

Weeping Over Humpty Dumpty

Nehemiah . . . Memoirs of an Ordinary Man – Part II

Nehemiah 1:2-4

Introduction

There is a fascinating book in our public library called, *The Annotated Mother Goose*. It gives the history behind many of the popular children's rhymes. Some of these nursery rhymes and children's songs, composed centuries ago, are still common to this day, but their underlying story is all but forgotten.

For example, the nursery rhyme about little Jack Horner sitting in a corner, eating a Christmas pie.

Jack Horner was actually an employee of Richard Whiting, the last church leader, or abbot, of Glastonbury Cathedral in England. When King Henry the VIII was taking over all the church property he could get his royal hands on, the abbot sent Jack Horner to London with a Christmas gift for the king. It was a delicious looking pie. However, buried underneath the crust was anything but fruit. Inside that hollow pie were hidden the deeds to twelve wealthy estates.

On the way to deliver the pie to the king, knowing that the abbot was trying to get in with the king and to do so he was going to transfer these estates to the king, Jack Horner opened the pie and took out one of the deeds for himself. He took the deed to the Manor of Mells (which was quite a plum piece of property!). There Jack Horner's family and descendants lived for centuries.

A number of years later, it would be Jack Horner who would betray that abbot. He sat on a jury that convicted the abbot of embezzlement and then, had him executed. That conveniently erased any

possibility of the abbot telling the truth about King Henry the VIII and Jack Horner.

Let me read the rhyme to you,
*Little Jack Horner, sat in a corner,
Eating a Christmas pie.
He put in his thumb and pulled out a plumb,
And said, "What a good boy am I."*

Another popular children's rhyme is this,
*Ring around the rosies,
A pocket full of posies,
A 'tishoo, a 'tishoo,
We all fall down.*

What is nothing more, to us, than a popular children's ditty, seemingly innocent and fun, was, at one time, a mournful chant. It originated in seventeenth century London during a plague called the Black Death. Each line of the rhyme was a reference to the plague.

"Ring around the rosies," referred to the small, red, rash-like areas upon a persons body so infected.

"A pocket full of posies," related to their superstitious belief that sweet smelling flowers would drive off the demons who brought the disease. So, they stuffed their pockets full of posies.

"A 'tishoo, a 'tishoo," was a reference to the constant sneezing, which was another common symptom of the plague.

"We all fall down," was another way of saying, "We all die!"

This nursery rhyme was actually a gloomy chant that sang of unbelievable sadness and fear.

I will mention one more nursery rhyme. And, let me say that I am not trying to start a conspiracy against Mother Goose. I do not have that kind of courage. I will take on anyone but Mother Goose.

I was leafing through a couple of books, looking for another rhyme, when I stumbled across this one. You can say it with me,

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the king's horses and all the king's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

Now, this is not a nursery rhyme about secret dealings with the king, or the betrayal of friends, or the tragedy of a widespread disease, but it was, like the others, about human need and despair.

It first appeared in print in 1803. Humpty Dumpty was an egg, which explains why, having fallen off the wall and broken apart, he could not be put together again. But, eggs do not sit on walls. For the original rhyme maker, that little egg man was intended to be a symbol that represented the origin of life (the world of humanity). The rhyme was designed to lament the fact that humanity has fallen and is broken, and that even the most powerful people on the fallen earth, such as the king, himself, and all of his army and wise men, cannot put the broken pieces of life back together again. The meaning behind the rhyme was a lamenting with despair over a fallen and broken world.

One contemporary author wrote,

That's the world we live in . . . we live in a world that specializes in producing broken people . . . and [once broken, we all discover that] no power on earth can put you back together again.

The book of Nehemiah is a story about broken things and broken people. It will reveal behind the scenes deception and betrayal and it will expose an epidemic of moral compromise and spiritual apathy. It is more than a bedtime story about a broken wall that gets fixed, it is a true life story about broken people who are restored by an ordinary man who happens to have a broken heart.

