

[Ezra 9:12](#) 'So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good *things* of the land and leave *it* as an inheritance to your sons forever.'

[Ezra 9:13](#) "After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited *us* less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us an escaped remnant as this,

[Ezra 9:14](#) shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape?

[Ezra 9:15](#) "O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as *it is* this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this."

- Ezra gives an impassioned speech to the people calling them to repent and return to following God's commands
  - If you were to read into chapter 10, you learn how the people repent at hearing Ezra's words
    - And he commands them to separate from their foreign wives and seek God's forgiveness
    - Which they do
  - But this whole episode is likely to repeat unless two problems are solved
    - First, Israel needs a wall to separate itself from the peoples living around them
    - Secondly, they need a leader to direct them according to the ways of righteousness
- As our series moves into our final book, the book of Nehemiah
  - I invite you to study with me the pattern God uses to raise up godly leadership for his children as He restores them out of discipline
    - The book of Nehemiah is often taught as a study in leadership principles
      - And there are many good examples of leadership principles at work in the story of Nehemiah
    - But that's not the true purpose of this account
    - The real purpose is to demonstrate how a godly leader will be raised up and called to work among God's people to complete His restoration

[Neh. 1:1](#) ¶ The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

¶ Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,

[Neh. 1:2](#) that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

[Neh. 1:3](#) They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

[Neh. 1:4](#) ¶ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- Nehemiah is employed in the service of the king of Persia
  - Look down at verse 11
    - He's a cupbearer for the king
  - And in the month of Chislev, roughly Nov-Dec
    - He hears about the plight of his people in Jerusalem
  - Now consider that this news comes fourteen years after Ezra had been sent down to Jerusalem
    - Nehemiah is still asking about the people who went down to the city
    - And then when he hears the news of how they city was still vulnerable
      - Basically, it's still a wreck
      - He is overcome with grief for days
  - If you ever wanted to know what a godly burden looks like, here it is
    - Nehemiah is carrying a burden for his people and the city
      - And here he is still asking about them 14 years later
      - Hoping to hear good news
    - But when he doesn't, it crushes him
      - That's a reaction that can only be explained as a burden laid on his heart by God
  - In fact, Nehemiah carries a burden for God's glory and His word

[Neh. 1:5](#) I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

[Neh. 1:6](#) let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the

sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.

[Neh. 1:7](#) "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

[Neh. 1:8](#) "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

[Neh. 1:9](#) but *if* you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'

[Neh. 1:10](#) "They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

[Neh. 1:11](#) "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."

¶ Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

- Nehemiah is so distraught over the circumstances in the city that prays for God to honor His word concerning the people
  - He's referring to Lev 26, where God declared that when Israel repented, He would restore them
    - Nehemiah is asking that God would be true to His word at this time
  - Immediately, we're confronted with a basic principle of how God brings leaders to guide His people
    - He doesn't cause them to audition for the post
    - He doesn't entice them with promises of personal fame or fortune
    - He doesn't lay out a career path where each group is merely another rung on a ladder
  - When God wants a man to move into a position of leadership and restore His people
    - He gives that man a burden
      - An unshakable, unmistakable calling to serve God's people

- And to do so for God's glory and for the fulfillment of His word
  - The people are important, but it's God glory that matters most
- Nehemiah was burdened
  - Hw was asking about these people long after most everyone else had forgotten them
    - He mourns the bad news
    - And He immediately appeals to God for a solution
  - He was a leader who recognized that obedience to God's word demanded action
  - And in verse 11 Nehemiah begins to contemplate that solution
    - Nehemiah begins to wonder if he might be the one God will use to accomplish that plan
  - But how can Nehemiah be the one, since he was the cupbearer for the king
- The role of cupbearer is an interesting one
  - Ostensibly, he served the king his cup
    - But the role was much more important than that
      - He was much like a body guard
      - He had the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the king's food supply
    - He was like the head of the secret service
  - Since he knew he would eat and drink anything before the king did, he made sure the entire food chain was free from enemies
    - He commanded a great deal of respect and authority
      - And he naturally became one of the king's most trusted advisors
  - In other words, Nehemiah served in a role where you couldn't just up and leave anytime you wanted

- The only way he could fact upon his burden was if God open a door for him to leave
- And so God brings about that opportunity

[Neh. 2:1](#) ¶ And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine *was* before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

[Neh. 2:2](#) So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid.

