

Recovery - Part 2 of 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual leadership, which is a heart relationship with God, a burdened heart over the state of things, and a commitment to God's purpose.

Duration: 54:18

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 29:28, Ezra 7:6, Ezra 7:9, Psalm 127:1, Matthew 7:13-14, John 6:60, Revelation 21:27

Topics: "Recovery"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being committed to God's purpose. He highlights the need for a specific and personal vision of God's plan in the present time. The speaker references the story of Nehemiah and how his heart committal to God's purpose brought God into evidence and led to the fulfillment of His plan. The sermon also emphasizes the sovereignty of God and how He takes the initiative to see His purpose through, even in the face of opposition.

Transcript

We continue with the message of the book of Nehemiah, which I think we shall all agree, even with our brief and imperfect survey, is a message for our own time. We have seen that the inclusive, pervading thing in this book is the recovery of that for which the Lord has himself been most concerned all through the ages, that which from time to time has been lost, or shall we say suspended, sometimes almost eclipsed, as though it had disappeared, then by his own initiative, sovereign action has been brought back again. That is the all-pervading message of this book, recovery of that which is supremely in the heart of God.

Now we are going to note another thing which runs right through the book, which represents God's way of recovery, and that, in a phrase, is the spirit of leadership. Anyone who knows anything about this book will immediately recognize that that is something which palpates, which runs right through, and which accounts for everything in the realization of that desire of God, the spirit of leadership. I particularly emphasize the spirit of leadership, for undoubtedly there is an atmosphere about this book, there is a power, a dynamic, a force about it, an energy.

It is a tremendously energetic book, just full of energy, and all that constitutes this spirit of leadership. The leadership, as you will see, is not just the leadership of an individual. It is something which, though it may come through an individual, reaches others, and, first of all, takes hold of those called the princes, or the elders, or what we would call the co-workers.

And then it still spreads and takes hold of the people, so that the spirit of leadership is expressed individually, and in a group, and then in the whole remnant. It is something which is not just bound up with any one person, but which becomes in its full expression a corporate thing. For all Israel, there is a company, a body, inspires, or sets the pace, or represents the mind of God in the first place.

We say that at the outset, although we have more to say about it as we proceed. But it is about this matter of spiritual leadership that I am burdened to speak this evening. I have said that much that I have just said, because I anticipate that there are those who would never regard themselves as leaders, who would feel, therefore, that any word about leadership has nothing to do with them.

I want you to understand that leadership is as much a corporate matter as it is an individual matter or personal matter. On the other side, I can imagine that that word leadership might find a very real soul reaction from some directions, making an appeal like the idea. It is very necessary, therefore, to get away from the merely personal idea in leadership, and recognize that this is essentially a spiritual matter.

True leadership in the things of God is not official, professional, or personal as such. It is essentially spiritual. That could be put in another way, but that is the burden of the message.

But given real spirituality, leadership follows without any thought about it. Now this book, as you see from the very first chapter, is a very autobiographical book. That is, Nehemiah says a great deal about himself, always in a good way, never in a bad or wrong way.

The personal pronoun occurs many times in the first chapter. And if you read it and note how he speaks of himself, you immediately catch the significance and meaning of spiritual leadership. It came to pass, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came.

He and certain men out of Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. I asked them, simple way of expressing himself, but that contains a spirit of real concern, of real concern.

I asked. It came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept and mourned certain days. And I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven and said, I beseech thee, O Lord.

You get the note? Now that's the spirit that runs right through this whole book. And in that, you have the essence of spiritual leadership. There is one thing that I would have you note, because it is vital to this consideration.

Nehemiah is one of many names in this book. He may be the chief one, but there are many names in this book. Chapter 10 is just completely given over to a great list of names.

And Nehemiah, like the many other names mentioned in the book, would never have been known in this world, and to us, but for his hard relationship to the Lord's interest. But for it being true, what he said. I inquired.

I wanted to know. I sought to get knowledge of the situation amongst the Lord's people. And when I heard, I wept, I mourned, I fasted.

That is, dear friends, no formal kind of interest in religious work and things. That is a heart relationship. No doubt about it, this man's heart was burdened, heavily burdened, over the state of things in his time.

He thought nothing for himself. He was not just looking for an opportunity to do something, something big. It was out of this heart condition, and this heart relation to the Lord, that everything came where Nehemiah was concerned.

