

A Contract For Revival

Nehemiah 1-2; 4:6; 6:1-4

It is a wise practice to read the fine print before you sign your name to a contract, a service agreement, or a repair estimate. Many people have been surprised when they discovered that they had unknowingly agreed to something, and there on the dotted line was their signature to prove it. It is always a good idea to understand fully what's involved in things like that before you commit yourself.

Jesus said something similar when He was talking about spiritual things. In Luke 14, Jesus was teaching about what it would take to be a disciple of His:

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it! Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (vv. 27-30).

Count the cost! Discover what's involved in following Jesus! Discover what it takes to be a disciple of the Lord. In these days we need to count the cost as well. We need to discover what it takes to have revival.

I know of no better place to turn to in the Scriptures to find out what it takes than the book of Nehemiah. That book opens in one of the bleakest periods in the history of the nation of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar had come through Jerusalem with his armies, and they had demolished Jerusalem with all its fine homes and palaces. Then they had burned the temple, and had torn down the walls which surrounded the city, and then they carried off the Hebrews into captivity in Babylon. Several years later, the Persians conquered the Babylonians, and set the Hebrews free. Some of the Hebrews returned to Jerusalem, and some chose to stay in Babylon and the surrounding area.

The Hebrews who returned to Jerusalem were met with a discouraging sight. The entire city of Jerusalem was in ruins. It was just the way that Nebuchadnezzar's destroying army had left it nearly a century before. The Hebrews attempted to rebuild the Temple, but when opposition arose, they grew discouraged even further, and abandoned the work after laying the foundation. So they built their own homes and businesses, and soon settled down to a new life.

About forty years pass by, and word reaches Nehemiah that the walls of the city were still in ruins. Nehemiah had remained in the land of captivity, and had the prestigious position of being royal cup-bearer for the king. He carried the king's cup, and made sure that no enemy poisoned the king. This is how the book of Nehemiah opens, and it opens the story of how the nation of Israel experienced revival. So from his story, we can find out what it takes to have revival.

1 It takes a burden, 1:1-2:3

Look at verse four. There you see Nehemiah's reaction to the bad news. He didn't just say, "Oh, how terrible" and then put it out of his mind. He says in this verse, "*When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*" Look at how burdened he was! He wept and mourned, not just for an hour or two, but for **days!** And he **fasted**. That word "fasted" seems to be a lost word in our Christian vocabulary. When Nehemiah fasted, every hunger pang reminded him of the reason for his fast. Jesus told His disciples once that "some things come only by prayer and fasting." **How long has it been since you were so burdened over something that you fasted?**

And Nehemiah **prayed!** One of his prayers is recorded for us in verses five through eleven. This wasn't the only prayer he prayed. Probably this was the summation of all the hundreds of prayers offered up from his burdened heart in the four months which followed. "*God in heaven, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, listen to me! We have not obeyed the commandments which You gave to Moses. Show me what you want me to do, O Lord, and grant me success in doing it!*"

His heart was so burdened that after a time, the burden began to show itself on his face. The long nights of praying and weeping, and the long days of fasting soon became evident on his countenance. Then one day, four months later, while attending to the king, the king noticed that something was wrong with Nehemiah, and he asked him, "*Why is your face sad? You are not sick. This is nothing else but sadness of the heart. Nehemiah, why are you so burdened?*"

Nehemiah's answer was, in effect, "Why shouldn't I be burdened? Why shouldn't I be sad, when the city of my fathers lies in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire?"

Someone says to me, "Why do you preach the way you do?" My answer is, "Why shouldn't I preach this way, when I see ruins in the lives of Christians, when I see

fathers who do not care for the things of God and are not leading their children to follow Christ, when I see the promises and vows and commitments lying in ruins? Why shouldn't I preach this way? I preach this way because I have a **burden**—and it's a burden that so many of the spiritual walls lay in ruins and it's a burden for the walls of revival to be rebuilt!"

