

Conference 1989-01 ~ Nehemiah 1

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald's sermon on Nehemiah emphasizes the importance of visionary leadership, prayerfulness, and collaboration in fulfilling God's work.

Duration: 56:10

Scripture: Nehemiah 1:6-10, Nehemiah 2:8, Nehemiah 5:1-3, Nehemiah 5:14-19

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of accountability in the service of the Lord. He references chapter five, verses one through three, to highlight the need for accountability in assemblies and on the foreign field. The speaker also discusses the power of setting a noble example, using Nehemiah as an example of generosity and leadership. Lastly, he emphasizes the importance of seeing the work through completion and not being someone who starts something but never finishes it. The sermon encourages listeners to seek the power of God in their lives and to touch the lives of others through prayer.

Transcript

When George Campbell was five years old, he made a momentous decision. He decided he was going to leave home. He had had enough of restriction, loss of liberty, too much discipline, no freedom to do what he wanted to do.

So he announced to his mother at 3.30 in the afternoon that he was leaving. She received the news with equanimity, just as if it were one of the usual things in life. She made no protest and did not urge him to stay.

So little George left, and silence reigned in the home. At five o'clock, the door opened. The usual supper time, and George walked in.

His mother said nothing. The silence continued to reign. The supper was placed upon the table.

George sat down. Not a word was spoken. Then the household cat rubbed against George's leg.

He broke the silence. He said, I see you still have the same old cat. Now, why did I tell that story? Because some of you are probably thinking, I see they still have the same old evening speaker.

I know Vic Cherniak is thinking that. Well, if you feel that, you should say something to the CMML board. I have said it.

You better say it in a loud voice, because I've said it, and they didn't hear me. I'm kind of glad they didn't. It's really nice to be back.

Again, the same old evening speaker. Would you turn in your Bibles, please, to Nehemiah? And we're going to just look through the book and draw some lessons that might be profitable for us, especially in connection with Christian missions. And I'd like to read chapter one, Nehemiah chapter one.

The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah, it came to pass in the month of Jislep in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan, the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came with men from Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. They said to me, the survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept and mourned for many days. I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven, and I said, I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, you who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and observe your commandments, please let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, that you may hear the prayer of your servant which I pray before you now, day and night, for the children of Israel, your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against you. Both my father's house and I have sinned.

We have acted very corruptly against you, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which you commanded your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for my name.

Now these are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servants, and to the prayer of your servants who desire to hear your name. Let your servant prosper this day, I pray.

Grant him mercy in the sight of this man, for I was the king's cupbearer." Obviously, we cannot do a verse-by-verse exposition of this book, but just let me bring certain subjects out of it that may be helpful to us. And the first, of course, is the subject of leadership. I don't think there are very many seminars, Christian seminars, held on leadership without the mention of the name Nehemiah.

And I would just like to pick out about 11 things that we can see about him that we might apply to ourselves tonight. Nehemiah had a vision of a great work to be done. It's great to be a person of vision.

I look out over the audience and I see men and women who have had a burden from the Lord, who have had a vision from the Lord, and they've gone and they've pursued it. They've given themselves to it and they've made history, and some are making history today for God. Perhaps there are others of us and the gold has become dim.

Perhaps the vision has faded somewhat. Perhaps that initial spasm has drifted off into a chronic lethargy or inertia. And we need to renew the vision.

And wouldn't it be wonderful if that took place at this conference, where some of us and the work has become kind of routine, kind of dull, and we don't see our service crackling with the supernatural anymore. How wonderful it would be to just get along with the Lord under the trees somewhere and seek a renewal of that vision, so that we can go forth from this place with the words of F. W. H. Myers on our lips. Only like souls I see the folk there under, bound who should conquer, slaves who should be king.

Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder, sadly contented with a show of things, then with a rush the intolerable craving shivers throughout me like a trumpet call. Oh, to save these, to perish for their saving, die for their life, be offered for them all. It would be wonderful if that could be one of the results of this conference, where the Lord would in a new and fresh way bring our vision into focus.

And of course, there are some here who are going out for the first time. They're wonderful, isn't it? I think that's one of the greatest experiences of life, when our hearts are aflame for the Lord Jesus Christ, and when he has spoken to us and planted a burden in our hearts, and we see the gears meshing, and we see him leading us forward. I think I have a word for you tonight.

One statesman said to his friend, for the love of God, gentlemen, buy Big Maps. That's what we want to do. We want to buy Big Maps in the work of the Lord.

We don't want to think small thoughts. Thou art coming to a king, large petitions with thee bring, for his love and power are such, thou canst never ask too much. I'm sure you've heard that little poem.

It says, if you had been living when Christ was on earth and had met the Savior kind, what would you have asked him to do for you, supposing you were stone blind? The child considered and then replied, I suppose that without doubt I'd have asked the Lord for a dog with a chain to lead me daily about. How often thus in our faithless prayers we acknowledge with shame surprise, we've only asked for a dog with a chain when we might have opened eyes. Let's go forth like Nehemiah with a vision of a great work to be done.

He saw a work to be done for the glory of God and for the good of his people. That's still the vision today, isn't it? To see God's cause carried forth on earth, see his name glorified, and see his people built up in their faith. The second thing I see about him, and this is what distinguishes his leadership from what we might call secular leadership today.

Sometimes I think that Christian seminars on leadership parrot leadership according to the world. They're quite different, aren't they? It would be quite unthinkable for the chief executive officer of a large industrial corporation in the United States to polish the shoes of his janitor. It wouldn't go over big in any secular seminar of the subject, but it's the way the master went shall not his servant tread it still.

The second thing is, Nehemiah depended on God as evidenced by his prayerfulness. I'm sure you noticed that most of the chapter we read was prayer, Nehemiah's prayer to God, and all the way through he was depending upon the Lord to show him the way. And you know that's very, very important.

It's possible to do work for God that isn't necessarily God's work, isn't it? I might have all kinds of schemes in my mind of things that I can do in Christian work, but of what avail is it if these are not the plans that God has for his kingdom here on earth? Nehemiah wanted to be so in touch with God that he could hear the Lord's pulse beat and know exactly what the Lord wanted him to do. The other day a friend of mine and I were walking by Lake Chabot in California there, a lady came the other way and she had a little

shelby dog, and that's always good for a conversation, so we stopped to talk. She said, this dog only wants two things.

He wants to know what you want him to do, and he wants to do it. And that was Nehemiah. That should be us, too.

He wants to know what you want him to do, and he wants to do it. I want to know what the Lord wants me to do. I don't care about all my fancy plans.

I don't care about my own empire building. What does the secret of fruitfulness, isn't it? Moving in tune with the Holy Spirit of God, doing the thing that he wants me to do, and doing it with a true heart. That's the second thing I see here about Nehemiah.

And his prayers were blood earnest, weren't they? I don't think I read them with the vehemence with which Nehemiah prayed them. He meant business with God, and when he stopped praying, you have the definite feeling that he had touched the throne of grace, right? He depended on God as evidenced by his prayerfulness. Chapter 1, verse 11, O Lord, I pray, please let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servants, and to the prayer of your servants who desire to hear your name, and let your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.

Praise to be a man who can pray like that. The third thing I see is that he planned the work. He planned the work under God.

Chapter 2, and verse 12. It says, Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem, nor was there any animal with me except the one on which I rose.

He started out making his plan, so the first thing was an inspection of the city at night to see the walls that were torn down. He wouldn't get along very well today. Today, a man like that would probably get in touch with the news media and make a big splash.

It's interesting when people are really working with God, they're not looking for publicity. Publicity is generally bad in the work of the Lord. It creates jealousy and conflict and reveals our strategy to the enemy.

I feel kind of strange standing here and saying like that, but it's true. Publicity is generally bad in the work of the Lord and causes more harm than it does good. I love my Savior who went about performing miracles and then he would say, tell no man that's beautiful.

Today, Christians will do anything to get on television or in the newspaper. They'll do anything. They'll even get on television and watch the church's dirty linen in public just to get on the TV.

Publicity. Nehemiah did it quietly. He went about his work quietly.

He wasn't revealing his strategy to everyone who would like to know about it. He planned the work. And then in chapter 2, verse 17, he shared the vision.

That's beautiful. I said to them, you see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be reproached.

He shared the vision with others. He wasn't a loner. He didn't have to do it all.

He never could have done it all himself, could he? It's greater to train preachers than to be a preacher. It's greater to train teachers than to be a teacher because you multiply yourself in that way. He realized that in order to see the work go ahead, this is the way it must be.

And this reminds us of Ephesians chapter 4, doesn't it, where we read that the gifts were given for the purpose of the saints unto the work of the ministry. Don't find any clerical system in that verse. You find the ministry of God being carried on by the saints.

A wonderful vision. And you see it exemplified here in the book of Nehemiah. He shared the vision.

And he not only shared it, but he motivated others to become involved. That's a great thing. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be reproached.

Why did people follow him? Why do people follow certain leaders? Well, I believe in the spiritual realm it's because they detect the power of the Spirit of God in the leader's life. I don't think it has anything to do with education or training or anything of the sort. But you see a man coming forth like a burning bush, burning but not consumed.

And people are attracted to him as they want to follow him in the ways of God. I think they detected that in Nehemiah. He was burning with zeal for God.

Spurgeon said, got on fire for God and the world will turn out to see you burn. Well, they'll do more than that. They'll follow you too as you lead them in the path of righteousness.

He motivated others to become involved. The next thing I see, I think it's so important, he was aware of the hand of God in his service. He was aware of the hand of God in his service.

Chapter 2, verse 8, the last part of the verse, it says, The king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. And then again in verse 18, it says, And I told them of the hand of my God, which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken. A wonderful thing, isn't it? In the service of the Lord, every so often to have some token of his presence with you in a special way encourages us to go on in the midst of trial and conflict and difficulty and all the rest.

Good to see the hand of God. Are we seeing the hand of God as we serve the Lord? I like to tell the story, I'm sure I've told it to some of you before, about a young fellow named Greg Livingston. He had been serving the Lord over in Europe and he came back to the States.

I was in Oak Park, Illinois, and he came to visit me and he told me about a very serious discipline problem that had arisen overseas and he felt I should know about it. And I said to him, Greg, you're going to a Midwest city from here and there's an elder there who should know what you told me today. And I gave him the name and address of this elder and I said to him, I'd like you to go and you tell that elder what you told me today.

But before he left, I thought I'm going to ask this fellow a provocative question and see what he says. I said, Greg, what makes you tick? Here you are, you have a graduate degree from an acknowledged institution, you go overseas and you throw away your life with a bunch of nobodies over there. What's that all about? And he knew that I was just trying to draw him out.

He said, brother, he said, I see that it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. He said, you have to put yourself in a position where if God fails you, you're sunk. But he said, if you do that, there'll be a power in your life and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God.

That's good. I'm going to write that down so I get it right. Brother McDonald, I see that it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States.

You have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God, where if God fails you, you're sunk. And if you do that, there'll be a power in your life and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. Greg went to this Midwestern city and then he came out to Los Angeles.

He had two weeks of meetings in Los Angeles and he wrote me a letter. He said, dear brother, he said, I went to that city. He said, I had appointments.

He said, I had conferences. I had meetings and I never did get to see that elder. And God knows that I was willing.

God knows that I wanted to get to see him. But the time just got away and he said, God knows I'm still willing. So Greg got on a Greyhound bus to travel from Los Angeles to Midland Park, New Jersey.

And the bus was fairly empty. And it drove along through Los Angeles, picking up customers at various points. And when it got to Riverside, there was only one empty seat on the bus.

And so he bowed his head and said, Lord Jesus, lead on some young person to whom I can speak for you. And he opened his eyes and an older man was getting on board. And the older man came.

There was only one seat. It was the seat next to Greg Livingston. And this man sat next to Greg Livingston and Greg said, young or old, Lord, I have my duty to do for you.

And so he started to witness to the man. And the man said, well, that's a strange thing. You should talk to me about the Lord, Jesus.

He said, I happen to be a Christian. Greg said, you are? He said, my name is Greg Livingston. And the man said, my name is.

And he gave the name of the elder from that Midwest assembly. That man and his wife had a daughter married in Phoenix and they had taken a drive away car from the Midwest to Phoenix. He dropped off his wife in Phoenix and drove on to Riverside to deliver the drive away car.

Got on the bus to come back to Phoenix to be with his wife. And he sat next to Greg Livingston. He talked to me three months later and he said, nothing has ever spoken to me so loudly in my Christian life that God would arrange the seats on the Greyhound bus and the schedule and where the people are sitting to bring us together.

He said, we had a wonderful time of fellowship all the way to Phoenix. And then I remember the words of Greg Livingston. It's hard to live a life of faith in the United States.

You have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God. Where if God fails you, you're sunk. And if you do that, there'll be a power in your life.

And when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. That's the kind of man Nehemiah was. When he touched other lives, something happened for God.