And I repeat, we should never have known anything about Nehemiah, nor of these people, or of them, or any of them, but for this spirit that was found in them. Nehemiah was not a priest. He was not a prophet.

He was not a king. Somehow or other, he had been put into an honorable position in a pagan court, as cupbearer to a pagan ruler. Quite a responsible position.

But, officially in Israel, he was nothing as far as we know. Whatever he was, we are not told. He was a man, and a man with a burden, and that was God's opportunity.

Who were all these people mentioned in chapter 10? Difficult names, many of them. Well, never heard of them before, never hear of them again. But they're in the Bible.

They're on the page of holy writ. They literally fulfill the word, The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. God has written them.

Their names abide century after century, thousands of years. As long as the word of the Lord remains, their names are there. Had in everlasting remembrance.

Why? Not because any of them, Nehemiah included, was anything at all. They had a heart, a heart for what God wanted most. They, in their heart of hearts, which meant with everything that they had, were linked with God's purpose.

On this earth, in this world, in their time, they were the prisoners of the purpose of God for its realization. And, believe me, you may be a nobody in this world, amongst men, but if that should be true, you or of me, there is an eternal significance given to every such one. An eternal significance.

And a significance which altogether outstrips any natural human importance. God sees to that. You may never make a great name, even in the things of God, but there's a value attached to you which heaven gives and God gives, which is our eternal account.

If it should be true, like Nehemiah and these others, you, in your heart, should be committed so utterly to the thing that God wants in your lifetime, in your day and generation, from nothing and nobody, moving into eternal accountability before heaven and before God. And that is a thing to be taken account of. But, again, it's a matter of your spiritual life, and the effect of your spiritual life has been something positive.

As I said to begin with, the method of God in realizing his purpose is by spiritual leadership, but spiritual leadership is not something to which you are appointed. It is not the work that is given to you by man. It is not any office or anything official.

Spiritual leadership is spiritual influence. The contagion of downright spirituality or committal to God's truth springs from the heart, and all such counts with God. And the names go down, and the Book of Remembrance is kept, and such righteous ones are had in everlasting remembrance.

You may not get your name into the Bible, but there's a bigger Bible than this one, being written in heaven, in which there are many more names than in the whole of this Bible. And the names of those who think on his name, to use Malachi, who think on his name, and that was what Nehemiah was doing. I inquired, I

asked, and when I heard, I wept, I mourned, I fasted.

That was not the end. Then I acted. I acted.

But we know the action of Nehemiah. Well, you see, it's from amongst those of that spirit that God makes his choice. There is a sovereignty, I know, in the choice of leaders, and in leadership, and yet two things always go together.

God's sovereignty works hand in hand with the spirit of a man or a woman. He chooses, but he chooses according to his knowledge of the heart. If he chose Nehemiah sovereignly, he had read Nehemiah's heart.

If he chose David, he had read David's heart. If he chose Paul, with all his mistakenness and blindness, he had read the man's heart and said, there's a man who will be utter for me. There's a man whose heart is at least not a divided one, it's whole in what he's doing.

There's a man who will give me everything, withhold nothing. God reads the heart, tests the heart. He looks upon the heart.

He puts into difficult situations, through long drawn-out trials and adversities and sufferings and disappointments. But in all he's watching the heart, is that heart for me? Is that heart for me? And if in reading the heart, in spite of failures, in spite of our miserable, miserable, contemptuous, disappointing of the Lord in many activities and ways, he can see the heart that is really toward him beneath and through it all, that's going to count with him that his sovereignty may, will, use everything, be economical about that, to see that there is no loss to God of anything that is really at the heart. Believe me, dear friends, that is true.

God is watching your heart, looking on your heart, testing your heart, finding out your heart. And if he can find in your heart what he saw in Nehemiah's and the hearts of these others mentioned, something that would go with him whatever it costs, go with him not for gain, but just for himself, for his satisfaction, then something will come out of that of practical value. It is out of that that leadership is born.

It is so. A committal to God and a standing by the committal through thick and thin. That's what we have here.

The thick and the thin. Yes. They had their very heavy time and they had what we might call very thin times.

The hands of their addresses. But they stuck to their committal. God honored them, took note of it.

It was God's purpose that had captured their heart. That's the point. Now, when you've got that far and recognize that it's the purpose of God in any given age or time or lifetime, that really governs the heart.