You see, Nehemiah was interested in more than just the stones that would build a wall. He was burdened because of the attitude of the people, the indifference, the apathy that would allow them to live in a city where they had no wall to protect them. He was burdened, deeply burdened, over the neglect and indifference of the people of God! **Does it bother you? Your indifference? The indifference of others?**

Before revival can come to this church or this town, there must be a burden on the hearts of God's people. It must be an overwhelming burden for the lack of concern, the apathy, the indifference on the part of so many who claim to be a part of God's kingdom. Nehemiah was called to rebuild the walls of the city, but first he had to weep over the city's ruins. Do we really see the ruins in which our own walls lie? So many times we do not because we have become spiritually blind and deaf. Many of us are so busy doing good things that we are deaf to the call of revival. We don't really understand that in order for revival to come to us, we must be burdened about sin. We must weep and mourn and pray and fast over the ruins, first in our own lives and then in the lives of others.

2 It takes an authority from the king, 2:4-9

Nehemiah, as we've already stated, was the royal cupbearer to the king, a very important responsibility. But he could not go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls because he didn't have the authority! He would need materials and he would need men and he would need the cooperation of the governors of the land. Without authority, he could have none of the rest.

But now we see that the king had given him permission to speak; he gave him the green light to go ahead and make his request known to the king. The king said, "What is it you want?" Before Nehemiah answered, he did something which was the key to his success. He darted a prayer toward heaven.

Then he made his request. He wanted to be given a leave of absence, in order to go home to Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls, to reset the gates on their pins. He wanted to bring revival back to his people! The king agreed, and so Nehemiah was commissioned to go to Jerusalem for this specific task.

But notice in verse seven that Nehemiah was given the king's **power**. "*May I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?*" Whenever the king of that country or any other wrote a letter, it always carried the seal of the signet ring of the king as proof that the king actually wrote that letter. With those letters in his possession, Nehemiah had all the power of the king himself.

Notice in verse eight that Nehemiah was given the king's **provision**. "*And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?*" He was saying, "O King, I cannot do this great thing unless you give the materials necessary to complete it."

And notice also in verse nine that Nehemiah was given the king's **protection**. "*So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.*" That's protection!

You and I are given the same authorities from our King Jesus! Because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him, we, too, as joint-heirs with Christ, have all the **power** we need to accomplish real, lasting revival. We have all the riches in glory in Christ Jesus at our disposal to bring it about as our **provision**. And through it all, through the skeptical remarks and opposition and jealousies and bickering, we have the king's **protection**.

And when I stand to preach God's Word, I have more confidence than I do at any other time. Do you know why? It's because I can speak with authority. I can speak with authority when I speak from The Book. And I speak with the authority of my King Jesus in telling you that God wants revival to happen in this church! God wants the walls of revival to be rebuilt!

3 It takes an honest inspection of the ruins, 2:11-15

Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for three days before he got up in the middle of the night, and taking just a few men with him, rode a donkey to the outskirts of the city. Then, according to verse 13, he examined "*the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.*" Verse fourteen tells us that in some places the rubbish and debris was so massive that he had to dismount and stumble over the wreckage himself.

In the middle of the night, while others were sleeping, Nehemiah with a burdened heart and a commission from the king went out to inspect the ruins. Can you

imagine that scene? Nehemiah did not try to persuade himself that the city was in a better state than it really was. He made an honest inspection of the ruins; such an inspection was absolutely necessary before they could begin rebuilding the wall.

Now let's draw some parallels. At one point the rubbish blocked the way. There may be some accumulated rubbish in your life which blocks the way to revival. It may have accumulated there through neglect or through conflict in your spiritual life, but it's there.

And how long has it been since you've ridden around your walls and seen the need for repair? We will never face the challenge of revival in our lives until we review, honestly, the ruins of our own lives. We must honestly evaluate the walls in our lives to see whether or not they are in ruins, whether or not the foundations of our lives are secure, whether or not we are secure in our spiritual experience. If you want to know how to rebuild the walls of revival in your own life, you must first find out what is wrong in your life that keeps you from having a right relationship with God. That must come first!

I wonder how many times we try to cover our spiritual tracks, by denying that anything is wrong between us and God. I wonder how many times revival does not come because we refuse to put ourselves in the category of "sinner" or "backslider." We like to compare ourselves to other people, and we forget that the Lord looks on the heart!

4 It takes a challenge to the people, 2:17-18

Nehemiah inspected the walls, and then probably the next day, he gathered the leaders of the people together and said in verse 17, "*You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.*" Nehemiah gave them a challenge. He knew that even with all the burdens and all the authority of the king, he still could not build the walls by himself. That task was too enormous for one man: he needed their cooperation.

