

The Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed

by Kevin Horton

A person used mightily by God is tuned into God's work, broken by their own sin and the sin of God's people, and willing to risk their position and business for the advancement of the kingdom.

Duration: 28:51

Scripture: Ezra 9:3, Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah 1:11 - 2:10

Topics: "Moravians"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being tuned into God's kingdom and being broken by our own sin and the sin of God's people. He uses the example of a Christian businessman, a mother of three, and an employee of McDonald's who are all willing to risk everything for the advancement of God's kingdom. The speaker also highlights the story of Nehemiah, who prayed for four months for an opportunity to speak to the king and was eventually granted his request. The sermon concludes by encouraging listeners to be tuned, broken, and ready to take action when God opens doors for them.

Transcript

In heaven, thank you so much for giving us your Word, which is a light into our path and which changes our hearts. Thank you that you decided to communicate to us and give us new lives. Show us how we are to live and make us the people that you want us to be through the blood of your Son, Jesus.

Bless us now, Lord, as we continue this study in Ezra and now into Nehemiah, the books of revival and restoration. Revive us today. We pray for the glory of your kingdom, Jesus Christ.

Amen. You know, there's never been a time in the history of the universe, in the history of the church, in which the church of Jesus Christ, in which the Great Commission has been so explosively spread through all parts of the world. It's exciting to see what is actually happening.

We might think that, oh, this is not a good time in church history. It's a magnificent time, because in our generation, we may well see the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the sense that every people group in the world will have scriptures in their own language, will have a witness of Jesus Christ. Now, that happened, that began, as some people will tell you, with William Carey.

But actually, William Carey took his cues from another man, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf is a man that we want to take a look at today. And there we go.

Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. As a teenager, he was part of the elite. He was a noble family.

He was born in 1700. This was in the day of feudal lords. He was of that feudal lord system.

He was a wealthy aristocrat. As he was sent off to school to gain an academy, he and a couple other young nobles formed a secret society. They called themselves the Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed.

Their stated purpose of this order was that its members would use their position and influence to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. As an adult, he later reinstated this society, and people that were included in the society were the King of Denmark, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Archbishop of Paris. During his grand tour, grand tour is what you might say the rite of passage of the aristocrats, he would take a tour around the world, the known world of Europe.

And during this one tour, he came across this picture, Behold the man. He sat there and wept and wept. Down below in Greek letters, you can just barely see it, I'll translate it for you, it says, This I have done for you, now what will you do for me? Young Nicholas sat there and wept for hours.

His life was changed as he realized, I want to live my life that makes a difference for the gospel of Christ. I want to be a person who will be used for Christ. And that day, he vowed to dedicate his life in service to Jesus.

In 1722, he's 22 years old now, as count, and the Moravians, a group of Moravians, which is basically from what we would know as Yugoslavia, Slovenia, and those areas, a group of Moravians asked permission to live on his property. And the Moravians moved there and he granted them permission. They were being persecuted in Moravia, which was under Catholic control and they were of a Protestant view, and so he granted them permission to live in this little village.

While they were there, they became fractious and fighting with each other over doctrine and over the way they would live. And at this time, the count was now becoming a very influential man in the world of Germany around him. And yet, he did at this time, with this serious division which was starting to happen in the Moravian people, he stepped out of community life, let his influence to the world end, and he poured his life into the Moravian people.

He spent and had daily Bible studies with the Moravian people. And they prayed and worshipped, and they eventually developed what was called the brotherly agreement, which was basic tenets of how we were to live together as Christians even if we have differences. And they developed this brotherly agreement.

Then, on August 13th, 1727, he's now 27 years old, there was an evening meeting, and they were praying together, and the Holy Spirit so moved upon the people that it changed the whole church. It changed his life and changed the entire church. The Moravian people became the people who started sending people out to the peoples of the world.

He became this group of the people, the Moravian people, really are the beginning of the Protestant mission group worldwide. They began it long before William Carey. In 1731, a converted slave from the West Indies, West Indies, St. Thomas Island, came into contact with this count.

And he was so moved by his story and the story of the people in the West Indies and the slaves that he went to the West Indies and he even met with people and they sent their first missionaries to the West

Indies. Count Zissendorf is supposedly the only European aristocrat to spend time with the American Indians out of the cities, out into the frontier to present the gospel to those people. By the time he died, literally there were missionaries from Greenland to South Africa from the Moravian people.

