

**9-11 Ten Years Later
Nehemiah 1:1-11**

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Text Introduction:

- ◆ Days of Reflection and Remembrance are good because life slows down and we ponder again the meaning of those moments.
- ◆ For whatever reason these are the things that I remember most about that day ten years ago: secretary coming in, phone calls starting to come in including one from the local newspaper and one from a local radio station, going home that day (Linett and Josh), David Letterman program with Dan Rather (we are in this all together), and the worship service that Sunday (we sang louder).

I haven't always been very good at this, but at various points in my life, I have been more consistent in keeping a journal. Fortunately, I was in a pretty good habit of keeping a journal back in September 2001. Exactly what I was thinking ten years ago is probably best captured in that journal. Here is what I wrote on September 12:

Yesterday was the worst day in very recent history for our country. Planes were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, and another plane suspected for Washington went down in Pennsylvania. The theory is terrorist activity. (I thought that it was interesting that I used the word "theory.")

It is hard to describe the mood. It is simply awful. Planes are still grounded. Wall Street is closed, etc., etc.

God, I know two things about You. God loves the world, and God is in control. These events must be interpreted in light of these two facts.

Second Chronicles 32 speaks to me. Linett showed it to me last night. Hezekiah's mission was to speak encouragingly. Today is not the day for doomsday—today is the day for encouragement. The most encouraging thing is knowing that You are greater. Oh LORD, show your greatness. Give greatness to the President and his staff. Give greatness to the rescue workers. Give greatness to Your church and to your pastors to give encouragement from Your Word.

Now, ten years beyond 9/11, I believe that my role is to be first of all an encourager. Certainly, there is much to be concerned about. There is ample ammunition for the doomsday prophet. We will save that for another day. Today, I want our attention to be given to that encouraging word from God's Word. For that, we turn our attention to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah.

Text: ¹ The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah:

During the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, when I was in the fortress city of Susa, ² Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with men from Judah, and I questioned them about Jerusalem and the Jewish remnant that had returned from exile. ³ They said to me, "The survivors in the province, who

returned from the exile, are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem's wall has been broken down, and its gates have been burned down."

⁴ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ I said,

LORD God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands, ⁶ let Your eyes be open and Your ears be attentive to hear Your servant's prayer that I now pray to You day and night for Your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we have committed against You. Both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have acted corruptly toward You and have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances You gave Your servant Moses. ⁸ Please remember what You commanded Your servant Moses: "[If] you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. ⁹ But if you return to Me and carefully observe My commands, even though your exiles were banished to the ends of the earth, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have My name dwell." ¹⁰ They are Your servants and Your people. You redeemed [them] by Your great power and strong hand. ¹¹ Please, Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and to that of Your servants who delight to revere Your name. Give Your servant success today, and have compassion on him in the presence of this man.

[At the time,] I was the king's cupbearer.

Introduction: Having done by undergraduate work in History, I am very much a believer in the old adage that history continues to repeat itself. I am also familiar with that cliché that indicates that history is doomed to repeat itself because we fail to learn from it. September 11, 2001, has many parallels to a particular part of Old Testament history. The OT book of Nehemiah tells us part of that story. In the 8th century B.C. Babylon invaded the land of Israel and hauled many into exile and there they would remain for 70 years. The Babylonian Empire gave way to the Persians, and the Persians began to allow the Jews to return. When they returned they saw that their beloved city was burned and the walls around the city were destroyed.

Nehemiah, being a Jew, but also a cupbearer to the King of Persia, asks about his city and is horrified to learn of its fate. Nehemiah 1-2 tells us that he does three things: prays, in his prayer asks God's forgiveness, and then commits himself to rebuilding the wall. These three actions give us our outline of application today.

Look Up

Nehemiah's example serves as an example of what we can and should do in every catastrophe of life. The bad report that Nehemiah received produced a burdened heart, which then leads to burdened praying. Now, understand, a burdened heart that does not lead to praying is only worry. Burdened hearts that do not lead to burdened praying is just worry.

Nehemiah's prayer is rooted in God.

- The Character of God
 - Great God—"great and awesome God" literally one who inspires fear.
 - God of Grace—covenant of love in the NIV is literally, "hesed"—grace.