And he knew how to motivate others to become involved and he was aware of the hand of the Lord in his service. That's wonderful, isn't it? Wonderful to think that he arranges. When you think of all the Greyhound buses in the United States and all the cities they serve and all the hours of the day and all the minutes of the hours and all the seats on a bus, it would never happen according to the laws of chance or probability, would it? But God would never put two people together on a bus like that.

But God cares. That's what we want, don't we? We want a power in our lives. We want to touch other lives and see God doing something.

Isn't that what Hudson Taylor said? Learn to move men through God by prayer. Good. Learn to move men through God by prayer.

Chapter 3, he divided the work into achievable units. I like this. I like this.

I think we're talking about four miles of walls that had to be rebuilt. No. Well, modern Jerusalem, I mean the old walled city of Jerusalem today is a mile square.

So I think we're talking about four miles of walls. What's too much? Too much. But a big job is composed of many little jobs, isn't it? People get discouraged with Bible studies.

I mean they open a Bible in such a voluminous work and there's so much there that you can't possibly do. Of course you can't do it. You can do five verses, can't you? You can study five verses intensively or maybe even a chapter intensively and over the period of the years you can go through and become fairly acquainted with the English Bible.

So Nehemiah divided the work into achievable units. The next thing I see here is that he gave recognition to what the people were doing. This is very important too.

The people working in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ is so easy to take them for granted, isn't it? And you say, well I'm just working for the Lord's well done and I don't care whether people take notice of it. Well, Nehemiah wasn't like that. He gave recognition to what the people were doing.

Chapter 3. Chapter 3 is like a miniature judgment seat of Christ, isn't it? It really is. Isn't it marvelous to think that God recorded the names of these people who were working on the wall. Nothing misses his notice and nothing will miss his reward in a coming day.

I thank God for verse 12 where special attention is given to the ministry of the women. Next to him was Shalom the son of Halosheth, leader of half the district of Jerusalem. He and his daughters made repairs.

He and his daughters made repairs. And we pay tribute tonight to those valiant sisters, many of whom are with us tonight, who've gone out to the barnfield. God knows all about it.

God knows the sacrifice that was involved. God knows the loneliness at times. He knows all about it and it's all written in his book.

And not only what's favorable, but what's not quite so favorable. Verse 5. Next to them the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord. It seems to me that what is

inexcusable in the work of the Lord is to do nothing.

To just take the talent and wrap it in a napkin and bury it. Some of the harshest words are spoken for that type of behavior. It's okay to make mistakes.

It's okay to fail at times and bounce back again. But it's unforgivable to do nothing as far as the service of the Lord is concerned. He made the people accountable to him.

You see that in chapter 5, verses 1 through 3. And how important is accountability? There should be accountability in our assemblies. There should be accountability on the barnfield. No freelances, no loose cannons in the work of the Lord.

And then in chapter 5, verses 14 through 19, he sets a noble example. He set a noble example of generosity. And this is what really speaks to people.

Let me just read those verses. Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provision. But the former governors who had been before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver.

Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so because of the fear of the Lord. Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.

Moreover, there were at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine.

Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on the people. Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people." The power of example. I've heard it said that when the Marines, when the United States Marines go into battle, an officer never commands his men to go into battle.

He leads them into battle. The officer goes first. You can't teach what you don't know.

You can't lead where you don't go. And then finally he saw the work through to completion. He wasn't one of these persons who starts something, is a cloud of glory, and then it peters out and he never does see it finished.

Nehemiah stuck with it through thick and thin, through opposition from without and opposition from within, and he saw the wall completed, as we shall see in a later meeting. Eleven things about the leadership of Nehemiah. Things that I think speak to us today in the service of the Lord.

Second thing I want to notice in this lovely book is the very last words of chapter one. It says, For I was the king's cupbearer. What are you? If I ask you, what are you? You say, I'm only a missionary.

That isn't what Nehemiah said. He said, I was the king's cupbearer. What is it? A position of dignity.

A position of responsibility. A position of intimacy with the king. How that speaks to my heart tonight.

A position of dignity. There he was next to the king, sampling the wine before the king ever got it. A position of responsibility.

Attempts were made on the lives of those kings, poisoning their food and poisoning their drink. A responsible thing, a life was at stake. Position of intimacy with the king.

And we see that as the book goes on. What are you? Remember what Spurgeon said, My son, if God should call you to be a missionary, I should not like to see you dribbled down into a king. One of our interns a couple of years ago was a returned missionary, and just back temporarily.

