

Victory of the Lamb – Forward: No Matter What – Nehemiah 1 and 2 The Vision
September 12, 2021 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Think way back. Think all the way back to March of 2020. Things have changed dramatically over the last 18 months. Truth is things were culturally moving a rapid pace in the last 15 years. The crisis of the pandemic only acted as an accelerating to shifts that were already happening. The pandemic is proving to be not an interruption but a disruption. In the middle of all these changes and shifts, today we are beginning a new series entitled: **Forward – No Matter What.**

To guide us, give us direction and vision for this series we are going to be studying the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. The name Nehemiah means God's comfort. Nehemiah comes on the scene about 450 years before Jesus. His book is one of the last, if not the last, to be written before we run into Jesus in genealogy. This timing places him about 550 years after King David, the high point in the nation of Israel. Because the people of God had first become complacent with God which turned into utter rebellion against God, God sent enemy nations into conquer the land. Back at this time in history it was thought that if you could destroy the nations land, religion, or people you could keep your dominance. In the case of Babylon invading Jerusalem, they destroyed the city, temple and protecting wall and carried the priests, the nobility, and the rich into exile, leaving the country without strong leadership and so easy to control. This is what the nation of Babylon did to people of God. They didn't know what to do now or next. A new King named Cyrus (of Persia) begins his reign and starts to allow people to go back to their homelands. This is the time right before Nehemiah's time. **What can we learn from Nehemiah about a vision forward in a changing culture?**

Nehemiah 1:1-3 The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. ³ 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." Nehemiah held a very important position; he was King (Artaxerxes) cupbearer. In other words, he was the King's bartender. The reason why this position is important is because it was Nehemiah's job to make sure that no one poisoned the king. So, Nehemiah was one of the King's most trusted men in the entire country.

Nehemiah's job had perks. When the King went on vacation, the bartender went on vacation too. So Nehemiah finds himself in our equivalent of a winter vacation in Mexico. While he was there, he ran into some people who were vacationing from Jerusalem and he asked about the about God's people. Nehemiah's ancestors passed down the information of glorious God was and how he blessed the people. But the report he received is the walls around them Temple is still broken down. The house of God is vulnerable to attack and dishonor. God is not glorified and the people are in trouble. Nehemiah grieved the disruption caused by their own corruption. Nehemiah grieved over God not being glorified and over people not being blessed because they didn't have God in their lives The report broke Nehemiah's heart. It was trashed. It was like Chicago after the great fire. All of these words were code for God's people are broken down.

That was then and this is now. In coordination with the Barna Research Group, the 2021 "State of the Bible" from the American Bible Society report says that "Gen Z – especially Gen Z youth – have a

precarious relationship with the Bible.” According to the report, 66% are not Bible users. What is the definition of a “Bible user?” A user is someone who uses the Bible three to four times... wait for it... a year. Yes, a year. THIS. IS. HAPPENING. We live in a post-Christian world. Generation Z is the first post-Christian generation. In our secular context it is not about those who no longer go to church it is about those who have never gone to church and don’t want to. Christianity is in shambles in the West. **What can we learn from Nehemiah about a vision forward in a changing culture?**

Face the facts. We can’t go back but we can go forward

This how Nehemiah moved forward. It has two parts. Part 1 he prayed. Verses 5-10 **Then I said: “LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ 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 family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸ “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’¹⁰ “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.** He fervently prays a prayer of repentance on behalf of himself and relies on the God of history who rescued his ancestors from slavery to rescue again.

Our turn. I invite you to join with me in prayer. God, we have taken you for granted. We have made you an add on in our life. We will worship you if we have time, and if something else doesn’t get in the way. We will follow your word as long as it doesn’t make us uncomfortable. We will do what you say if it makes sense to us. We have loved people who are like us but held in contempt those who are different. We have judged the stupidity of others and so loudly proclaimed our own self-righteousness and hypocrisy. We are concerned about our preferences instead of the needs of others. We have received your blessings as if we deserved them and have left many poor and hungry. We have boldly relied on ourselves even though we can collectively muster up enough strength to make even a grain of sand. We have relied on our own ethics as opposed to your unconditional love. We have looked to and trusted others more than we have looked to and trusted you. We have prayed with wishful thinking instead of in confidence. Forgive us Lord, we are but clay jars. In spite of this, we come to you. Because you have told us, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” We pray because you have given us your Holy Spirit to trust you. We pray this because you, Lord, have redeemed us by the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus. We pray this because Jesus is victorious over all sin, death, and Satan. We pray that since you have made us your children and have given us your Holy Spirit that you will make us witnesses at home, in our state, in our nation, in our continent, in the world. And his prayer is based on who God is and God’s promises. (Acts 1:8) We trust in you to help us fulfill your Word. And so we pray this in your powerful and saving name Jesus.

