

Becoming a Difference Maker Nehemiah 1:1-11

Intro: One of life's most important questions is the question of significance. Isaiah asked this question in Isaiah 49:4a. He said, *"Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain..."*

What was Isaiah saying? *"My work all seems so useless. I've spent my strength for nothing and for no purpose at all."* Living a life of significance means living a life for a purpose and people who live a life of purpose become **people who make a difference** in the life of others.

Someone who lives a life of significance is someone who makes a difference in the life of others. Are you **SPECIAL** to anyone besides your mother? I think all of us want to be significant in life. Not that we are better than anyone else, necessarily, but more than just another driver on the interstate, more than a featureless form moving through the checkout line. We want to matter, to be significant. We want others to realize we lived. How can we make that happen? We can make others realize we lived by becoming **Difference Makers**. A **Difference Maker** is someone who invests in the life of others.

When I go to pastor's meetings around this state I regularly hear from someone how much of an influence Pastor Smith was in their life. Pastor Smith was a **Difference Maker** and we meet another one in our text today.

Let's look at **[Nehemiah 1 and see what takes to be a Difference Maker Read 1:1-11/pray/dismiss Jr. Church]**

When people arrive at the end of their lives rarely are concerned with how much wealth they have accumulated but how many people they have impacted. This past Tuesday Sally and I attended Pastor Jim McCarty's funeral. Jim was a man who made a difference in people's lives; how do I know that? The number of people who attended his funeral on a cold, snowy Tuesday was a testament to a life of a **Difference Maker**.

Our text today we see a man who was a **Difference Maker**. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I. The position of cupbearer was a responsible one (certifying that none of the wine the king drank was poisoned) and an influential one (since such a trusted servant often became a close advisor).

You could say that Nehemiah was living the good life – except for that outside chance that someone might try to poison the king. But Nehemiah was not a man who was going to set back in his comfort zone and just live the good life, he wanted to be a **Difference Maker**. In the first chapter of Nehemiah we see what it takes to be a **Difference Maker**

A Difference Maker is someone who...

1. IS CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF OTHERS - v.2-3

- A. Nehemiah was in the palace at Shushan when his brother Hanani came along with another man from Judah.
- B. Nehemiah asked how it went with the children of the captivity and what state Jerusalem, the beloved city, was in.
 - 1) Nehemiah was living a fairly good life there in Shushan, which is in Babylon
 - 2) He was the King's cupbearer; a position of great trust, honor and benefit
 - 3) But he could not forget who he was; an Israelite and he could not get the plight of his fellow Israelites
- C. The account was not a happy one
 - 1) Hanani "...was a faithful man, and feared God above many..." (7:2) tells us so the report was not an exaggeration but an honest and true one.
 - 2) The remnant was in "...great affliction and reproach..."
 - 3) The walls of the city were "...broken down..."
 - 4) Even the gates were "...burned with fire."
- D. The need was great
 - 1) They were exposed to be overrun by their enemies
 - 2) They were suffering from poverty and subject to be taken into slavery again

- E. The temple was built and the government was settled but there was still much to be done.
- F. We have our Jerusalem's among us today...they are called the church.
 - 1) The church is the gathering of God's people.
 - 2) Every church goes through it's difficult times
 - 3) To overcome it will require the help some Nehemiah's – **Difference Makers** – to help over come them

A Difference Maker is someone who...

2. IS MOVED WITH COMPASSION FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS - v. 4a

- A. Nehemiah's immediate reaction was pretty extreme; he is just sad about what he hears
 - 1) It appears that the strength in his legs gave out because it says he "...set down..."
 - 2) Then he "...wept, and mourned..."
- B. He his reaction goes beyond normal human emotions
 - 1) This weeping and mourning was not short lived
 - 2) It continued "...certain days..."
 - 3) He not only was not only weeping and mourning but it says that he "...fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."
 - 4) Many times a concern will come over us and we will feel something of a concern for a while but it soon passes
 - 5) If it is from the Lord the burden will abide and even grow stronger and remain until the burden is finished.
 - 6) **ILL:** Hurricane Katrina. Right after Hurricane Katrina in Aug 2005 people came out of the woodwork looking for a way to help; today, less than 2 years later the many of those who lost everything are still suffering but we don't see the same level of compassion.
Manna. We have Manna rep in once a year and many right away want to sponsor one of those hungry kids. A year later; if we don't have the Kent back the giving goes down. Let me illustrate it this way, from last Jan thru the end of Oct we gave an average of \$311 per month to Manna; Since Nov of last year we are giving an average of \$207 per month. At \$311 per month we were feeding 15 kids, at \$207 we are feeding 10 that means that 5 kids who were being feed are now not.
- C. **Notice what he did not do when he heard the report.**
 - 1) Complain, whine, or "see who could fix this problem."
 - 2) He immediately did what he knew he could do - pray, and intensely seek God in this situation
- D. He also had a clear understanding of just who it was who could fix the problem and to whom he was fasting and praying
 - 1) The God of heaven
 - 2) There are many God's people trust in
 - 3) But only the God of heaven can really meet our needs
- E. When a difference maker becomes aware of the needs of others he is moved with compassion for those needs and that compassion doesn't end until those needs are met.