And he had children going to the local school. And one day in the local school, the teacher asked the children all to go around and tell what work their father did. And when this dear little girl was asked, she said, My father doesn't work, he's a missionary.

And I'm afraid that because sometimes of the way we talk about our calling, people might get that idea. Do we recognize tonight the glory of the ministry? And I mean that sincerely, the glory of the ministry. One of my favorite authors is J. H. Jowett.

And I'd like to read you what he says. This makes me proud to be in the service of the King of Kings. I wish I could write like this.

He said, I have been in the Christian ministry for over 20 years. I love my calling. I have a glowing delight in its services.

I'm conscious of no distractions in the shape of any competitors for my strength and allegiance. Is that good? He says, I have had but one passion and I have lived for it, the absorbingly arduous yet glorious work of proclaiming the grace and love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I would affirm my own conviction that in all genuine callings to the ministry, there's a sense of the divine initiative, a solemn communication of the divine will, a mysterious feeling of commission, which leaves a man no alternative, but which sets them on the road of this vocation, bearing the ambassage of a servant and instrument of the eternal God.

Now a man who enters through the door of divine vocation into this ministry will surely apprehend the glory of his calling. He will be constantly wondering and his wonder will be a moral antiseptic that he has been appointed a servant in the treasuries of grace to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. You cannot get away from that wonder in the life of the apostle Paul next to the infinite love of his Savior and the amazing glory of his own salvation, his wonder is arrested and nourished by the surpassing glory of his vocation.

His calling is never, I like this, his calling is never lost in the medley of professions. Get it? His calling is never lost in the medley of professions. The light of privilege is always shining on the way of duty.

His work never loses its halo and his road never becomes entirely commonplace and gray. He seems to catch his breath every time he thinks of his mission and in the midst of abounding adversity, glory still more abounds. Therefore, this is the sort of music and song that we find unceasing from the hour of his conversion and calling to the hour of his death.

This is what Paul said unto me, on less than the least of all things is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ

for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me, to you it is. And then again he says, whereunto I am ordained a preacher and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

And Jowett asks, do you not feel a sacred burning wonder in these exclamations, a holy exulting pride in his vocation, leagued with a marveling humility that the mystic hand of ordination had rested upon him? That abiding wonder was part of his apostolic equipment, and his sense of the glory of his calling enriched the proclamation of the glories of redeeming grace. Listen to this, if we lose the sense of the wonder of our commission, we shall become like common traders in a common market babbling about commonwares. That's magnificent.

If we lose the sense of the wonder of our commission, we shall become like common traders, t-r-a-b-e-r-s, common traders in a common market babbling about commonware. This sense of great personal surprise in the glory of our vocation, while it will keep us humble, will also make us great. That's a wonderful thing, isn't it, that when God is using us and working through us and things are being accomplished for God, it doesn't create conceit.

How can God do that? You know God is using you, yet you're not proud. You say, what does the man have but what he's been given? He could do nothing except if it were given to him from above. I guess there's a greatness about the calling.

This is good. It will save us from becoming small officials in transient enterprises. Small officials in transient enterprises will make us truly big and will therefore save us from spending our days in trifling.

Emerson has somewhere said that men whose duties are done beneath lofty and stately domes acquire a dignified stride and a certain stateliness of demeanor. And preachers of the gospel whose work is done beneath the lofty dome of some glorious and wonderful conception of their ministry will acquire a certain largeness of demeanor in which flippancy and trivialities cannot breathe. Once Sir Christopher Wren was building St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a visitor went to observe, a sidewalk supervisor went to observe.

And he saw a man just beyond the barrier and he said, what are you doing? And he said, I'm moving this dirt from here to there. And he saw another man with a wheelbarrow working, said to him, what are you doing? He said, I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul's Cathedral. To one it was a despising, to the other it was a dignity.

I was the king's cup bearer. Both men were doing the same work. But look at the different attitude in them.

John Hunter asked, is your Christian life drab and seemingly pointless? Are you disillusioned and discontented? Are you shoveling dirt? Or are you building the eternal house of the Lord? Good question. I was the king's cup bearer. The glory of our vocation.

The glory of our calling. And then of course you can't study the book of Nehemiah without noticing the tremendous emphasis on prayer. It's interesting to me, the Bible is really the greatest textbook on prayer, isn't it? Scratch it anywhere and prayer will come out.

That's the wonderful thing about the Bible. Almost any subject of divine value, you can trace it right through the scriptures. And here you have some wonderful insights into prayer and the prayer life of Nehemiah, a man of God.

