



Lord, send revival start with me

Nehemiah 2:11-18

TITLE

We looked last time at how God calls us to pray for the nations, for those in authority that we may live peaceful lives – why? - so that we may be able to share the Good News of Jesus. That applies to our own nation as much as it does the other nations of the world.

GOD AND THE NATIONS

I thought I would start this morning by looking at the relationship between God and nationhood. If you will remember from last week, when the Bible talks about nations, it refers to people rather than political institutions or even specific borders, although as we will find in a moment, specific areas of land become associated with particular people groups. So what can we say about nationhood?

NATIONHOOD IS A RESULT OF BOTH GOD'S GRACE AND MAN'S SIN

That may seem quite a contradictory thing to say so let me explain it by taking a tour through the early part of the Bible.

We read in Genesis 1 and 2 how God created the human race. And what did he do with them. First of all God gave them dominion over all the Earth.

VERSE

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Humans were given dominion over the earth – it's God's earth but our race were given dominion and the responsibility to God that comes with it. Initially Adam had a partnership with God. But what did people do? They sinned. Disobedience resulted in creation being degraded by man. Have you ever seen a bird's nest once the hatchlings are flown. Here's this magnificent piece of engineering by mummy and daddy bird and it's full of mess. The mess isn't theirs but the chicks they produced. We live in a universe where God looked at it and saw that it was good. He then gave us responsibility and we messed up and fouled our nest.

That's the world picture of the human race, but what we also find in Genesis was the way in which God also gave the first people some territory: the Garden of Eden. As a result of their sin, Adam and Eve were barred from that land and had to live elsewhere and we see the human race generating families, clans, nations as they multiplied and probably fell out with one another!

We find after Babel that the human race fragmented even more, claiming territory and naming it after the one that claimed it Edom, Ammon, Moab. Rather than the control that Adam had, sin fragmented the human race into nations, languages and territories – and they were given over to idolatry rather than the worship of God.

Even with that pattern, we find God's grace being poured out on nations. Actually it wasn't just Israel which we'll come to, we see God blessing nations in Abraham's time, we see it elsewhere in the OT, for example the repentance of Nineveh in Jonah, and we can look down the Christian era to lands like ours and others who have been blessed of God.

The history of Israel was one of how a land was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Israel. As with Adam, the nation was blessed through God's grace by having a special revelation from Him, as well as having a piece of land. But the land and favour came with a covenant.

DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD DESTROYS SOCIETY

If they wanted God's continued blessing, they needed to follow Him faithfully. But we see that they went through cycles of turning to foreign gods. What happened? The nation came under God's judgement – or they were just left to get on with it. Society collapsed.

REPENTANCE BRINGS RESTORATION

Israel had a history of disobedience, but there was also a history of repentance as well. Even with the massive blow of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of 586BC, the door was still open for them to repent. Here's a promise that was given to Solomon in more faithful days:

2 Chron 7 verse 12-14 "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. 13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land

The promise was that if God's people prayed and sought God's face, there was the offer of forgiveness and a healing for their land. This promise was specifically for Israel but has an underlying principle that's universal – for people who turn to God, they find not just forgiveness, but a healing of their land too. Look at the Bible you'll find this is true of other nations – I gave you the example of Nineveh earlier. We've seen the same in Christian revivals in many parts of the world too. A turning to Christ isn't just about people finding personal faith, but the societies also change too – there is a healing of the land. You can't avoid the link between mass conversion and a change in society. After the Welsh Revival police found themselves little to do!

UNTIL JESUS RETURNS

But the example of Israel is still with us too. The principles remain the same. Look back at the history of our land and we see times of turning to God, and times of turning away from God. When we turn away from God we see all sorts of things going wrong with our society.

IN CHRIST WE HAVE HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

How does that apply to the New Covenant? This idea of God giving His people a land applies as much to the people of God now as it ever has. In trusting Christ, we are made citizens of another place. Rather than getting a slice of this world we get a new inheritance with God eternally. We are citizens of heaven! There the underlying destruction of sin will no longer be there. The principle of God's grace is the same, the promise is even more generous than the early one.

But what of now?

IN CHRIST WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THIS WORLD

We may be citizens of heaven but we have dual nationality! *Philippians 3:18 many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* We are still citizens of a land, Britain; a nation that needs Jesus now as much as it ever has. And our presence here is still to influence this world – to extend the kingdom of God into our nation. That's why we pray for kings and all in authority. So we pray for our nation and specifically for our community.

Which brings us to our reading. Nehemiah's book is often used as a picture of the church and "Let us rise up and build" is often used as a rallying cry for building projects!

But if we look at it as what it was, the story of one man's dealings with God in restoring nationhood, reviving the worship of God and obedience to Him and healing the land, then we can learn much. The process of restoration in Ezra-Nehemiah ended very much as the embodiment of 2 Chronicles 7:5. What happened at this time ushered in a golden age of the worship of God for these people. So what can we learn that we can apply to our nation and community?

1. Recognise God's call

Nehemiah's journey started in chapter 1 when he heard news from Judah and he wept as God burdened him with the fact that something needed to be done. He wept before God for the city. What do we see when we look around our society? It's depressing. Just look at the news and it's doom and gloom. Then look at the

people of God: a small shrinking minority. What are we going to do about it? Does the low state of our land in relation to God make us weep, or are we not bothered. The reason I got Rachel Hickson here a few weeks ago was that there are many in our land and others in the declining west that understand that we have a call to rise up and do something about our nation's decline.

2. Recognise a reliance upon God

So here's Nehemiah, the king's cup-bearer – a high up and responsible office in the Persian Empire – upset at what he has heard. He wants to do something but what can he do. He knows God wants him to do something but that something could get him into big trouble, particularly as it involved a nation that was not allowed to have nationhood. He could lose his job and his life for suggesting that Jerusalem is restored. However the king notices that he is sad. Ouch – here comes trouble! What does Nehemiah do – send up an arrow prayer to God. Only God could save him – and he did. The king not only agreed to restoring Jerusalem but gave Nehemiah a well-funded expedition. One of the things I have found emphasised to us in these first few weeks of 2012 are our weaknesses as a church. There is so much to do, but we=here are the resources, particularly people? As it happens on Sunday evenings we are looking at that – my verse tonight are God's word in 2 Corinthians “My power is made perfect in weakness”. How do we start seeing change in our community and nation? By accepting our weakness, but also the surpassing power of God to change all of that! Nehemiah did and he got his expedition. When we accept our weakness, we discover God's strength.

3. Recognise the need as we survey the boundaries

So what did Nehemiah do. It's what he didn't do is what's interesting. Here's a man who comes from Persia as a senior man in the government and rather laying down the law, he goes out and surveys the territory. He gets to understand the size of the job. It was a big one. But here was a man who understood God's power to do something unlikely, impossible. But as he rode, he saw the possibilities – what was needed to present to the leaders; to envision them.

There is always the temptation to go in with both feet when we perceive God wants us to do something. We let our experience drive us rather than seeing what's needed. Nehemiah was a man of prayer and a man who examined the boundaries and saw what was needed. If we want to see our own community restored we need to know our community. That doesn't just mean doing a survey, but being prepared to walk the streets, understanding the people, understanding the issues and we can't to that inside a church building.

Prayer walking is popular these days. I'd recommend it. It's interesting that the view of our community changes when we pray outside our church walls. The other week the Worship Group walked Maidstone Road. The Lord emphasised to us what a critical road it is in this town. For a start there are three schools. There's a doctors surgery, there a flats for young people in difficulty, there are a large number of houses, it's an important through road. And we're in it? It gave us a fresh perspective on what its needs are and what we might need to do to reach out to these people who live here. If you are part of a small group, why not start walking and paying in your neighbourhood? It's surprising how God can change our perspective.

4. Recognise that we are called to do something

The bottom line for Nehemiah was that he was actually called to rebuild the walls. It started with a discussion with the leaders, then it was all organisation. Remarkably, the walls were rebuilt in an astonishing 52 days – a remarkable feat. God is calling us to reach our community and nation. It starts with prayer – praying by ourselves, praying in our small groups, praying as a church, praying with others in the area with the same burden and vision, walking the boundaries, discerning God's will.

The bottom line is that in the end, the whole of Jerusalem and beyond rolled up their sleeves and rebuilt the wall – the miracle happened. The main thing was that it all started with prayer. There it was rooted. Do we want to see real change in our community? Then it starts with prayer. One of the features of many of the current movements of God's Spirit in many parts of the world is that the most vibrant parts of church life is prayer. And that extends to the community – people are offered prayer. Community and Government leaders are approached and offered prayer. Prayer is publicly made for them as per 1 Timothy 2. People pray for their friends and neighbours. People come to Christ – whole communities are changed. And of course, people come to Christ.

How does it start? The restoration of Jerusalem started when one man wept before God. We so often want revival and we pray for nations. But revival starts with us – when we weep before God, when we recognise our weakness, when we see what we can achieve with God's strength. Is that what we want for Walton in this second decade of the 21st Century. Then let's come before God in our weakness and say "Send revival, start with me".

Matt Redman – Send revival, start with me.

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11 I went on to Jerusalem, and for three days 12 I did not tell anyone what God had inspired me to do for Jerusalem. Then in the middle of the night I got up and went out, taking a few of my companions with me. The only animal we took was the donkey that I rode on. 13 It was still night as I left the city through the Valley Gate on the west and went south past Dragon's Fountain to the Rubbish Gate. As I went, I inspected the broken walls of the city and the gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then on the east side of the city I went north to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool. The donkey I was riding could not find any path through the rubble, 15 so I went down into Kidron Valley and rode along, looking at the wall. Then I returned the way I had come and went back into the city through the Valley Gate. 16 None of the local officials knew where I had gone or what I had been doing. So far I had not said anything to any of the other Jews--the priests, the leaders, the officials, or anyone else who would be taking part in the work. 17 But now I said to them, "See what trouble we are in because Jerusalem is in ruins and its gates are destroyed! Let's rebuild the city walls and put an end to our disgrace." 18 And I told them how God had been with me and helped me, and what the emperor had said to me. They responded, "Let's start rebuilding!" And they got ready to start the work.