

**Christ Community Covenant Church,
The Story Chapter 21: Rebuilding the Walls
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 26, 2012**

Crossroads

We are approaching a crossroad here in our study of The Story. With our study this morning on chapter 21 we will conclude our study of the Old Testament and with the Lenten season on us, we will head into our survey of the New Testament.

On day six of the ill-fated mission of Apollo 13, the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. All power had gone out in the Command Module Aquarius. If they failed, they might never return to Earth.

Days before, in order to save energy, they had shut down the onboard master computer that steered the craft. Yet the astronauts needed to conduct a thirty-nine-second burn of the main engines. But without the computers it was impossible for the crew and craft to know where to point it and how to steer. Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, they could steer the craft manually. That focal point turned out to be their destination--Earth. Home!

Video 1:41:00 to 1:43:12 or so - 'Houston we have shutdown'

For thirty-nine agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on keeping the earth in view. By not losing sight of that reference point, the three astronauts found their way home.

Scripture reminds us that for us to finish our life mission successfully, we have to "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

For the last 6 months we have been talking about the Upper Story and the Lower Story in this series, the Lower Story is the obvious first person accounts of what is happening in the lives of God's people as God reveals Himself to us over the thousands of years of the Old Testament. The Lower Story is the story we can miss. But the Upper Story we can only see by looking again at the account from a divine perspective, with a God's eye view on the happenings. Actually the Upper Story is open to us only with the help of God through the translation of the Holy Spirit. By seeking the Upper Story we can set our eyes on God as we enter the intersections that are the very important crossroads of our lives. Our life journey is tough and filled with decisions. Sometimes the decisions are fairly straight forward:



Wouldn't it great if we had a template for the difficult journey of life? For those times when we have only one chance to get it right and everything of consequence and value in your life rests on the next decision you make. In those moments it can feel more like this:

of the story in the following four acts: God in His sovereignty anticipated our enmity, orchestrated our delivery, all for His glory.

God's Sovereignty, Our Enmity, Our Delivery, God's Glory

How does this translate into my world?

How does this translate into my world? 'I want to make a difference - not just exist.'

The Upper Story's existential statement of youth all too often gets bleached out by the time we are 40 by the all too familiar trials of the Lower Story of our lives. If we do ask the question again it is often in the middle of our lives (the so called mid-life crisis) when we begin to ask "Is this life I am leading going to leave the legacy I was hoping for?" I want to offer these character traits from Nehemiah's story as difference making interventions that will leave a legacy of a God honoring life:

Ask the first question and 'the second question'

Nehemiah 1:2

Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

I have made a habit of noting from the pulpit that there is a need in our lives to ask "The Second Question." "How are you?" is question one. The more important question is the second question; "Really, why?" Asking this second question with genuine caring can save a person's life.

But in this context there is another reason to ask the second question. It will usually save your bacon. If I ask of myself the deeper question, "Why am I choosing this path; because it gives me the glory or because it gives God glory?" I can now look to my motives. From the platform of this question, I can see into the Upper Story of my circumstances. That simple self question will save you miles of bad road, if you choose to answer this question first before you choose your path.

[The other thing about important questions is that they must be about matters of consequence. Important questions are about important subjects. Questions like:

1. Pilate's question, "What is truth?"
2. Or the rich young ruler's question; "What must I do to be saved?"
3. Or God's question to His people in light of His promises; "Why is your soul so downcast? Put your hope in Me!"
4. Or Jesus' penetrating question of His good friend Peter; "Who do you say that I am?"]

If you want to navigate this journey of life, make a commitment like Nehemiah to ask the important questions. Consume your life with things that matter. Ultimately your ease and comfort and sense of well being are not nearly as important as living a life that gives God glory. This is the victorious life.

Be broken going into prayer

Nehemiah 1:3-4

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

The trouble is that there are no formulas for life's journey. Life is mostly a work of the heart. Passion. Life is more like a Monet watercolor than an electronic schematic drawing. How long has it been since a news story has made you angry at injustice, that you have wept for the sadness of someone's grief, that you have agonized over the despair of someone you do not even know?

