

New Hope Global Sermon 11 29 20 – Riding the Waves

Introduction:

Over the Thanksgiving break our family went to Cocoa Beach – a beach on the central Florida ocean that is a famous destination for surfers. The waves were breaking steadily as Bruce and Sam were out on their surf boards trying to ride those waves. Keith and I watched from the shore 😊. Growing up along the ocean in New England surfing was not a sport I knew, but I was fascinated watching the young men and women who spent the day trying to ride the waves at Cocoa Beach. You could see people begin to catch a wave and then they would disappear and their board would fly high as they fell off. But every so often a more experienced rider would stand on his or her board and gracefully ride the wave along its crest and then all the way into the shore. Again and again. Surfing is an exhilarating sport, notwithstanding the continual threat of sharks and injuries if in the capsizing board rebounds and smacks you on the head, etc. A helicopter flew back and forth over this long beach, assumedly looking for sharks as well as surfers in distress. Still, undaunted, every surfer I watched always got back on their boards and did not let defeat or failure deter them.

This past two weeks I have been studying Nehemiah and written Scattered Flock from the daily application of that book to the US, particularly at this time in our history.

Nehemiah's model

The story of Nehemiah is about his call from God to rebuild the broken wall around Jerusalem which had made his people vulnerable to their enemies. In many ways the enemy opposition was like repeating waves that came crashing over Nehemiah and everyone who worked on the wall. The enemies seemed tireless in using taunts and lies to sabotage the work. But Nehemiah's model gives us 7 ways Christians can successfully ride the relentless waves of discouragement and difficulty that have uniquely marked 2020. If you open your Bibles, you will be able to recognize each of these in the first 6 chapters.

First, chapter One, verse 4. When Nehemiah heard of the "great trouble and disgrace" of the Jewish remnant back in Jerusalem, (v.3), he wept and mourned and fasted and prayed to the God of heaven. He confessed the sins of his people that had led them to this plight and then asked God for success in his passion to go and rebuild that wall. Nehemiah was himself in exile in Babylon but he held an important position in the court of King Artaxerxes. Cresting the wave of a broken situation through prayer, fasting and seeking to know your own call for that situation.

Chapter Two. Nehemiah understood all the issues involved with his taking leave of his work, gathering all the supplies needed to rebuild the wall and transporting them safely to Jerusalem. So when the King asked him why he was so sad, he had a complete plan ready to present – a plan we assume came directly from his prayer to the God of heaven (2:4) and God gave him favor and he arrived at Jerusalem safely with the needed supplies (2:4-9). He had crested over the second wave of what seemed like an impossible task.

He surveyed the situation when he arrived and then gathered the leaders and laid before them the project and evidence of God's hand thus far (2:17-18). This constant reference to God's work in the rebuilding is a theme throughout the entire rebuilding project. And it is critical because the enemies' attacks began almost immediately – they publically tried to shame Nehemiah and created "fake news" about how his work was rebelling against the King. But Nehemiah silenced those slanderous remarks

with confidence that “the God of heaven will grant us success” (2:20). This focus was what the disheartened, oppressed Jews needed to persevere in this project. Cresting wave three through confidence in God.

Chapter Three lists all the people among the remnant who helped rebuild the wall. It was a community-wide work. That is a lesson in itself for any calling we have from the Lord. We lay it before God in prayer, we keep our focus on what God is doing and tell the story of how He empowers us, and we gather people around us who can help bring the project into reality. Cresting wave four in community.

In Chapter Four Nehemiah lays the ridicule of the enemies over to God in prayer and continues with the people to rebuild the wall to half its height. When the enemies planned to fight against Jerusalem, the Jews continued “to pray and post guard day and night” to meet this threat. Similarly, when the Jews themselves faltered and accepted the lies the enemy, Nehemiah turned the people’s attention to the Lord and told them: “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers and sisters, your sons and daughters, our wives and your homes.” (4:14). It was the focus the Jews needed and they continued the work while guarding against enemy attack. Together cresting wave five by God’s strength and readiness to fight against enemy attacks.

More opposition came from within as Jews cried out against the oppression from their own people who had enslaved them (ch. 5:1-13), Nehemiah’s response was the call for repentance and restitution. The integrity of his own unselfish model in the work caused the people to grant the restitution and continue the rebuilding. We can crest wave six of sin in our community through repentance and restitution.

Chapter 6 then describes the efforts of the enemy to trick Nehemiah into a trap that would discredit him and stop the work. But Nehemiah again rode this opposition to victory by listening to God’s guidance and refusing to do something that would compromise him and the work (6:1-14). The end result was that the wall was completed in 52 days and the gates hung, greatly honoring God who had protected and empowered the people (6:5-7:3). Cresting wave seven by maintaining our commitment to the Lord and trusting His sufficiency.

Conclusion

Beloved, whatever circumstances or voices or lies you face as you seek to follow the Lord, remember Nehemiah’s example. Always turn each day and each dream and hope over to the Lord and ask Him to fight your enemies in your own mind and in the circumstances. Trust Him to act and be wise and courageous as you teach step forward. Gather the people around you who will help you fulfill God’s calling and keep their focus on the Lord as well. Seek God’s discernment to filter out the accusing, deceiving, intimidating thoughts from God’s detractors who list all the problems, highlight your own weakness, say your dream is impossible, try to lure you to give up, or urge you to follow “fake news.” Work together (even through zoom connections!!) to “remember our God who is great and awesome, and fight” for the well-being of each member of the Body of Christ. Together by the Spirit we can crest every wave of opposition and difficulty in this time of Covid and world unrest and demonstrate God’s miracles in our midst. Nothing is impossible with the Lord. What has He called you to do in His power?

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 11/30/20

The song of response that comes to mind is “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord. This mountain shall be removed. I’ll build my kingdom through you and what I promise will be done. For it’s not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord.” Amen and Amen.

