August 3, 2014

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

Ordinary World Changers

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Nehemiah 1:1-4 New Revised Standard Version

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, “The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.” When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Today we begin a new message series called “Change Your World in 52 Days”[[1]](#footnote-2). We are not going to do this sermon series for 52 days, but the story that we are going to be looking at for the next 4 weeks is about how a man named Nehemiah changed the city of Jerusalem in 52 days. He accomplished an amazing task. We are going to talk about why he did that and how he did that.

Ordinary World Changers. God specializes in using ordinary people to make an imprint on the world. There is a slice of the world just waiting for your imprint. How will you shape your slice of the world?

Nehemiah lives in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire and Nehemiah is a cup bearer for the King. A cup bearer was actually a dangerous job because the cup bearer had to taste before the King did and if the cup bearer fell over dead, they would know that the drink had been poisoned.

Hanukah happens at the end of Chislev. So it is November, December in 444 BC in modern day Iran and the walls of Jerusalem are broken, the temple is destroyed, and the leaders of the Jewish community are in Assyria. For 140 years the walls have been broken down and God’s people have been in captivity, far from their homeland. Their capital Jerusalem was all but destroyed. After Persian Empire succeeds Assyrian Empire, some of the Jewish exiles are allowed to return to their homeland which is described in the book of Ezra.

But the walls of Jerusalem are still destroyed. And those who have been able to return to Jerusalem are in great trouble and shame. Nehemiah thinks that someone had to do something about this. Nehemiah is not a priest, or a prophet. He is not a warrior or a king. He is a man who saw something that bothered him. And he felt like someone had to do something about this. Have you ever felt like that? Somebody has to do something about this, about hungry children, about hurting people. What breaks your heart? Seeing a parent belittle their child? Seeing the break-up of a family. The abuse of children and teens. Poverty? Hunger? Human trafficking? People with no hope? Hatred of refugees and immigrants? Bigotry against LGBT people?

Let that pain in, feel it, and embrace the burden. Nehemiah did. And the first thing that he does is sit down and weeps. Nehemiah is broken. Something has to happen. Something has to touch our heart and break our heart if we are going to be a world changer. Nehemiah lived 1000 miles from Jerusalem. He lived in comfort, he was an employee of the King and he was provided for. And sometimes our comfort insolates us from the hurt and the pain of the world that we live in. We read a tweet or see a post on facebook and then, oh that is sad, what a shame, and then we do not give it another thought. That is so sad, but it is not my problem. Don’t worry if you are deeply bothered by something, worry if you are not.

Nehemiah could have just said it is such a shame that those folks are all messed up, and then sat down for a big dinner. We watch news stories about people who are starving and we say, “Oh, that is so sad, and then we get up and see what food there is in the fridge. But don’t medicate your broken heart. Why isn’t God doing something about this? Why doesn’t anyone care about this? God is doing something. God is speaking to you, that is why your heart is broken.

We want to make a difference. So, our heart breaks and then we kneel down to pray. After Nehemiah weeps, then he fasted and prayed before the God. Twelve times in the book of Nehemiah, he prays. What difference could we make?

But that is where we stop. As Christians we are good at caring and weeping and praying and fasting, but then we stop. We do not stand up and act.

Nehemiah got up and did something about what he had been praying about. Nehemiah went to the King. As he went to the King, the King noticed that Nehemiah looked overly sad. The King wanted to know what was going on. In his answer to the King, Nehemiah butters the guy up a little bit. Nehemiah 2:3-5, “I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors’ graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors’ graves, so that I may rebuild it.”

Nehemiah knows who to talk to, who can make a difference. He is not going to sit around and complain. He is not going to see if somebody else can go or whine about how things are. He is asking the King if he can go home to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He asks if he can make a difference. And against all odds, the project is completed in 52 days.

There are ways that God wants us to serve to make a difference. Nehemiah realizes that he is in a position to do something about this. He can get the ear of the King and he can make a difference.

Somebody has to do something, and it might as well be me. There are all kinds of issues and problems in the world, and Nehemiah chose this one. Nehemiah’s heart was broken about this issue. What issue is your heart broken about? Maybe there is nothing? Maybe we need to pray that God will break your heart and lead to the thing that God wants you to do. We are a church full of people who care. Where can you make a difference?

What is it that I want God to be attentive to and call out to God for? What is it that is breaking your heart and you are going to pray for? How is God calling us to be world changers today?

Did you hear about Danny Nickerson, the 5-year-old boy diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor who celebrated his birthday this past weekend with over 100,000 cards and packages, and three parties? Danny’s mom told a local Massachusetts paper last week that her son loved cards. After the request was posted to Reddit, thousands of letters and presents began pouring in.[[2]](#footnote-3) Danny received more mail for his birthday than his entire town, combined. Danny’s aunt said, “Just seeing everything that's coming in for a little 5–year–old boy; it's amazing what people can do." The Burlington Police Sergeant, Gerard McDonough, organized one of the birthday parties. He said, "To see the smile on his face as he's fighting it, is a bit of inspiration for the officers that are here, to see what this boy is fighting. At the end of the day if we can just give him another reason to smile, give him a distraction, and give him a happy memory; that's our goal."

 We sit down to cry to discover what breaks our heart. We kneel down to pray and then we stand up to act. What breaks your heart? How has having this burden impacted you? What’s your next step towards taking action on your burden? May we take time to pray about our burdens this week and allow God to direct our next steps.

1. This sermon series is taken from http://open.lifechurch.tv [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.abc6.com/story/26121302/danny-nickersons-birthday-bash [↑](#footnote-ref-3)