If you care to look behind the lines of this memoir, you discover that Nehemiah's ink is most often mixed with tears. Frankly, I have been arrested by this deeply burdened man.

When most believers, including myself in the past, have studied this book, they tend to rush to the prayer of Nehemiah. They catalogue it into its neat, four-part outline, and say, "There, pray like that."

1. Adoration,
2. Confession,
3. Thanksgiving,
4. Supplication!

We overlook the fact that this kind of prayer emanated from a deeply burdened man. This was a great prayer, but it was a great prayer that was effective in gaining God's maximum attention, because it came out of a broken heart over a broken world.

Yes, his prayer is a model for us, but notice the evidence of his burden and his broken heartedness. Look at verse 6, where he pleads,

Let Thine ear now be attentive . . . to hear the prayer of Thy servant . . .

Then, skip to verse 11, where he begs,

O Lord, I beseech Thee, may Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant . . .

Eleven times, throughout this book, Nehemiah is imploring the attention of God. Three times, in the closing chapter, chapter 13, Nehemiah cries out,

. . . remember me, O my God . . .

In fact, the very last phrase of this book are those words. That is, "Consider me. Don't let my life ever leave Your gaze."

They are the same words, in the Old Testament Septuagint, that are used in the New Testament Gospel of Luke by the dying thief, who says to the crucified Lord,

Jesus, remember me . . .

It is another way of crying out to God, saying, "I want to be where you are; I want to go where you go; I want to walk where you walk; I surrender to think after and long after You, and I beg of You to think after me."

Nehemiah was a man who desperately wanted the maximum attention of God. In this book, before God reveals to us what Nehemiah does, He shows us who Nehemiah is.

He, and all others like him, are the living illustration of the people God was thinking about when he said, through His prophet Jeremiah, as recorded in chapter 29, verse 13, of that book,

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Now, are we all not under the sovereign gaze of an omniscient God? Nothing on this earth escapes His attention. What is God talking about when He says that He will be discovered by those who desperately search for Him with all their heart?

Similarly, what did David mean when he said, in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 2,

. . . blessed are those . . . who seek after Him with all their heart.

And, what was the meaning when Paul cried out, in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 10,

that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings . . .

And, as well, what did the writer of Hebrews mean when he said, in chapter 11, verse 6, that God,

is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Who is the man, or woman, today, that has this intimate, close, rewarded communion with God? How do we gain this maximum attention of God?

Taking A Closer Look

The answer is in chapter 1 of the memoirs of a man who, one day, stopped what he was doing and began to weep over the condition of Humpty Dumpty. Before Nehemiah ever began to rebuild, he first sat down to cry over brokenness that just could not be put back together again by any power on earth.

His name –

The Hebrew name, “Nehemiah,” literally means, “the consolation of God”. And Nehemiah will live the meaning of his name. He will bring the consolation of God; the relief of God; the solace, the encouragement, the condolence of God.

His occupation – “having it made in the shade”

In the last part of verse 11 of chapter 1, Nehemiah tells us that his occupational title was “cupbearer”. He was the best person in the entire kingdom to get close enough to the king to poison him. The enemies of the king knew that and, no doubt, offered Nehemiah untold amounts to join them in their coup attempts. Assassination attempts were commonplace.

You may remember in the book of Esther that Mordecai overheard the plans for an assassination attempt on the king’s life.

Perhaps you remember, in the story of Joseph, when he was placed in the dungeon to languish for years. While there, one day, Pharaoh’s baker and cupbearer were thrown into jail while an investigation took place. This was, no doubt, to discover which of them was guilty of attempting to poison the Pharaoh. And, you may remember, it was the baker who was found guilty and later executed, while the cupbearer was restored to his office. As Genesis, chapter 40, verse 21, tells us,

. . . and he put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand

Nehemiah put the cup into Artaxerxes’ hand.

A student of Socrates, by the name of Zenophen, wrote,

Now it is a well-known fact that the cupbearer, when they offered the cup, draw off some of it and swallow it down so that, if they should put poison in it, they may not profit by it.