And many of them went there and died within a year or two from diseases and the next group would come. And they literally went there carrying their coffins, knowing they would not survive it, but that God would use them. He's the father to modern missions and a man that I would like, and a church that I'd like us to be like.

But how do we become people, men and women, like the Moravian people? How do we become people like that? Let me ask you another way. If a Christian businessman wants to be used mightily by God, what are the characteristics he needs? If a Christian mother of three wants to be used mightily by God, what are the characteristics in her life that she needs? If a Christian employee at McDonald's wants to be used greatly by God, what are the characteristics that person needs? Today we're going to start our study in the book of Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah originally was part, most likely, of Ezra.

They were one book together. They've been separated now because we move ahead in time a few years to now Nehemiah. Nehemiah is the cupbearer of the king of Persia, living in Susa, which is southwestern Iran.

It's a fertile little valley between two rivers. As these rivers flow out of the mountainous areas of Iran, there's this fertile green valley, and there was a summer palace of the king of Persia. In that place, Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king.

We know from secular texts that we have discovered that the cupbearer of the king in the Persian Empire was a number two man in the empire. This is the man, Nehemiah, who we're about to study. Nehemiah and Ezra are books of transformation of a culture, restoration of God working through His people.

That's what we hope to see by the time we finish Nehemiah. What it takes to be a people used mightily by God. Turn your Bibles over to Nehemiah chapter 1. Nehemiah chapter 1, right after Ezra.

So if you get the Chronicles, and if you pass on to Job, you've gone too far, and Nehemiah is right after Ezra. Nehemiah chapter 1. As you look through this, it gives us a date of a time in which he was working as cupbearer of the king, about 444 B.C. And he was cupbearer of the king when, probably off duty, his brother arrives from a trip in which his brother traveled to Jerusalem. This was a godly family that the cupbearer was, Nehemiah was.

And his brother arrives from Jerusalem, and Nehemiah says, How are things in Jerusalem? How are things, brother? Expecting to hear a great story of how things are just going along great. And his brother says, We're in disgrace. We're in disgrace.

The walls are broken down. The gates have been burned with fire. Now to us, that doesn't mean too much.

We don't have walls around our cities. But in those days, it would be like saying, There is no police force, no army, and there's marauders all over the place, and they can come by your house at any time at night. That's what he's really saying.

And so there's no way to close up the gate at night. No way to provide safety for the people in the city. It was a dangerous, disgraced place.

And Nehemiah hears of this, and he falls down on his knees. He weeps and mourns, fasts and prays to the God of heaven. So the idea here is that Nehemiah is a man who is tuned into God's work.

He is concerned about things that God is concerned about. He is a man who is going to use his position, his power, for the advancement of the kingdom. He is a man like the order of the grain of mustard seed.

Nehemiah had the mind for kingdom work. In history, the great men and women are those who have turned their hearts and minds to kingdom work, whose hearts break when things go badly for the kingdom. Are you a man or a woman who is tuned into kingdom work? Does your heart break when you hear of setbacks for the kingdom of God? Do you long to be part of a mighty kingdom work? The Christian businessmen, the mother of three, the employee at McDonald's who want to be greatly used by God, tune their minds into God's work.

Their heart pulses for the advancement of the kingdom. So when they hear news, good or bad, they respond according to what's happening in the kingdom, not the stock market. They're concerned about the kingdom of God.

Then verse 4 through 11, we see that Nehemiah breaks down into a great prayer. He addresses the prayer to Yahweh, the God of heaven. The Jewish God, but He's the God of heaven.

That is the description that's used in these post-exile scriptures. It is the way that would fit the world in which the Persian world understood that there was a God of heaven. As we've been studying in the scriptural interpretation class, we realize that there's a witness to everybody in the world that there is a creator in the way God created things.

And in almost every culture, there's a name for the great creator God. In the Persian culture, He was called the God of heaven. So when we read about this in the post-exile times when they were in Persia, they would speak of Him in terms of their culture, the God of heaven.

He prays to the God of heaven, and the first thing He does in His prayers, He worships God. He calls Him great, the awesome God. And then He describes His character.

The character of God is one who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him, with those who obey Him. Then He makes a petition. He says, listen to your servant's prayer.

And praying day and night, He's praying on behalf of His people, Israel. And the content of His petition is this. It begins with confession.