Let me give you some indisputable facts concerning prayer. Man, number one, man never comes closer to omnipotence than when he prays in the name of the Lord Jesus. You and I will never be omnipotent, only God is omnipotent, and even in heaven we won't be omnipotent.

We'll never have those attributes of God. But let me say it, we never come closer to omnipotence than when we pray in the name of Jesus. Why? Because when we truly pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, it's just exactly the same as if he was making those prayers to God the Father.

Exactly the same. An old English bishop said, when I pray, things happen. When I don't pray, they don't.

I think that puts it very complexly. When I pray, things happen. When I don't pray, they don't.

I don't know who wrote this, but listen. What has prayer done? Prayer has divided seas, rolled up flowing rivers, made flinty rocks gush into fountains, quenched flames of fire, muzzled lions, disarmed vipers and poison, marshalled the stars against the wicked, stopped the course of the moon, arrested the rapid sun in its great race, burst open iron gates, recalled souls from eternity, conquered the strongest devils, commanded legions of angels down from heaven. Prayer has bridled and changed the raging passions of man and routed and destroyed vast armies of proud, daring, blustering atheists that fire to heaven.

What has prayer not done? Good. As is one of the great secrets of the work of Nehemiah in this book. He was a man of prayer.

He knew what it meant to come, and did you notice the way he talks to the Lord? And the Lord loved it. He loved it. I often think of that, of the boldness of some of the greatest men of God in the Old Testament.

They were reverent. They were bold. Bow down your ears.

Why don't you stretch forth your arm to help us? God loved it. And God answered those prayers. Number three.

Christians hold the balance of power in the world through prayer. We can change the destiny of nations through prayer. And some of you sitting here today could give living testimony to that time.

To changes in government, to military coups, to release of prisoners in answer to prayer. God is there, the sovereign of the universe, and he's moving the checkers on the checkerboard, the chess men on the chessboard, and he does it in answer to the prayers of his people. Number three.

God seldom, if ever, does anything except in answer to prayer. I'm going to get some sparks on this one. Some of you see a lotion afterwards.

Sure. Well, I like to say it again. God seldom, if ever, does anything except in answer to prayer.

Every once in a while I meet some, let's say, some young fellow. He's been saved, you know, not from a Christian background at all. And I say to him, who prayed for you? And he says, well, I think I had a grandmother who knew the Lord.

Sometimes grace skips a generation, you know. And oftentimes I find that response. I love to ask that question to a new convert.

Who prayed for you? Yes, I think I had a grandmother who knew the Lord. You know, years ago Donald Ross used to pray that not one hoof of his family would be left behind. He liked to borrow scriptural phraseology.

And that's what he used to pray. As he looked down through the ages following his own time here on earth, he prayed, not a hoof be left behind. It's remarkable what's happened in that family.

I remember a man, a descendant in Elgin years ago, and he had been an alcoholic most of his life. And just before he died, he trusted the sinner's savior. And I thought Donald Ross's prayer is being answered.

Still being answered there. God has, this is another quote, this is from R.A. Matthews, born for battle, and with this I quote, God has limited certain of his activities to responding to the prayers of his people. Unless they pray, he will not act.

Heaven may will something to happen, but heaven waits and encourages earth's initiative to desire that will, and then to will and pray that it happens. The will, this is good, the will of God is not done on earth by an inexorable juggernaut omnipotence out there overriding or ignoring the will of man on earth. On the contrary, God has willed that his hand be held back while he seeks for a man, an intercessor, to plead, thy will be done on earth, in this or that specific situation.

Without God, man cannot. Without man, God will not. Wow, sobering, isn't it? Without God, man cannot.

Without man, God will not. He bids his own work wait on man's prayers. Makes me want to get down on my knees and pray.

How about you? We'll just continue with these thoughts on prayer, Lord willing, tomorrow night and press on in the book. Shall we look to the Lord in prayer? Father, we praise you tonight for the word of God, a mine of wealth to us. How it speaks to us in all the circumstances of life.

How it guides us in our service for the Lord, keeping us back from pitfalls, from acting in the energy of the flesh. Oh God, we pray for each of us here tonight that we might be men and women of prayer. Men and women who want to see God working in their lives day by day.

Who, when they touch other lives, will see something happen for God. Refresh the vision in our soul tonight. Give us a new sense of the glory of the ministry.

We ask for the Savior's sake. Amen.

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