In other words, “Long live the king,” but no more Mr. Cupbearer!

The cupbearer was perhaps the most trusted man in the kingdom by the king. By the way, this king, that Nehemiah served, was the son of Ahasuerus, the king whose life was spared by Mordecai’s quick thinking. Ahasuerus, however, would be killed during another, successful assassination attempt.

The role involved more than handing the king his favorite drink. The Apocryphal book of Tobit says this of a man who was a cupbearer,

He was keeper of the signet ring and had charge of administration and of the accounts.

Nehemiah was a trusted assistant to the most powerful man on earth. He was living with the king’s cabinet in the palace of Susa. It was the winter resort of the kings. The palace and grounds covered five thousand acres. Precious gems and gold were part of the architecture. Murals have been uncovered, made of painted bricks. These formed huge murals in the palace, such as murals of bulls with wings. That is not exactly something my wife would pick to hang in the living room, but it must have been an incredible sight. If you were in the king’s palace in Susa for the wintertime, you were in the middle of incredible affluence and power.

All of that to say, Nehemiah had it “made in the shade”. As a Jew in a foreign kingdom, he had achieved an enviable life with powerful friends and

financial security. He was worlds away from the broken city of Jerusalem. Indeed, Jerusalem was four times smaller than this one winter palace. Little broken Jerusalem.

Polite conversation – two questions

Now notice what happened in verses 1b through 2,

Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

Is this just polite conversation? No! He asked two questions:

1. What about the people?!
2. What about the city?!

And did they ever tell him! Verse 3,

And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.”

This is not news – Babylon did this years ago. Why ask? Because the walls were under construction during the return of exiles under the leadership of Ezra. But, in Ezra, chapter 4, the work is forced to stop by the Jews’ enemies. Most believe, the enemies destroyed the sections of the walls that had been under construction.

So, Nehemiah is asking, “Hey, how’s it going under Ezra’s leadership? How are the walls coming?”

“Oh, they’ve been torn down, the work has stopped, and the people have thrown in the towel.”

Symptoms of a broken heart

Nehemiah later writes in his journal, in verse 4,
Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

What, in fact, happens are several things, things that we could call, the symptoms of a broken or burdened heart.

Five responses:

This verse gives us five responses of a broken hearted man.

1. Number one, contemplation –
. . . I sat down . . .

In other words, he took time to think and contemplate the report he had just heard. He did not listen to their report, he heard their report. He heard all that it implied and he felt the anguish of those who were in distress. He stopped his normal life just long enough to listen and to hear the news.

2. Number two, compassion –
[. . . I sat down] and wept . . .

According to the April, 1999, *World Monitor*, preschool teachers, administrators, and child development specialists said that the most important thing for a child to learn is “self-reliance.” Seven times more educators said that children should learn self-reliance, than educators who said children should learn “sympathy and concern for others.”

The solution of educators would be to go out in the street and tell Humpty Dumpty to pull himself together. “I can’t believe you fell off that wall. Now believe in yourself, man, and pull yourself up.”

The rhyme would go like this,
*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
And all the humanist scholars and professors,
Told Humpty Dumpty to just get it together.*

People are broken and it is their fault. They did not believe in themselves enough. They need to have faith in themselves. They just need to get their act together. Do not develop sympathy or empathy, whatever you do.

Nehemiah cried. When is the last time you have cried over a broken world?

3. Number three, concern –
[. . . I sat down and wept] and mourned for days . . .

The word “mourned” is the Hebrew word “abal”. It literally means “to mourn for the dead”. It is a deep sorrowful mourning that does not soon pass away. It lingers on. In fact, we know, from the text, that he will spend four months in this state, from December, which is “Chislev,” until April, which is “Nisan,” the month given to us in chapter 2, verse 1. So, for four months Nehemiah is weeping, and he is in deep mourning.

E. M. Bounds, quoted in *A Passion For Faithfulness*, by J. I. Packer, said,

How few the men in these days who can weep at the evils and abominations of the times! How rare those who are sufficiently interested and concerned for the welfare of the church to mourn! Mourning and weeping over the decay of religion, the decline of revival power, and the fearful inroads of worldliness into the church are almost an unknown quantity.