Who does He confess? He confesses about the nation, Israel, which He is part of. If we were to make an analogy today, what would we confess about? Would it be the American people? I would say more closely it would be the Christian people. Confess about the sin in our own church.

Then the second person He's concerned about, not only the nation is sinned, any good leader knows, I have sinned. I'm a sinful person. I've added to the horror of these judgments of God.

And He even goes on to say, my family, we have sinned. What is the sin that we have committed? We have not obeyed. And this is Old Testament time, so they're under the law.

So it was illegal commands that they have failed to obey. The law of Moses. It was conditional covenant when the people went into the land, and they've been unfaithful to that covenant, and that brought about the punishment therein.

He also mentions that if they return to them, Moses said this, if the people of Israel would return to God, obey His commands, and He would gather them from the horizon to Jerusalem, where God has chosen to put His name. That's His prayer. If we weep before God as a New Testament church, we would weep and confess what? What is our sin? What would you confess? If you were to weep today and weep for the sins of the church in our church, what would you confess? If you were to weep today before God, if you were to confess sins before Him today of yours, what would you fall on your knees and confess? If you were to weep before God today and confess the sins of your family, what would you confess? And He lists the confession of the people of Israel, the people and His servants who God has redeemed by His powerful hand.

He's confessing their sin and His own. But He presents a request for a miracle toward me. God, I am praying that the servant who delights in revering Your name and notice that he's going to say, if You have any favor with me, God, I am asking for a miracle.

I'm asking that You would give me favor with the king of Persia today. And then the text ends with this fact that he's the cupbearer. And it's said in highlighted and bold text in the Hebrew, I want you to know was second in command of Persia when this happened.

He requests then that his position and personal business success would be put on the line. He's going to ask the king to send him away, which essentially means he's going to drop in rank and become a governor of a distant province. This man is going to put his business on the line.

He's going to take loss in position, risk it all to be part of God's kingdom. Point number two, the Christian businessman, the mother of three, the employee of McDonald's who wants to be used greatly by God is broken by their own sin and the sin of God's people. They're tuned in to God's work and broken by their own sin and the sin of God's people.

So, chapter 2, verse 1-10, his prayer is answered. It's March 4th, four months later now. He's been praying for four months.

He's taking wine before the king and he's sad. And what I gather from this text is he's been praying for this all this four months long, looking for an opportunity to speak to the king. But how many of you want to do that? Because you can be executed by the Persian kings.

It's not something you do loosely. You say, I'd like to leave your service for 12 years. Would you mind if I go away for 12 years? And would you hold my spot when I get back? You'd be executed for that.

But this particular day, he said he was sad before the king. And the king says, why the sadness? This sadness must be sadness of the heart. Now, it appears here that Nehemiah wasn't even prepared.

He wasn't even thinking about that. He was so much a praying man and broken by what he'd heard about his nation, that he'd been praying for it, but he wasn't prepared that it was still running in his mind when he got before the king where he was supposed to be attending the king's business. And the king calls him on it.

And Nehemiah says, I was greatly afraid. You see, he was required to be attentive to the king. He had crossed the line in his duty.

But also now was his opportunity. It was now or never. It was now or never.

And it appears like he'd been praying for an opportunity, and now it came, not the way he had anticipated it was, but it was right there in front of him right now. You ever had that happen? Where you've been praying for something, but you're afraid to, and then all of a sudden, boom, it's right there. Okay, okay.

And that's what happens. So Nehemiah says, King, live forever. Now, we wouldn't say that to our president.

President Obama, live forever. Don't think anything. I know what you're thinking.

You wouldn't say that to him because that's not a normal salutation of ours. We might say, President Obama, please live to finish your office. You know, that would be kind of what you're saying.

It's a salutation to the great king. He said, why shouldn't I be sad? The city of my fathers. Now, this is where he would really relate to the culture.

The city of my fathers, where my father's tombs are, lies in ruins. The gates are destroyed by fire. The issue is the humiliation and constant danger.

It would be like living in a Muslim country right now, like Pakistan, up in those Afghan villages, as an open, known Christian, and going to bed every night wondering if you survived. That's what it's like to have those gates down and have that wall torn down. At any moment, you could be destroyed.

The king speaks. You're dead. No.

Now, he was anticipating any possibility at this moment. What do you want? What would you do at this moment in time? Exactly what he did. The three-second prayers.

They're valuable, okay? They work and they're valuable. The king speaks. What do you want? Nehemiah says, he prays to God in heaven.