When it is like that, God's purpose, God's purpose, then you notice certain things issued from that. First of all, it was the purpose of God to which these people were so utterly committed that brought God himself into evidence. That is a tremendous thing.

You see, God can be latent or he can be patient. God can be passive, waiting, inactive, inoperative, standing. And people have to say, God, what is God doing? God's not doing anything.

And such a time is a terrible time. Or God can be on the move. He can really be coming out in evidence and evidences.

If you look at the Bible and at this book, you will see that it was this heart committed to the purpose of God for that day, for that time, that brought God out into evidence. That made God forsake all of a non-committal attitude, all of a passive condition and come out. Oh, as we said this afternoon, this book is a book of divine sovereignty.

God is here and in the companion book, Ezra, acting in sovereignty. Tremendous how God himself seems to take the initiative as though God had said, I'm going to take this matter in hand and see it through. Come what may, I'm going to see this thing through.

You know that in the companion book of Ezra, the praise constantly recurs, according to the good hand of my God. According to the good hand of my God upon me. The hand of my God was upon me for good.

As though God had set himself to sovereignly see this thing through. But, dear friends, God doesn't do that without a basis. And the basis was this.

He found this heart condition and this commitment. That itself made it, if I may put it this way, impossible for God to stand back and do nothing. The Lord had to say, I must commit myself.

They've committed themselves. I must commit myself. There's a people who mean business.

I must mean business. They're going all the way. I must go all the way.

To the thrower thou wilt show thyself from. And we could add a lot more phrases to that. God is to us what we are to him.

We are careless. God will be like that. We are indifferent.

Well, God will be like that where we are concerned. So God was drawn out into evidence by this concern for his own interests in that. And again I say, not only was God brought into evidence, but his servants and vessels were brought into evidence by their own heart attitude to the Lord.

Do you want to count? Do you desire to be a profitable vessel? Do you really want to function? Let me say to you, it will not be by you being given a job. It will be by your spirit that God takes note of and it will be spontaneous. It will not be organizational.

It will be the spontaneous reaction of God to the values that he sees in you as a heart for him. And you begin to count without putting on any uniform or wearing any badge or being appointed to any work. It will happen.

You see, I'm keeping to my context. There's nothing in this book or anywhere else in the Bible to say that Nehemiah was appointed to this work. Officially appointed to this work.

That the priest anointed him or the king appointed him or the prophet chose him or in some way he was officially set apart for this job. He came into it. He simply came into it.

There was no ordination service for Nehemiah. There was no church meeting to set him aside for the work. In this case, he just came right into it.

He was in it. He was it. It was like just walking in.

You have to take notice of this. The Lord saw to that when he found what he wanted in the man. This relationship to God's purpose brought God into evidence and it brought the vessels of his purpose into evidence.

And it did a third thing. It always follows. It was this abandon to the Lord's purpose that brought all the enemies into evidence.

But for their spirit. Their spirit. What would Sam Barrett and Tobiah and Gisham and all the rest of them.

We shouldn't have known of them. Their names would not have been in the Bible with dishonor. They would not be remembered.

But for this. And I'm touching something that is very real and true to life. Make no mistake about it.

If you are like this man or these people with a heart, a real heart for the Lord and his full purpose in your day and lifetime, that very spirit will make enemies, will bring enemies into evidence. You'll not lack enemies. And really, you know, there are two ways of looking at that.

The way of feeling sorry for yourself. You're always tempted to that when the enemies come into evidence, begin to fight as they did here. There's another way of looking at it that it may be complementary to have a lot of enemies.

It may be a compliment. Paul said, A great and effectual door is opened unto me. He did not say, But there are many adversaries.

And there are many adversaries. The compliment that the enemies pay to a spirit of devotion to the Lord. We will give the enemy credit for this much.

However much we won't give him. We give him credit for this. Of never wasting his energy or his time.

He sees it's worth his while to fight a spirit. To break that spirit. To break this, that I'm calling the spirit of leadership.

To break and nullify that spirit, which is a tremendous influence upon others from God. Was the sole object of all these many adversaries and the various forms in which they set themselves to stop this work. Really reading through it all, and seeing that their attitude was this, We must break the spirit of this man and these people.

We must break this leadership. We must nullify this influence, this energy. We must, in some way, wear them out.

Wear them out so that they give up. They just give up. They lose heart.

Give up. That was the one object. Many, many were the ways of trying it.

But, only one thing was in view. We must break the spirit. See it, friends.

