

Restoration: The need

Art lovers around the world can spend hours at art galleries studying the various paintings and other forms of art. Many of these valuable paintings are a few hundred years old. Some of them weren't discovered in good condition and thus art restorers had to do their best to restore the valuable works of art to its original form. Many times archeologists discover ancient artifacts that are broken and need to be restored by professional artists to their original forms so that they can be appreciated by all who see and study them.

The Bible is a book about the restoration of mankind to what God originally created him to be. Sin has distorted man and the world in which he lives. It has also distorted the church. We are prone to wander from the purposes of God and we, as well as the community that we live and worship in, becomes distorted and is in need of restoration. This is what the book of Nehemiah is all about. Israel constantly sinned against God and thus God eventually sent the Babylonians and Assyrians against Israel and took the Israelites into exile. After 70 years in exile they could return to their land, but much had been destroyed and was in need of restoration.

Restoration takes place on 2 levels:

- 1) Individual
- 2) Community

Nehemiah 1: 1 – 11

- 1) Seeing the need for restoration (vs. 1 – 3)
 - Before anything else can happen in our lives and community we need to see the need for restoration.
 - Often we only see the need for restoration when it is pointed out to us by others.
 - This is because we have a tendency to have blind spots in our lives and our own community that we don't see what needs to change.
 - Israel had been in exile for about 70 years and didn't know what was happening back in Jerusalem. Besides that it is possible that they had resigned themselves to life in exile and many, especially those who had been born in exile, had probably come to accept things as they are – life in captivity in a foreign land.
 - Are there areas in your life that you have come to accept as normal even though you might be in bondage to them?
 - What are the areas of our lives that could need restoration even though we have believed in Jesus and are born again?
 - Our minds – we have often believed lies about ourselves
 - Our emotions – we have been hurt, gone through trauma, etc.
 - Our relationships – Most of us have been through conflict situations.
 - Our sense of responsibility – Most of us take responsibility for our own lives but not for others or the purposes of God to be served through us.
 - What are the areas of the church that could need restoration?
 - Worship – from lip service to heart worship
 - The Word of God – rather than mere tradition
 - Community – rather than individualism
 - Giving – generously and sacrificially

- Service – not just wanting to be served and have our own needs met.
- 2) Being convicted about the need for restoration (v. 4)
 - When we come to know about the need for restoration we can react in one of 3 ways:
 - Deny it
 - Acknowledge it and continue life without taking responsibility for it
 - Be convicted in the heart that moves us to action whether for personal restoration or for corporate restoration – the church.
 - Nehemiah was so moved by the reports of the condition of Jerusalem that he mourned, fasted and prayed for some days.
 - Praying acknowledges that restoration is a work of God and not man.
 - How does the need for restoration affect you?
- 3) A prayer for restoration (vs. 5 – 11)
 - Acknowledge who God (5)
 - He is great and awesome
 - He keeps his covenant of love to those who love and obey Him.
 - Petition – appeal, implore, plead – God to listen to our prayers. (6)
 - Confess that we have sinned against God and not obeyed Him. (6 – 7)
 - Remind ourselves that God had stated that disobedience has consequences (8)
 - Remember how God had redeemed His people in the past by His great strength and mighty hand. (10)
 - Ask for success in starting the task of restoration even against the odds. (11)
 - Nehemiah had to get the permission of the emperor who held him captive.