Now, you can just see that. The king, I mean, there isn't much time. You're not going to sit there and, ah, just a minute.

I'm going to pray. I mean, it was one of those, okay, God, here's what I want. And then Nehemiah responds, and he pleads the king, if I have favor, send me over there.

Let me step out of my position. Make me a governor of one of your distant lands. Send me to go and rebuild.

Let me do the work. Not send somebody else. Send me.

I'll be part of it. And evidently, the king and queen are there. And they ask them questions.

Well, how long will you be gone? When will you return? And the text says, Nehemiah set the time. He'd been thinking about this for four months. He already knew how long he'd want to be there and evidently told him 12 years.

I'd be gone 12 years. Then Nehemiah also asked for some extra requests, letters to the governors, safe conduct, a letter to the Asaph, who was the keeper of the king's forest in Lebanon so he could get trees. He thought this all through in the four months.

And then he says, as we saw in Ezra too, God's gracious hand was upon him and all the requests were given. And what's interesting with this decree, for him to go and rebuild the walls, is also an important date. Most Bible scholars who take a conservative literal view of Scripture calculate the date of Arctoxerxes' decree to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem was March 5th, 444 B.C. This was the beginning of Daniel's 70 weeks of years prophecy.

And in fact, if you make those 70 weeks of years, which means complicated, but 400 and some years figured out, that if you do the math on this, from this date until the king would enter Jerusalem should be so many exact days. If you do the calendar based on the Hebrew calendar, you find out the exact date when Jesus rode in on the donkey was the exact date that starts from Nehemiah's event. Now I tell you this to show you that a man who was used and attuned in God's kingdom, who was broken before God, can be used for mighty things, more than he ever knew.

That his beginning of reform in that city would be the mark of the coming Messianic age. And the Messiah would come, based upon his request before the king. All in God's plan.

Nehemiah's prayers and actions were part of the sovereign plan of God. Have you ever asked this question? Why does God not hear my... Anybody ever ask that question? Maybe you're not in tune with God's program. Maybe you're not broken.

Now he travels and he's given letters and he's given an army escort. But, just like the old soap opera, but, tune in next time to find out what Sanballat and Tobiah were disturbed about his arrival. And we'll find out about that next week.

But this is the point that you want to get at this point. When a man or woman is in tune with God's kingdom, broken before God, and puts his or her wealth and position on the line, those prayers are answered in miraculous ways. And he acts boldly.

He drops rank to take a position in the outer ends of the country for 12 years. You see, that Christian businessman, that mother of three, that employee of McDonald's who wants to be used greatly by God, is ready to spring in action when God opens the door and puts it all on the line. His business, his wealth, his position in the community.

This man or woman has a heart for Christ and the advancement of the kingdom. The average Jew who is above average in the kingdom is tuned, broken, and ready. Tuned, broken, and ready.

So are you tuned? Are you tuned into God's kingdom? Is your prayer a prayer that you can be used by God? I believe that in Count Zinzendorf, it began with that little community where he said, You know what? We're going to take our wealth. We're going to commit our position and use it for the kingdom. That's where he became tuned into God's kingdom.

There comes a day where you have to put it on the line and say, You know what? I've played around long enough. I'm going to put it all on the line. And whatever happens, God, you take my business, you take my job, whatever it is, and use me for your kingdom.

The average Jew who is above average in the kingdom is tuned. The next thing is he's broken. Broken.

Do you need a bit of time with Eke Homo? Behold the man. I think that was the day when our dear friend the Count became broken before God. He looked at what Christ had done for him.

And who am I? Are you broken by your sin and the sin of the church? Do you need a prayer time to confess that sin and the sins of the church? We're going to take such a prayer time right now. I have asked the elders and the elders who are in training to come forward. We're going to take some time in prayer.

So if you guys would come forward. They're going to pray up here. Gentlemen, I'm going to ask you to do something unusual.

I'm going to ask you to spend some time praying for yourself first with Eke Homo. Behold the man. Are you broken by your sin and the sin of the church? Do you need more time to pray? Take some time this week.

Continue to pray for your sin, that God will work mightily in what you just dealt with him today. Ask him to do that in our entire church and change this church to be a church that is fully committed. You see, the Moravians were a group of people that fought each other.

But when the Spirit of God knit them together, they confessed their sin, they became a force that changed the world. Missions began with those people. And folks, it's about time we joined them.

Let's sing. Stand up, please.

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