

**Christ Community Covenant Church
Pursuing Christ and His priorities in the world
God is in the business of transforming lives
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 19, 2014**

Redemption is a priority of God

Community is a priority of God

Remembering is a priority of God: Chapter nine is a lesson in remembering

Next week a service of remembering...

The disenfranchised and poor are a priority of God. In Nehemiah 5 we see Nehemiah confronting the elite and powerful nobles who have been charging the poor usurious interest rates and have been taking land and money from those who can least afford it.

Life is important to God. This is the week where we as churches celebrate Life and remember how in our country we have a culture of death, where the unborn are daily aborted with a total disregard for God's heart for life.

And as I read on through Nehemiah I see other priorities of God. **His word is a priority.** In Chapter 8 we read one of the great stories of God's word recorded in history as Ezra the priest reads the Book of the Law of Moses to all the people from a huge scaffold before the entire city in front of the Watergate and from morning to high noon he read the law six plus hours and they stood and listened the whole way through! And you complain of my sermons! Deuteronomy 31:9-13 tells us that the entire law was to be read to an assembly of the nation once every 7 years at the Feast of Tabernacles to keep the law before the people. The last time that we know of from scriptures that the Law had been read aloud was over 100 years earlier under the reign of King Josiah of Judah, and before that it was 250 years earlier under King Jehoshaphat and before that 500 years earlier by Joshua. While we all may have not lived up to it, we are to treasure the reading and study of God's law and word.

Prayer is a priority of God and if we look closely we see that Nehemiah is a man of constant prayer. When the enemies of Nehemiah were threatening to kill them we read things like "We prayed to God and set a watch."

But the longer I reflected on this book and reflect on what prayer and remembering and the word all have in common is that these are all a means of grace by which God transforms our lives. God's ultimate priority is the transformation of those who love Him.

Transformation

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

It turns out that from our message two weeks ago redemption is a means of transformation.

And last week we discovered that community is a means of transformation

Chapters 1-7: The reconstruction of the wall

Chapters 8-13: The restoration of the people

Ezra and Nehemiah are written in one scroll and the difference between them is a single line in the original Hebrew. They are to be read as one story that inform each other and together they tell the story of the redemption, the restoration, and I think better put, the transformation of the nation of Israel.

[Brief review]

Nehemiah 8:9-12

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

The people are crying for a number of reasons. They are crying out of sadness. They have lived for virtually hundreds of years without hearing the Law of God and they have discovered that they have not lived well in light of that word. They are crying because they are scared of the consequences of disobeying God, and they know that part of the reason they are in this difficult position now are returning exiles of a destroyed country and temple now is because their Kings of years before lived and led with disobedient hearts.

But perhaps some of them are crying for joy because they heard the Law of Moses and their hearts were touched and they repented and found forgiveness and were relieved to the core that their sins would be blotted out by a God who cares to love them anyway.

Transformation, the deep soul transformation that God is so interested in is available for all, purchased by Christ on the cross. But the faucet that releases this forgiveness and grace is called repentance.

At Male Call this past Friday, we remembered in our youth when we first discovered the love of Christ we were overjoyed to repent. The older we get the more repentance feels like a burden or a punishment, and those couldn't be further from the truth.

Acts 3:19

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

Transformation is expected

Matthew 18:1-3

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³ And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You can tell if your life is hidden with Christ in Heaven. You will have been experiencing transformation. You will have been doing what Paul wrote about in his letter to the church in Ephesus; you will have been making a practice of taking off the old man and putting on the new man. This passage tells us that transformation or change is necessary to enter the Kingdom of God.

Remember how dependent children are to their parents and how they want to please and perform for their parents, how proud they want to make their parents. Then we grow and we become self-sufficient and independent rather than dependent and we think these to be so grown up. Actually the American value of the self-sufficient and self-made person have very little to do with the Kingdom values of God.

Transformation is expected and you can measure your life in Christ by your transformation. Once and for all and moment by moment. But that is not all:

Transformation is necessary

If you are not transformed, you cannot get into heaven. Remember when Jesus was speaking to the Pharisee Nicodemus in John 3 and he said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." You see in our current state without Christ we are finite and fallen and unholy. We must be made infinite and whole and holy to become heaven ready. The finite and fallen and unholy cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. It is necessary that we must be transformed – the ever-living never-dying part of us must be made new. You must be fit for heaven as the old children's Christmas hymn says... "And fit us for Heaven to live with thee there."

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Romans 12:2

² Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Finally transformation, even though it is necessary and expected can often be painful.

Transformation can be painful

Change is hard. Sometimes we get locked into a way of doing things and we just don't even think about it. The U.S. standard railroad gauge (distance between rails) is four feet, eight-and-one-half inches.

Why such an odd number? Because that's the way they built them in England, and American railroads were built by British expatriates.

Why did the English adopt that particular gauge? Because the people who built the pre-railroad tramways used that gauge.

They in turn were locked into that gauge because the people who built tramways used the same standards and tools they had used for building wagons, which were set on a gauge of four feet, eight-and-one-half inches.

Why were wagons built to that scale? Because with any other size, the wheels did not match the old wheel ruts on the roads.

"So who built these old rutted roads?"

The first long-distance highways in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions. The roads have been in use ever since. The ruts were first made by Roman war chariots. Four feet, eight-and-one-half inches was the width a chariot needed to be to accommodate the rear ends of two war horses.

For true transformation to occur we need to be knocked off our train tracks. And speaking of not wanting to change and trains, here's an excerpt from a letter to then President Jackson dated January 31, 1829: *As you may know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed. Signed, Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York*

James 1:2-4

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

We can't seem to learn the deep lessons of life without them having a cost associated with them.

Illustrated: Tempered steel chisel

Prayer