4. Number four, concentration –

[. . . I sat down and wept and mourned for days;] and I was fasting . . .

This was not that Nehemiah was simply taking time off from work to go pray or cry, this word implies the fact that he had lost his appetite. He was fasting, not simply because he wanted to focus his attention and spare time to discipline even his body for prayer alone, he was actually fasting because he had lost his appetite. That was the burden of this man's heart.

5. Number five, communion –

[. . . I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting] and praying before the God of heaven.

A number of different words are used for praying. This Hebrew word involves pleading; it implies deep emotion; it is a lamenting before God in desperation, knowing that you must hear from God.

By comparing the date mentioned in chapter 1 and the date mentioned in chapter 2, we learn that Nehemiah fasted, wept, mourned, and prayed for four months. Can you imagine weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying for four hours? Four days? Four weeks?

John Knox, the Scottish reformation preacher and leader, used to weep and pray in the royal gardens of Mary, Queen of Scots, who happened to hate the Protestant Reformation. But, she said, of John Knox, that she feared his prayers more than anything on earth. He would pray in her gardens, loud enough for her to hear, "Oh God, give me Scotland, or I die."

Nehemiah had every reason not to care. He had been born in captivity, had never been to Jerusalem, had never worshipped in the temple, had a great career in Persia, and he was the king's right hand confidant and protector. Why would he ever pray, "Give me Jerusalem, or I die."?

Why would he ever go to a broken down city, eight hundred miles away, to a people he did not know and to a problem he did not create?

Because he was burdened for the glory of God to shine from Jerusalem, and for the people of God to be restored to honor and to worship the only true and living God.

Touching On Crucial Lessons

There are two crucial lessons of application in this.

1. First, if you want the maximum attention of God, you must first give your maximum attention to Him.

Do you want Him to be available to you? Great! Are you available to Him? Do you want to move the heart of God? The question is, can He move yours?

2. Secondly, if you want the maximum attention of God, you must be willing to receive the maximum burden from God.

I would define the burden of Nehemiah this way:

- an overwhelming concern with some aspect of human distress or sin,
- an irresistible conviction that God has an available remedy,
- an unreserved compliance with God using you to deliver the remedy.

In other words, you are convinced there is a problem, and you surrender to God to be part of the solution.

It is easier to just say, "Lord do this . . . Lord bless that . . . Lord help him . . . Lord help her . . . Lord move in this way . . . Lord move in that way . . . Lord come through for him . . . Lord deliver her."

What if we heard a voice from heaven that said, "Out of the ten requests you just prayed, nine of them are up to you."

That is exactly the application of Paul's words to the Galatians, when he said, in chapter 6, verse 2,

Bear one another's burdens . . .

Nehemiah will bear the burden of a broken Jerusalem and a broken nation.

Donald K. Campbell wrote, in *Nehemiah: Man in Charge*,

A burdened God is at work in the world. He searches for burdened believers through whom He may work.

Is it any wonder that the average Christian really does not want the maximum attention of God? He really does not want to be a part of the solution and really does not want to fix anything.

Is it any wonder why we would rather play religious games for an hour or two on Sunday, than set about to restore and rebuild broken lives? We did not know God would want to start with us. We did not know God would want to break our hearts over the condition of ourselves and our world. We did not know it would make us uncomfortable. We did not know that God would first hammer at our hardened hearts before He would ever use us to hammer up a wall. We did not know that, in gaining His attention, we would share His anguish over a fallen world.

Paul cried, in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 10,

. . . that I may know Him . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings . . .

“I did not know it would mean that.”

And so,

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;

And to all the king's horses and to all the king's men,

Do we really care enough to put him back together again?

Are you willing to have a broken heart over a broken world? If so, you are prepared to pray, as we will see Nehemiah praying, and, in so praying, you are also prepared to gain the maximum attention of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/6/2000 by Stephen Davey.

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