That is the enemy's object. Break your spirit, if you are so set upon it. See it, friends.

That is the enemy's object. Break your spirit, if you are so set upon it. Take the heart out of it.

To wear you out. We use the phrase from the book of Daniel, to wear out. Well, this attempt at that, as you know from the book, was made in many different ways, along different lines.

First, there were threats to try and bring fear, fear of consequences, fear of what the enemy could do and would do. Threats. There was, when that failed, despising and contempt, ridicule, trying to make them feel foolish, feel foolish and feel ridiculous.

Look at their wall. Only a fox goes up against it. Fall down.

Self-despising in a wrong way. There is a dignity that should be found in leadership. For Nehemiah said, should such an one as I flee, and who is there that being as I will take refuge, will hide himself, seek security in the house of God, ridicule.

It failed. Then intrigue, intrigue trying to involve in a subtle scheme, misrepresentation, misconstruction of motive, perversion and distortion of intention. It's all here.

It's all here. They said Nehemiah is trying to make a name for himself, gathering around him prophets to preach him, preach his name. This is all personal interest.

It's cruel. It's cruel. But it wasn't true.

Where did it come from? Dear friends, this achievement would never have been accomplished. This committal of God would never have been made. This divine sovereignty in action would never have been effective if Nehemiah for one moment was seeking a name for himself.

God doesn't do that. God doesn't do that. If there is any personal motive at all bound up with our attitudes and relationships to the things of God, then God stands back.

Until that has gone, been disciplined out of existence, with Nehemiah, God saw that this was all lies, all false. It was not true. God committed himself.

He will not do that. Have you got any ambition to have position or name and do some work that will be attributed to you? Ah, yes, this is very true. You wanted to be a great evangelist.

You told yourself that you wanted many souls to be saved, but God reached the heart. Some ambition to be something great in the Christian world. You wanted to be a teacher.

People should say something about your gift as a teacher or something else. And the Lord hasn't done it. And believe me, he will not do it.

It's his name and his name alone to which he will commit himself. And the Lord so coming out in these evidences that he was in this business was because the spirit of leadership was free from all that which the enemy sought to associate with it, falsely, and attribute to it. It was all untrue.

We must have purity of heart. That's the point. The enemy must never be able truly to accuse.

Well, what about the work? We know that so far as the historical thing was concerned, it was Jerusalem and its war. What did it represent eternally and spiritually and in the heavenly way? It just represented that which was holy of God, holy of God, something holy of God. Everything bears that out.

It would never have been if it had not been of God. It was impossible. See how impossible it was.

Right from Chaldea and around in the country and around Jerusalem, everything constituted an impossible situation, but that God wanted this. God's heart was on this. This was something for God, and that war was the mark, the boundary of something holy of God.

I cannot emphasize that too strongly, but God wants something. He has always wanted, and he wants it in this day, something which is essentially God, not a bit of man and a bit of God, not just man for God, but out from God himself, of God, something that says in every way, where the people are concerned, where the work is concerned, where the spirit is concerned, where all the means are concerned, and the resources, it's God. It's God.

You can't argue on any other ground about that. Look. Look.

And if you really know the truth about that people and about that work and about that situation, you have to say, well, it's just God, that's all. Can't explain it any other way. It's the Lord.

That is what the Lord wants, and that is what the war represented, a mark between what was of God holy and what was not of God. You'll find the merchants coming to the gates. We'll leave that for a minute.

That's the other element, trying to impinge, insinuate itself, get in, and make merchandise of the things of God. But Nehemiah was up to that. He said, you shut the gates, and if you see them, you drive them away.

And Nehemiah himself was quite ruthless with those elements that did not belong. They were foreign to what was there. He was ruthless, almost humorous, the way he dealt with them.

I chased them from me. I plucked off their hair. Well, uncompromising.

This thing is of God. Take your hands off. And in order to have it like that, you know how much there is here in the book about the great and the very purging of these people.

Purging. The mixed marriages had to be cleared up, and all that was mixture had to be put away. It was a thoroughgoing purging of the situation.

Israel was called to be a people separate, separate from the nations. They must not intermarry and intermingle in that way that brings about a taint of any kind. And in that prescription of God, there is the principle, the abiding spiritual principle, that God will not tolerate mixture between two kingdoms, his own and another.

Anything that is a mixture of the kingdom of heaven with the kingdom of Satan, which is the kingdom of this world, God will not tolerate. And so we have this great time set apart for purging all mixture, clearing out all that was confused, contradiction, this thing. It must be pure.