What can we learn from Nehemiah about a vision forward in a changing culture?

1. **Face the facts**
2. **Pray a prayer of repentance and trust God to be faithful to His Word**

Nehemiah is grieved on the situation, and he has prayed. In his grief, Nehemiah 2:2 **the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid,** ³ **but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”** ⁴ **The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven,** ⁵ **and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”** Nehemiah wants to rebuild the way, which really means he wants to rebuild and restore not so much bricks but the people of God. Nehemiah had a big vision. Imagine Big!

That was then, this is now. Like Nehemiah we have a big God and we need to have a God-sized vision to reach the spiritually lost people in what is now a global neighborhood. Into this global neighborhood God has given the Great Commandment and the Great Commission to love God, love one another, and to reach our neighbors. A lot has changed by God’s plan of salvation and his mission for us a church and as individuals hasn’t changed. And this is what we have learned is that we can share the good news of Jesus and that God works through his Word not only in our physical location but in digitally throughout the world.

Here are some of the reasons why I think God is leading us to think digital first.

I saw a report this last week that said There are 4.80 billion internet users in the world today. The total number of internet users around the world grew by 257 million in the past 12 months – **more than 700,000 new users each day**. The average person in the US is online 7 hours a day. And the average person in the US spends seven hours online per day. The mission field is digital.

Think of it this way. Historians often point to the time of Jesus death coinciding with advent of the Roman Road system. It was now easier to share the gospel with more people. Today you and I get to ride on the new Roman Road digital first. God has placed Digital technology as a tool to share the good news of Jesus Christ! Reminder use the tool don’t get used by the tool.

Pre-covid we average 65 devices, last week we had 172 devices, not people device. That is more than our 9 am in person service and almost twice as many as the 10:30 in person service. In our fiscal year **July 1 2020 to June 30, 2021 we worshiped people from all 50 states and 11 countries**. In the month of august 2021, we reach almost 2600 different people through our website. One of social media posts reached over 10K people with a gospel message in 12 hours. We live in a global neighborhood now. Our neighbors are not just the people living next door Imagine what it is like for my friend Hagar Mutentami to worship with you and me in Lusaka, Zambia. Imagine what is like for my friend Hagar to invite her family and friends to worship with her and us. Because our eyes are opened to this new opportunity, we can literally share Christ victory with every continent, nation, neighborhood, home, and heart. Testimony of an online worshiper I was talking to this past week – when it connects you to God it is a blessing. If you are worshiping online from another community, I ask you to pray about starting a digital site. Let’s talk.

Our culture has changed There will always be a physical gathering but now we see a new way a broader way to reach more people with Jesus. Just as there will always be crowds in the stadiums but more people watch the game on TV than in-person so we know have a new way to reach more people.

Victory is on the new Roman Road of digital. We are still experimenting and learning. We have messed up. And we thank you for your grace. But Victory is not just the church or an organization it is you. We need you to join in if you haven't already the digital mission field seeking ever last and lost one. Here are some ways you can jump in – post only positive posts, post Bible passages, prayers, like, share, and comment on what Victory posts. Go to votl.life and the Go card and we have pro tips on sharing Jesus with your digital community. When you do these things, multiplication happens and the word gets out and people's lives are changed.

Here are a couple of reasons why we, all of us, need to this now. People will live for an eternity in one place or another. Jesus has made it, so no one needs to have anything but an eternal party in heaven. And Jesus says to you in the middle of this changing culture, **John 4:35 I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.**

Thirty months ago we dreamed of 30 multisite campuses in 30 years. Now because of digital what do you think? Dream Big. The word Works! Remember: big God, big vision.

What can we learn from Nehemiah about a vision forward in a changing culture?

1. **Face the facts**
2. **Pray a prayer of repentance and trust God to be faithful to His Word**
3. **Big God equals a big vision**