

“Broken To Make A Difference”

Nehemiah 1-2

Sermon Series: “Broken”

Introduction: It’s an understatement, and even a cliché at this point, to say that we are living in unprecedented times. Our world is full of massive problems. Honestly, I think it feels overwhelming at times. How are we going to respond as individual followers of Christ and as the body of Christ? Are we going to give up, give in to the world, complain, rant or make a difference? Nehemiah is a man in the Bible that God broke in order to use him to make a great difference. I believe He wants to do the same thing with us today. He is breaking us in order for us to make a difference.

Background of Nehemiah’s Day: God chooses to use ordinary people to change the world. Nehemiah is a great example of this. He was an ordinary person in the sense that he wasn’t royalty or a religious leader, and God used him to solve a 140 year old problem in 52 days. Nehemiah was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes I. He was obviously a man with character who was trustworthy because the cupbearer was the wine taster for the king who was there to make sure the wine wasn’t poisoned. A cupbearer was often a confidant to the king so this could be a position of great influence. Other than risking his life by tasting the wine, Nehemiah would have had a comfortable life.

However, a simple conversation with his brother changed his life. Nehemiah was in the king’s palace at Susa in the month of Chislev (which is roughly November or December on our calendar) when Hanani came with men from Judah, and Nehemiah asked him about Jerusalem and the remnant of people who had returned there. Hanani told him that the walls were “broken down and its gates are burned with fire.” This was both a dangerous and embarrassing situation. They were in this predicament because of their unfaithfulness to God so they were failing to be a light to the Gentiles and instead bringing reproach on the name of God. In regard to the historical background, the study notes in the Believer’s Study Bible say, “Just as the Israelites were taken into exile in three successive stages (605, 597, 586 B.C.), they returned in three stages. The first stage occurred under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (538 B.C.). After a long delay, this return resulted in the rebuilding of the temple (520-516 B.C.), encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Ezra led the second return in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (458 B.C.; cf. Ezra 7:1, 8). Nehemiah led the final return in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I.”

1. The godly response to sin and suffering is brokenness (v. 1-4). Sin and suffering breaks God’s heart so it ought to break our hearts. Are we embracing this brokenness or running from it? It’s easy to stick our head in the sand and avoid pain or engage in escapist activities to avoid really dealing with the pain in the world and the lives of

others, but Nehemiah inquired about what was going on and responded to what he learned. How are we responding when the walls are broken down and the gates are burned with fire in our world today?

2. Brokenness is expressed by:

A. Sitting down to mourn (v. 1:1-4). The Bible speaks a lot about joy and rejoicing, but it also speaks a lot about lamenting. Something is wrong if we don't mourn over sin, injustice, and suffering. We shouldn't end here, but we should begin here. Of course, this should include mourning over our own sin and not just the sin of others or circumstances around us (see Isaiah 6:5).

B. Kneeling down to pray (1:5-11).

-Pray based on the character of God

-Pray personally for ourselves and for others as well

-Confess sins in prayer

-Pray according to the Word of God and claim the promises of God

-Look to the cross as we pray

-Pray practically in regard to what God wants you to do

C. Rising up to act (1:11-2:20).

People who make a difference in the world have an attitude that says, "Somebody's got to do something, and that somebody is me."

A. Act obediently (1:11).

B. Act courageously (2:1-3).

C. Act sacrificially (2:1-3).

D. Act prayerfully (2:4). This is an expression of dependence upon God that we see numerous times in this book.

E. Act wisely (2:8). He had obviously thought through things and had a plan in mind before speaking to the king.

Conclusion: It would be easy for us to shrink back right now, but the church is more important than ever. It is imperative that we fulfill the mission God has given us at True Life. How are you contributing to the fulfillment of that mission? Are you giving, serving, praying, and witnessing? Personally, what breaks your heart? What burdens you? Your burden is a clue to your divine assignment. Where does God want you to make a difference? Who does God want to use you with to make a difference in their lives? Who's Your One?