- The second chapter begins with the month of Nisan
  - This is roughly Mar-Apr on our calendar
    - This is significant because it means that between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Nehemiah, roughly four months have passed
  - For about 120 days, Nehemiah went into the work and into the king’s presence with this burden on his heart
    - He was standing in the company of a man who could have released him to join his brethren with just a word
    - He must have thought time and time again about how he could raise the topic or ask the question of the king
      - His desire to press the issue and receive a response must have been eating away at him
      - And yet he didn’t say anything to the king for four long months
  - What was Nehemiah doing during that time?
    - Remember verse 4
      - Nehemiah began four months of praying to God for action
    - Now as we read this story, it’s easy to connect the dots
      - Too easy in fact
    - We see Nehemiah pray and then we see God act

- But what do you think was running through Nehemiah's mind at about the second or third month?
  - Do think he was growing impatient with God?
    - Have you ever had that same tendency in your walk
    - You feel you've done your Christian duty to pray to God for an answer
      - You've been praying for some time
      - But eventually, you decide either that God isn't going to answer you
      - Or that you need to do something instead of nothing
    - So you get busy
- When God is ready for us to act, I am convinced that God is fully capable of making His will known to each of us
  - When God wants you to know it's time to act and when He's ready to show you where and how to respond, He won't hesitate to do it
    - And you won't miss it
    - You might not like the answer, and you might not obey it, but you won't miss it
  - So often the real test of prayer is in the waiting for God to answer
    - And in not assuming that God's silence is equal to an answer
- Nehemiah is often taught as a man of prayer
  - A man who sought God's will before taking action
    - And that he certainly was
  - But I think we often overlook the real lesson in Nehemiah's prayer life
    - Nehemiah was going to wait on God to open a door and direct his steps
      - Nehemiah's real virtue with respect to prayer was his patience

- If God had not opened the door for another 4 months or 4 years, I believe Nehemiah would have waited
  - And all the while, his burden would have continued to be there for his people in Israel
- But then God opened that door for Nehemiah
  - In verse 1, Nehemiah says I had not been sad in the king's presence
    - This was an important detail to the story because part of Nehemiah's official duties were to never show any sadness in the presence of the king
  - In fact, no one in the king's court could show any sadness or unpleasant emotion before the King
    - Under Persian law, anyone who would dare show themselves unhappy before the king could be executed, and usually were
    - The Persians were especially strict in enforcing their laws
  - And so Nehemiah has been careful to keep to that expectation in his duties, he says
- But then in verse 2, the king perceives Nehemiah's sadness nonetheless
  - Now, if we are going to take Nehemiah at his word, and I believe we should,
    - Then it's necessary to assume that the king didn't come to know of Nehemiah's sad disposition through observation
      - He must have come to know if it supernaturally
      - In other words, God revealed to king Darius that Nehemiah was sad
    - Which causes Nehemiah great fear, because he knew the king could have him put to death
  - This is God opening a door
    - God selected this day to reveal to the king of Nehemiah's burden
      - And though Nehemiah did nothing different on this day, God intervened to open this conversation

- God could have created this opportunity on any day, but He choose to wait until today
  - And Nehemiah's patience in waiting on God was now being rewarded
- When God opens up a need for leadership for the sake of His people, He also raises up men to fill that need
  - I believe the scriptures teach us that when God is ready to provide that leader, he will begin with a man who's burdened for the work that lies ahead
    - A burden for God's people and for God's word and for God's glory
  - And that man will often be someone who isn't looking for the opportunity
    - At least not at first
  - And when he senses the burden, his first response will be to pray and seek the Lord's intervention
    - But ultimately, that burden must be combined with patience to ensure that God's timing and purpose lead the way
  - Leader is a man who answers a call, not a man who calls with all the answers
    - And he knows that if God has brought the burden and the call, then He can be trusted to provide the means of answer as well
- Finally, God will often raise a leader who doesn't fit the classic mold
  - Here, God is raising up a cupbearer to become a wall builder and leader among a nation
    - Nehemiah didn't go to wall building school
    - More than that, he had no background in building at all, as far as we know
    - In other words, in the eyes of men, he was wholly unqualified
  - And yet he was God's man for this job

- To be fair, Nehemiah was someone who had already developed leadership expertise in his role as cupbearer
  - So it's not that God had done nothing to prepare the man
  - It just might not look like the way the world would expect
- As we leave the study today and look ahead to next week, consider the effort God is willing to go to bring the right man to the task of restoring His people
  - He draws someone from a great distance
    - And at great personal risk he gives that man a deep burden for His people
    - And He orchestrates events within the halls of the most powerful man on earth
    - All so that a cupbearer might be appointment to this important task
  - What is God willing to do for you when the time comes to restore you with godly leadership?
    - While we could draw comparisons easily for the sake of the church
      - Don't forget to make a personal application
    - What kind of man or woman will God bring you when the time is right to lead you forward in your walk of obedience
      - Are we going to be ready to accept them when that time comes?

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