He implied in his challenge to them that the city lying in ruins was **despicable**. He said at the end of verse 17, "Let's rebuild the wall so we will no longer be a disgrace." A disgrace? A disgrace to whom? A disgrace to God, of course! This was Jerusalem, this was the city where God's people lived, this was the city where King David had reigned for 33 years! The other nations and people would pass by and see the ruins and say, "Ah, either their God is weak to have allowed this to continue, or they don't love their God very much!"

I am giving you a challenge today, a challenge for revival, that we join hands and hearts and work to rebuild the walls of revival! A church which does not experience revival is a reproach to the name of Jesus! The unsaved people of the world pass by, and they say, “Ah, either this Jesus isn’t much after all, or else they don’t love Him as much as they say they do!” The walls of revival and commitment and love for Christ lying in ruins all about us are *despicable*.

And not only despicable. Nehemiah implied to the leaders that the walls lying in ruins were **dangerous** as well. A city in those days without a wall was easy prey to whatever army or band of marauders happened to be passing by. They could not rebuild their Temple and restore its furnishings of gold unless they had some form of defense. They could not settle there and raise their families unless they knew their families would be protected.

I am giving you a challenge to rebuild the walls of revival in this church and in your life, because refusing to do so is *dangerous!* There is nothing in so many lives to keep Satan and his attack away from us. There are no walls of defense; there is no spiritual protection. The city had no protection because the walls had been destroyed and the gates burned. By our neglect and compromise *we* have burned the gates, and we are vulnerable where we need to be the strongest and at a time when so much of the victory depends upon our building the walls of revival.

Nehemiah validated his challenge by presenting to the people his credentials, his commission from the king. So do I! I challenge you to rebuild the walls of revival, and I validate that challenge by presenting my credentials as an ambassador, a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. A fireless, spiritless, revival-less church is a reproach to the name of Jesus, and it is defenseless in spiritual battles of all kinds. The challenge is this: “You see the trouble we are in, how the walls of revival and homes and Bible study and worship and personal commitment are destroyed and the gates burned with fire. Let’s get up now, and rebuild before it’s too late!”

5 It takes a commitment to the task, 6:1-4

In the sixth chapter of Nehemiah’s book, we find that the enemies are opposing the great work of God that is being accomplished through Nehemiah. They have tried scoffing at the workers. They tried threats against their lives. Now the enemies try a different tactic. They sent a message to Nehemiah, who was still busy working on the wall.

The message said, “*Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.*” But Nehemiah, staying ever so close to God, knew in his spirit that they intended to do him harm. So he sent a message back to them: “*I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?*”

And notice how committed he stayed to the task. In verse four, “*four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.*” Nehemiah was so committed that he would not give way, even under repeated pressure.

Many times the walls of revival are not built because there is no commitment to the task at hand. **We become so busy doing so many other *good* things that we forget to do the *best* thing.** We stand like Nehemiah, and we hear the world and our unsaved acquaintances calling to us, “Come on down to our level. Don’t be so fanatical and extreme. You are too narrow. Come on down to our level, down to the plain, and let’s reason this thing out!” Satan wants to compromise—to get us to come down to the “plain.”

And we hear that plea, and we hear it over and over again. And finally, many of us **do** throw down our tools and go to the plain to meet with the enemy. Many of us do compromise. They **were** doing a great work, but at the invitation of the enemy have gladly and quickly thrown down their tools and have come down from the great work.

Jesus heard something similar, even while He was hanging on the cross. From the throats of the blood-thirsty crowd came the cry, “*Come on down from the cross!*” But Jesus could not come down from doing the great work of dying for our sins.

If the walls of revival are to be rebuilt, then you and I must recommit ourselves to that task in a fresh way. We must be sincere in our commitment. Two young ladies were discussing their boyfriends over dinner. One of them said, “Oh, he’s always sincere whether he means it or not.” Well, that boyfriend wasn’t very sincere at all, was he?

And if you and I are to commit ourselves to the task of building the walls of revival, we must always be sincere, and we must always mean it! Our reply to Satan, to the world, to anybody or anything that would pull us down from our great work should be, “I am doing a great work and cannot come down!”

That's it! That's the fine print on this contract for revival. It takes a burden. It takes an authority from the king. It takes an honest inspection of the ruins. It takes a challenge to the people. And it takes a commitment to the task.

Now that you've read the fine print on this contract for revival, **it's time to sign your name on the dotted line.**