

## “TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN”

Devotional Thoughts for Day of Prayer and Fasting, October 7, 2017

**Key Verse:** Matthew 28: 19-20

### **Introduction**

God has a plan for this world. Throughout the centuries, he has chosen human instruments to work with him to accomplish it. In our sermon today, we will consider the cases of four people that God called and learn from them. What about us who are the children of God in these last days?

### **I. Nehemiah**

“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God” (Nehemiah 6:15, 16).

Fifty-two days. The wall was done. The city safe. The enemy defeated. And the people encouraged.

Despite persistent opposition and attacks of the enemy, Nehemiah refused to let anything distract him from what God had called him to do and led his people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. But he accomplished more than just building walls.

His work brought hope and courage to the Jews. They had worked together and taken the first step in rebuilding their lives and their nation. They were now more eager and hopeful that they could rebuild their homes and worship their God. Word would soon spread, and other captives would come home. Israel would grow and flourish again. They would rebuild the temple and recommit their lives to the God who had rescued them.

But it wasn't just Israel and the Jewish people who were impacted by all God had done. “And all the nations around us saw these things . . .” (verse 16).

The nations were watching. They knew the Jews had been captive. They knew Jerusalem had been destroyed. Their enemies persistently attempted to prevent them from rebuilding the walls. But despite all they did, the walls went up and Jerusalem was protected. They saw what had happened and knew that there was only one explanation:

“They perceived that this work was done by our God” (verse 16).

They knew that it wasn't because the Jews were special or above average in skill or strength. They weren't master builders. Or mighty warriors. They were captives finding

their way home. Ordinary people who hadn't been able to defeat their enemies 70 years earlier.

Yet here they were. An incredible feat in a short period of time—despite constant attack.

The nations knew that it wasn't because of the people but because of their God. They were ordinary people with an extraordinary God who worked through them and for them. They marveled and feared. Who was this God and why did He care about these people?

## **II. Peter and John**

Hundreds of years later, within these very walls, would come another time when the nations would see ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things and recognize that it could only happen because of their God.

At that time, the followers of Christ in Jerusalem were growing in numbers because of the ministry of Peter and John. These fishermen who had followed and failed Jesus were now preaching with a boldness and authority that caused others to stop and listen. Their teaching led thousands to be baptized and gather together to study and pray. As the new church grew, amazing things happened.

One day, as they walked to the temple to pray, Peter and John came across a man lame from birth who was begging for alms at the temple gate called Beautiful. The two apostles had no money to give him, but they offered what they did have: the power of Jesus (Romans 8:11; Ephesians 1:19-21). Instantly the lame man was “walking, leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3:1-10). Everyone who saw the transformation was amazed. People came running to Peter and John. And Peter, seeing an opportunity, again began teaching about Jesus and calling the people to repentance and salvation. The number of believers grew to about 5,000 (Acts 4:4).

But not everyone was excited.

The rulers, elders, scribes, and high priest were not happy. They had never seen anything like it. Thinking they had ended things when they crucified Christ, they wanted to put an end to this growing movement. And they wanted to know how it was happening. “By what power or by what name have you done this?” (verse 7).

With boldness—and by the power of the Holy Spirit—Peter responded. Basically he told them, “It's all Jesus.”

And the leaders and scribes couldn't deny it. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (verse 13).

Peter and John were just a couple of ordinary fishermen. They hadn't been to the rabbinical schools. Hadn't apprenticed under one of their scholars or teachers. Yet here they were preaching with authority and boldness and a power that was transforming lives

and creating a powerful, unstoppable movement.

And there could only be one reason.

They had been with Jesus. “The light and love and power of an indwelling Christ shone out through them, so that men, beholding, marveled” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 65).

When God’s people trust Him and step out in faith to do what He’s called them to do no matter what, things happen and people see God through them. Let’s make that personal. When *you* trust Him and *you* step out in faith to do what He’s called *you* to do no matter what, lives will be impacted and transformed.

It’s the way God works: through His committed people.

### **III. Paul**

Another follower of Jesus, the apostle Paul, walked away from everything he was—the position, respect, “righteousness”—and did what God called him to do. He became a traveling preacher, often beaten and jailed but persistently sharing Jesus wherever he found himself—whether on his own accord or because he was in prison. Those who opposed him recognized that God was using him to turn “the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

### **IV. God’s call to us**

What do people see when they look at us? What do our lives reveal about God? When we face trials or attacks from enemies, what does our response tell people about the Jesus we talk about? The world is watching. Maybe the whole world isn’t watching you, but there are people in your family, workplace, and community who are watching you. They’re watching to see the difference God makes in your life—in how you respond to trials and in the way you treat other people.

It doesn’t matter who you are. Nehemiah was a captive who served a foreign king. Peter and John were fishermen, blue-collar workers. Paul had once been respected by the leaders of his community, but now he was despised by them. God still called each of them, and He calls each of us. He calls the young. Old. Educated. Uneducated. Rich. Poor. God still calls His people today to turn the world upside down. To rebuild lives. To begin a movement. To share Him—His story, His salvation, His love. To live lives that reveal a powerful God who loves and protects His people and works through them to impact the world. His call is the same for every one of us. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

He is first calling you to a personal relationship with Him. Nehemiah, Peter, John, and Paul were only able to do what they did *because* of their connection to God. They had been with Him—in person or through study and prayer. Our first priority needs to be time with Jesus. Not just checking off a list of things we think we should do but connecting with Him in a personal and real way that changes us.

Then He is calling each one of us to *go*. Each one of us has a role to play. We have a story to share about what God has done in our lives. It's really that simple. "Go . . . and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you" (Mark 5:19). He has gifted each one of us in a way that will encourage and build the church (1 Corinthians 12). He challenges us not to see our unique role as less important—or more important—than anyone else's but to believe that we are needed. We are created for this time, to make a difference.

If we do whatever He's called us to do, He will use it to change the world. Just as He did for Nehemiah, Peter, John, and Paul. "If through living faith and sanctified obedience to God's word, we reveal the love and grace of Christ, if we show that we have a true conception of God's guiding providences in the work, we shall carry to the world a convincing power. A high position does not give us value in the sight of God. Man is measured by his consecration and faithfulness in working out the will of God. If the remnant people of God will walk before Him in humility and faith, He will carry out through them His eternal purpose, enabling them to work harmoniously in giving to the world the truth as it is in Jesus. He will use all—men, women, and children—in making the light shine forth to the world, and calling out a people that will be true to His commandments. Through the faith that His people exercise in Him, God will make known to the world that He is the true God, the God of Israel" (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 274).

God calls us to make Him known to the world. Are you ready to turn the world upside down?

## **Conclusion**

Nehemiah was in a foreign land. A captive serving the king. God broke his heart for his city and called him to lead the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah let nothing keep him from this task. As a result, the nations around Jerusalem saw God.

Peter and John were called to preach. They didn't let their lack of education or lack of position stop them. They spoke with boldness and healed people as they went. The threats of the religious leaders couldn't dissuade them. (Prison couldn't deter them—they just witnessed there, too.) And people recognized that the only reason they could do what they were doing was because of the time they had spent with Jesus.

Paul and others turned the world upside down.

God calls us to do the same: "Go and make disciples."

Call and Prayer.