A Difference Maker is someone who...

3. PRAYS FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS - v. 4b-10

- A. When Nehemiah prayed notice that he didn't just cry out to God to meet that need.
 - 1) First he directed Adoration to God -v.5
 - 2) Then he Confessed his own and the rest of the peoples Sins to God v.6-7
 - 3) Then he rehearsed for God what God had promised Moses v.8-9
 - (a) One of the mightiest men of prayer of the last generation was George Mueller of Bristol, England, who in the last sixty years of his life (he lived to be ninety-two or ninety-three) obtained the English equivalent of \$7,200,000.00 by prayer. But George Mueller never prayed for a thing just because he wanted it, or even just because he felt it was greatly needed for God's work. When it was laid upon George Mueller's heart to pray for anything, he would search the Scriptures to find if there was some promise that covered the case. Sometimes he would search the scriptures for days before he presented his petition to God. And then when he found the promise, with his open Bible before him, and his finger upon that promise, he would plead that promise, and so he received what he asked. He always prayed with an open Bible before him.
 - (b) When we pray using God's Word and praying it back to Him then he knows we are serious.

- 4) Need to Thank God for what He has done v. 10
- (a) It is said that in Africa there is a fruit called the "taste berry", because it changes a person's taste so that everything eaten tastes sweet and pleasant. Sour fruit, even if eaten several hours after the "taste berry," becomes sweet and delicious. Gratitude is the "taste berry" of Christianity, and when our hearts are filled with gratitude, nothing that God sends us seems unpleasant to us. Sorrowing heart, sweeten your grief with gratitude. Burdened soul, lighten your burden by singing God's praises. Disappointed one, dispel your loneliness by making others grateful. Sick one; grow strong in soul, thanking God that He loves you enough to chasten you. Keep the "taste berry" of gratitude in your hearts, and it will do for you what the "taste berry" of Africa does for the African.

A Difference Maker is someone who...

4. MAKES HIMSELF AVAILABLE TO BE USED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS V. 11

A. The ask the question, "What can I do to make a difference?" v. 11

- 1) Nehemiah closes his prayer by making the entire thing personal.
- (a) When he closes with the phrase "...**and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day...**" he means himself.
- (b) Later that day he would wait on the king of Persia, and, if he had opportunity, intended to lay the case of the Jews before him, and therefore pleads that God might allow his attempt to be meet with success
- 2) He understood that by doing so he ran the risk of putting at jeopardy all he had but he was willing to do it to become **A Difference Maker**.
- 3) "One of the concerns of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil. He mocks our wisdom. But he trembles when we pray."
- 4) Alexander the Great had a man in his kingdom who asked of him some monetary help. The Emperor told him to go to the Treasury and obtain what he needed. When he asked, the sum seemed so large that the Treasurer was astonished and went to Alexander to confirm it. Alexander is said to have told him to honor the request and give him what was needed. He explained, "This man has paid me a singular honor. By the bigness of his request, he has shown his idea of my wealth and my generosity, and... something more gratifying: He takes me at my word!" <Stones with Fair Colors> Gary Bowell p.192

Conclusion: Nehemiah not only prayed and asked that God care for the people of Jerusalem after he heard the report but he gained permission to leave his good life behind and go to Jerusalem and began the task of rebuilding the walls. You see, **A Difference Maker** doesn't stop with a **CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF OTHERS** no, a **Difference Maker** has **COMPASSION FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS** and then they **PRAYS FOR THE THOSE NEEDS** and then **MAKE THEMSELFS AVAILABLE TO BE USED TO MEET THOSE NEEDS**

Do you want to be a **Difference Maker**? If so wont you join me here at the alter to begin praying for the needs of your church.