I want to let you in on a secret. God is looking for those who are broken. He has had it up to here with know it alls; people who live by laws and rigid strategies. Who live by "6 steps to a happier wealthier life" kind of formula. This is not to say that we are to be *ruled* by our emotions but sad things should break our hearts and injustice should drive us broken to prayer. It did Nehemiah.

When confronted with difficult news Nehemiah mourned, prayed and fasted. He turned his attention to God and His Upper Story.

Do you give yourself time to mourn and the freedom to be sad over the crossroads and setbacks? We live in a world that is not as it should be and so there are tragic happenings that break our hearts. Mourn but then apply yourself to prayer and fasting. This is the season of Lent and prayer and fasting are part and parcel of this journey throughout church history. As we will see, mourning followed by confession is the template.

Tonight at the concert of prayer we will have the chance to begin our walk with Christ to the cross. We got blown out by Ash Wednesday (literally by a wind storm knocking out our power); please consider coming to pray tonight.

Take personal responsibility

Nehemiah 1:6-7

Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. *I confess* the sins we Israelites, *including myself* and my father's house, have committed against you. *We have acted very wickedly* toward you. *We have not obeyed* the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

There is something special here. Something very, very rare. Notice the absence of self-righteousness in Nehemiah's prayer. He does not say, "Lord, I am thinking of those terrible sinners back there in Jerusalem. Be gracious to them because they have fallen into wrong actions." No, he puts himself into this picture, saying, "I have contributed to this problem. There are things that I did or did not do that have made this ruin possible. I confess before you, Lord, the sins of myself and my Father's house." There is no attempt to excuse or to blame others for this. It is a simple acknowledgment of his own culpability in these far away tragedies.

Humanity is a closed group that is all made in the image of God; the disasters that impact Sudan and Syria and Argentina and Japan and Alaska are our disasters, not as Americans but as fellow image bearers. Our church values of being externally focused and socially concerned speak to this desire that this other-centeredness and is a hallmark of our church character.

Be bold coming out of prayer

Nehemiah asked the important questions. He was heartbroken by the despair of others and for the thwarted affairs of God. He took personal responsibility for the wrongs of the world and though he knew his humble position – cupbearer – he also knew who he served. Not just the King of Persia, but the King of Kings. He may have been Broken going into prayer, but he was Bold coming out.

Let's read verse 11.

Nehemiah 1:11

"O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

I think sometimes we fail to boldly go to God in prayer because we forget the power and love of God. The fullness of the power of God is in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Why are we so defeated and melancholy?

Nehemiah came to his heavenly King in prayer and then asked the king of Persia boldly for what he wanted knowing that the cost of his inquiry might be his very life. He did the right thing, the right way, for the right reason, at just the right time.

There is a story in The Story that I did not talk about. It is the account where the people ask for the Word to be read. It has been 140 years since they have heard the Word. As Ezra the priest reads with Nehemiah the governor at his side, the people begin to weep. They now know that they have missed the mark; that they have failed to stand up for the character of God. So they mourn and pray and fast. They respond well and instead of receiving a reprimand from Nehemiah he says, "Today is a day of celebration, go and drink and eat and celebrate what God has done in our lives. God is once more the steady unmovable reference point of our lives and He has once again become our home. This is worth celebrating."

So come celebrate with us tonight as we mourn and pray and fast. Then as we come out of prayer I hope we will be bold. That we will go to the King and ask Him for direction, purpose and for unity. We are at a crossroad. So was Jerusalem. ***It is no sin to be at a crossroad. It is only a sin to face it poorly, prayerlessly and tentatively.*** When you face the next threshold/ watershed moment of your life, your next 39 second burn, will you ask the important questions? Will you look at the issues with your heart as well as your mind? Will you be broken going into prayer and then bold coming out? This is the way to navigate your journey. To set your eyes on home and never lose sight of it. And in our lives, Jesus is home.

I am only a cupbearer but will you pray boldly with me now before the Throne of the King?