- The Compassion of God—if confession is real, Nehemiah knows God will forgive.
- The Covenant of God—calls on God to remember the covenant

The point is that our praying ought to be rooted in God. This is faith. God will hear, God can hear, God can act, He will act. Why wouldn't He? Our prayer life is rooted in our dependence on God.

A young man was making his first climb in the Alps. Making the climb with guides he felt safe. As he reached the summit, the guides wanted the young man to get the first view. As the young man arrived, he leaped to his feet, but the guide quickly dragged him down. "On your knees, sir!" he shouted. "You are never safe here except on your knees."

Look Within

Nehemiah's prayer is also rooted in humility. Let us understand that Nehemiah is only partially about the rebuilding of a wall. More than that, the book of Nehemiah is a book about revival. Certainly, Nehemiah is burdened because the walls of his beloved city are in ruins, but more than that, he is burdened that the spiritual condition of his countrymen is also a pile of rubble. However, Nehemiah does not point the finger at everyone around him. He first of all points the finger at himself. He is content with looking within as the root of the problem. His prayer is confident, but it is also contrite.

Looking within ought to cause us to look at least at two things:

At our own Sin—We cannot reflect on a day like 9-11 without remembering what the day was like on 9-11. We actually might think about what 9-12 was like ten years ago. I think there was an increase in prayer, an increase in seeking God. Unfortunately, we have to confess that today, as a whole, our nation, and perhaps even our own lives look a whole lot more like 9-10-01 than 9-12-01. That is, we have returned—lesson unlearned.

At our own Mortality—When we think on things like 9-11, it would be wonderful and comforting to be able to huddle in our churches or huddle with our families and declare our safety. However, we cannot do that. We are better to speak the reality that we must face our own mortality and the unknown and uncertain timing, but know that we can be prepared. We cannot choose our appointed time of death, but we can choose on how we will live between now and then.

That actually causes us to look at the last truth.

Look Beyond

What can I personally do? Our world changes little by little. We are a nation of individuals. We make change in our world because we decide to do so one by one. Nehemiah realized that he ought to pray, but he also realized that there was more to do. Nehemiah 2 tells us this part of the story. Nehemiah 2:5 indicates that he sought permission. Nehemiah 2:11-15 tells us that he developed a plan. Nehemiah 2:16-18 tells us that he persuaded others to join him in this good work. Nehemiah 2:20 tells us that all along the way Nehemiah depended upon God for his help. In short, Nehemiah's story tells us that he got busy doing what God called him to do.

On that tragic morning of September 11, 2001, The Brooklyn Tabernacle lost four of its members. One victim was a police officer. The officer's funeral was held at the church building, and Rudy Giuliani, then mayor of New York City, had been asked to share a few thoughts. In his book *You Were Made for More*, Jim Cymbala, pastor of The Brooklyn Tabernacle, records what the mayor shared with the audience that morning:

"You know people, I've learned something through all this. Let me see if I can express it to you. When everybody was fleeing that building, and the cops and the firefighters and the EMS people were heading up into it, do you think any of them said, 'I wonder how many blacks are up there for us to save? I wonder what percentage are whites up here? How many Jews are there? Let's see—are these people making \$400,000 a year, or \$24,000, or—?'

"No, when you're saving lives, they're all precious. And that's how we're supposed to live all the time. How would you want the cops to treat you if you were on the seventy-fifth floor that day? Would you want them to say, 'Excuse me, but I've got to get the bosses out first'? Not exactly.

"I confess I haven't always lived this way. But I'm convinced that God wants us to do it. He wants us to value every human life the way he does."

The words of the mayor moved everyone who had gathered that day for the funeral. Cymbala concludes:

"I sat there thinking, *My goodness, the mayor is preaching a truth that has eluded so many of our churches throughout New York and the country!* He may have stood for other policies that I could not agree with, but on that day, he was right on the mark. The truth of what he said penetrated my heart.

The world you and I live in is falling apart before our eyes. We are God's only representatives on the planet and simply cannot take time to pick and choose who needs help. They *all* need help. They *all* need the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. They *all* need to be rescued from the horror of an eternity apart from God. (Copied from Preachingtoday.com as quoted from *Jim Cymbala, You Were Made for More (Zondervan, 2008), pp. 94-96*)

What are we to do?