It must be of God. You and I must be like that. No heart compromised with this world.

No intermixture spiritually in an inward way with what is not of God. The Lord takes great pains, dear friends, to get us clean. So much of our discipline, so much of the difficulty through which he puts us, it may take years over it, it may be a very, very hot fire through which we go, but he's after getting rid of these mixed elements in us, these things that will just spoil everything if he doesn't deal with them, to get

us to a pure place where it is the Lord.

It's the Lord, not ourselves in any way, but the Lord, just the Lord. He must have it like that. These people were a purged and a purified people, essentially so to express the nature of God and thereby to have his testimony established in the earth.

This is God. So the wall was the bound, we might say, intrinsically, intrinsically, in an intrinsic way, the true spiritual nature of God's people was represented by those walls. That wall was within that wall.

That's what it said. That wall and city, note what I'm going to say, did not signify division or exclusiveness amongst the people of God. Read again.

There was no division or exclusiveness so far as the Lord's people were concerned. Don't let us make a mistake about this. It's very important for us, dear friends, to keep this in mind.

May stand for utterness for God and for a pure testimony and for the fullness of Christ. Put it how you will, but never allow the idea to creep in that that makes you and your testimony a divisive thing amongst the Lord's people or makes this an exclusive kind of thing. So far as this work was concerned, amongst the Lord's people, it did not create division or did not represent, the wall did not represent division or schism amongst the Lord's people and certainly nothing exclusive amongst the Lord's people.

If that wall spoke of dividedness and separation, it was solely and wholly between what was of God and what was of the world. That is the meaning of the wall. That is the meaning of the gates.

That's the meaning of those gates being closed on the Lord's day. That is something of God, sacred to God. And therefore the merchants and tradesmen that tried to come in and bring their goods and trade upon what is of God had no place with Nehemiah.

It was the wall and the gates that said no to the world, the spirit of the world. And you know there's a great deal of commercialism in Christianity. However, leave that.

The wall is not division amongst the Lord's people. Let us be careful that we do not ever imply that a testimony of utterness and fullness of God divides us from the other people of God. Never allow that to be suggested.

And certainly it does not represent anything exclusive. But it does represent very definite division between what is of God and what is not of God, that is, of this world. This wall was a protective thing, a defensive thing, against the wild spirit.

There's a spirit which is of God and for God inside, and there's a spirit of the world outside. The wall was there to defend and protect against that wild spirit. And I'll just say one other thing, I think if I can, I'll only say one more thing out of so many as I close this evening.

This wall, this wall gave a great opportunity to the Lord's people to let it be known exactly where they did stand in relation to the Lord's fullest interest, to God's purpose. You know, it was the least pleasant thing to live in that city. It was not the thing that the natural heart would choose.

Only a tenth of all the people agreed to live in the city. The others preferred the country, outside. But, look again, a special blessing was conferred upon that tenth.

A special blessing was conferred upon the tenth, the tithe, of all the people who agreed to live in the city. I think there's something there to take note of. This position for God of unmixed devotion to the Lord, utterness for the purpose of God, the fullness of Christ, all this represents, this is a test, you know.

It really is a test. It will find us out. There are the greater number, the nine-tenths, if you like, who prefer a bit easier way, not this way.

Yes, still the Lord's people, still loving the Lord, serving the Lord, working for the Lord, living for the Lord, but not going this way. Shrinking from this way. This is too exciting.

But this wall gave a real opportunity for people to show really where their hearts were, whether their hearts were in the purpose of God or not. The Lord does this. He raises up something, and it's a tremendous test to people, and many won't face it.

Many won't go that way. Many say, as did some in the days of the Lord, this is a hard saying. Who can hear it? Or this is a hard way, who can go it? It's a few, perhaps, who stand the test, and live in the city.

I think I, Bill, will stop there for this evening. You've got quite enough. Do you see clearly all this, all this means? I am convinced that it's a message for today, and for us here.

I am cast upon the Lord that you see the significance, for I never felt more that we here, in this place, were in greater need than we are today of a consolidating, reconfirming vision of God's purpose. Really what the heart of things is with God. We can miss the way and lose if we do not see, and if we are not captured and captivated by that which the Lord would have specifically, not generally, but specifically, in this time, of a recovered testimony to His Son's influence.

We pray.

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