

Sermon Series: "Name Your Need"—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield—2/18/2001

Title: "Don't Be Afraid to Ask!"

Text: Nehemiah 1: 2–2: 4

Introduction: *Illus.:* "Getting What We Have" (Garrison Keillor) "Moving Men" (Hudson Taylor)

Theme: Scriptures's admonition, "you have not because you ask not," should encourage us to be bold in our prayer requests not because we have the right to demand anything of God; rather, because Jesus has given the privilege and the gift of prayer by which we can come.

### *The hindrance to a powerful prayer life*

- **Self-trust**
  1. For Nehemiah, prayer could have been the last thing on his mind
    - a. He was trusted powerful position to the King—cupbearer to King—not need God (vs. 11)
    - b. Susa (vs.1) New York. of ancient world—in the hub of activity—why think about dirty, dusty broken Jerusalem
  2. Often our "self-helps" and "technological gimmicks" take our focus and our thoughts off of God and his providence
- **Self-doubt**
  1. Nehemiah could have let go of prayer because it appeared the God had become a God—at-a-distance
    - a. Seventy long years had passed since Jerusalem's destruction—forgot God's eternal plan, doubt God around
  2. We let trial, consequence of a bad choice we bear or a long dry spell or depression do, drive us to despair of prayer
    - a. **ILLUS.: WRITING BLIND**
    - b. Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1

### *The heart of a powerful prayer life*

- **A clear recognition of the need at hand**
  1. Understanding your own sinful, weakness as you approach God in prayer (vs. 6)
  2. Understanding that our own sinful actions and nature have brought on sin-fallenness we endure (vs. 7-8)
  3. Understanding that God promises to be our **RESCUER** if we only turn to him at this late date (vs. 9-10)
- **Personal involvement in the other's concern**
  1. It would have been easy for Nehemiah to say, "It is their own fault," or "it is not my concern." (vss. 2-4)
  2. A sin of omission is just as bad as if you did it.
    - a. "Suppose a believer, whether a man or a woman, needs clothes or food <sup>16</sup>and one of you tells that person, "God be with you! Stay warm, and make sure you eat enough." If you don't provide for that person's physical needs, what good does it do? James 2:15-16
  3. God wants mercy before sacrifice.(Matthew 9: 13)
    - a. **ILLUS.: NOT BY BREAD ALONE**
- **Go to God first rather than last**
  1. Before he went to the King, before he tried his own "powerful solution," Nehemiah went to God in prayer
  2. Not about trying to find *emergency pull station*--having line open to God in *every need, all the time, always praying*
  3. Pray without ceasing! 1 Thes. 5:17
- **Be available to be used by God to meet the need**
  1. Nehemiah did not ask God to get someone else—he saw the need, prayed about it, and dove into the deep end (2: 1-4)
  2. When you and I say, "Thy will be done," we better be ready to be used by God as His answer to the prayer need
  3. **ILLUS.: DON'T BE SURPRISED BY THE WHO OF GOD'S ANSWER**

### *The how-to of a powerful prayer life*

- **Wait on the Lord** ---You can't pray if your rushing out ahead of God
  1. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: Psalm 37:5
- **Take on God's eyes** — see the situation and the people through His eternal perspective
  1. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8
- **Quiet your heart** —you can't worry and pray at the same time
  1. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philip. 4:6
- **Activate your faith** — walk by faith and not sight—base actions on hope rather than petty and critical attitudes
  1. We live by faith, not by sight. 2 Cor. 5:7

2. [Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1](#)

### **Getting What We Have**

Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which once you have it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known. Citation: Garrison Keillor in Lake Wobegon Days. \

### **Moving Men**

“It is possible to move men, through God, by prayer alone.” Hudson Taylor

### **Writing Blind**

When divers combed the wreckage of the *Kursk* (the destroyed Russian nuclear submarine on which 118 sailors perished), they found a letter written by Lt. Dmitri Kolesnikov. The handwritten note was addressed to his wife, Olga. It was penned after the explosion that sealed the sub's doom on August 12, 2000, in the Barents Sea and confirmed speculation that all the crew had not died instantly. A few hours after the submarine plunged to the bottom of the sea, Kolesnikov wrote, "All the crew from the sixth, seventh, and eighth compartments went over to the ninth. There are 23 people here. . . . None of us can get to the surface." The note included a deeply personal expression of affection to his beloved Olga, who admitted that her husband had a premonition of death when he bade her goodbye before sailing out to the Barents Sea. Eerily, the last lines of the letter indicated that death was closing in. The auxiliary power had failed. Kolesnikov wrote unevenly in the pitch darkness: "I am writing blind."

### **Not by Bread Alone**

My four-year-old was standing on a kitchen chair pulled close to the wall, intensely staring at the familiar "Our Daily Bread" painting of the older man praying over a small loaf. "What are you doing, Honey?" I asked. "Looking," she said with a catch in her voice. Noticing tears under her dark lashes, I probed deeper. "What are you thinking?" With a heartfelt sigh, she replied, "He doesn't have any peanut butter."

### **Don't be surprised by the who of God's answer**

It was a cold winter day and the entire family was snug in our warm house. Everyone that is, except for our six-year-old Jonathan, who insisted on playing out in the snow. As I happened by an upstairs window, I noticed Jonathan had made a giant snowball in the yard across the street. My wife stopped by to see what I was so interested in. Just then, Jonathan began to roll the giant snowball across the street. Our other three children joined us as we began chuckling to ourselves. Jonathan had reached our side of the street with his snowball and was trying desperately to get it up the curb. After a few unsuccessful tries at pushing it, he backed up about ten feet for a running start. Failing again, he tried lifting it and finally in frustration gave it a kick! Suddenly, he knelt in front of the snowball with his hands folded and head bowed. My nine-year-old, Jeana, was immediately dispatched to help the Lord answer Jonathan's prayer.

## Neh. 1:1-2:4

<sup>1</sup>The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,

<sup>2</sup>Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." <sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

<sup>5</sup>Then I said: "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup>"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, <sup>9</sup>but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' <sup>10</sup>"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. <sup>11</sup>O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

I was cupbearer to the king.

<sup>2:1</sup>In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; <sup>2</sup>so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid, <sup>3</sup>but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" <sup>4</sup>The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven,