

How to Move God to Action – Nehemiah 9:5b-38

I. Introduction:

- A. As you have seen, this prayer is filled with references to Israel's history.
1. I will probably not deal with that history other than to say at this point – *“Actions have consequences.”*
 2. Israel proves that even when God's people sin, they will be punished.
 3. God is *“righteous”* in the sense that He treats people as they deserve to be treated. **He is just.**
 4. When you sin against the Lord you can expect His backhand.
 5. And when you please Him, by living according to His precepts, He will bless you – but perhaps not in ways you might expect.
 6. These things are some of the lessons in this prayerful psalm.
- B. The Bible shows us that there are many different kinds of prayer.
1. The prayer of this godly Levite **isn't characterized by pleading** – with requests for great **miracles**.
 2. And this is **not a psalm of praise**, even though there is praise implied.
 3. Despite beginning by extolling some of God's attributes, this prayer **does not focus** on the **Lord**, per se.
 4. As I said last week, this is **more like a prayerful hymn**, directed as much to the congregation as it is to the Lord.
 5. It is not what the Seraphim might repeat before God's holy throne of grace.
 6. And yet, there is a lesson about prayer contained here.
- C. Before getting to that, I'd like to set the background by asking you to think about another Biblical prayer.
1. Do you remember Abraham's prayer to God for his nephew Lot and the city of Sodom.
 2. In **Genesis 18** the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre.
 3. *“And the Lord said – (to himself) – Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?”*
 4. God then let Abraham know that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their unnatural and ungodly sins of homosexual immorality.
 5. At that point, knowing that Lot lived in Sodom, Abraham began to pray for leniency.
 - a. *“And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”*
 - b. *Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?*
 - c. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*
 - d. *And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”*
 6. From there, Abraham argued back from 50 to 45 people, then to 40, and 30 then down to 20 people, and eventually to 10.
 7. Finally, the Lord said, *“I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the Lord went his way...”*
 8. There were not 10 righteous people in Sodom, and God destroyed it with fire and brimstone.
 9. The United States of America ought to expect the same judgment for the same reasons, despite the few righteous living within her borders.
- D. Besides that, the thing I'd like you to notice is that **Abraham argued** for the deliverance of Sodom **based on God's righteousness** – the Lord's sense of justice.
1. Abraham **ARGUED** in prayer with the Lord – He used **dialectics** – He **reasoned** with God in his prayer.
 2. And his argument was not so much about a few righteous people in a wicked city, as it was about the nature of the Lord himself.
 3. *“That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”***

II. Keep that in mind as we consider this prayer of Nehemiah 9.

- A. When this prayer-leader was speaking to the Lord, he touched on a couple points which we, like Abraham, might use to implore the Lord to action.
1. Do you have burdens crushing your soul; so occupying your thoughts that they are depriving you of joy?
 2. Do you have requests – the need of miracles – perhaps loved ones so enslaved by sin and unbelief that you fear there is no hope for them? There is always hope, as long as you both shall live.
 3. God loves to show His power and sovereignty, **SO** *“let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,”* following some of the examples the Lord has given to us in His Word.
- B. Notice again how this man began his prayer with **WORSHIP – verse 6**.
1. *“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.”*
 2. It is definitely not a waste of time in your prayer closet to remember who it is you are addressing.
 3. In fact, it is **ALWAYS appropriate** to speak to others – especially important people – with the respect.
 4. And there is no one more important, more elevated, more glorious than Jehovah. Tell Him so.
 5. It is not simpering, not groveling, not ingratiating to honestly and respectfully speak of the Lord’s glories.
 6. I won’t tell you that it will guarantee the Lord will do things on your behalf, but it will never hurt your case.
- C. I will come back to this, but notice the words of **verse 10** – *“Thou art the Lord the God, that...”*
1. *“Shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a NAME, as it is this day.”*
 2. It is a fact that the Lord will do things for **His name’s sake** that He will not do for other reasons.
 3. It is not a mistake on our part to pray that God will do things for **His glory** and for **His name’s sake**.
- D. And then **verse 32** refers to the fact that **God keeps His word** – His **COVENANTS**.
1. *“Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest COVENANT and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.”*
 2. Have you ever seen a **rainbow**, and it reminded you to plead with God for protection and blessing based on the covenant He made to Noah? It is a perfectly permissible prayer.
 3. Our worship-leader here may be referring to the **covenant** which the Lord made with **Abraham**, or it might have been the one made with **David**.
 4. You and I might be more inclined to point to the **eternal covenant** between the members of the God-head.
 5. *“Father, I stand in need, bless me for Jesus’ sake – in whose righteousness I stand.”*
 6. We could apply this idea to any and all of God’s promises – God’s covenants contain promises.
 7. *“Oh God, our Saviour has said that if I have faith the size of a mustard seed, I could move mountains. Lord, there is a mountain in front of me today. Please move it, or carry me over it, or let me see around it.”*
 8. I believe that God loves to hear us pray the promises which He has made to us.
- E. There is something else to which our leader often refers – **MERCY**.
1. **Verse 31** – *“Nevertheless for thy great **MERCIES’ sake** thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.”*
 2. **Verse 32** once again, *“Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and **MERCY**, let not all the trouble seem little before thee...”*
 3. **Verse 28** – *“After (our wicked forefathers) had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy **MERCIES.**”*

F. How often – how many times – does the Bible speak of God as merciful? – 3 dozen?

1. *“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”*
2. *“Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.”*
3. In Psalm after Psalm, David, Asaph and others plead with the Lord to meet their needs based on nothing else but that God is merciful.
4. In one sense, mercy is all that we have to plead. *“God be merciful to me, a sinner.”*

III. Now, with that I want to make a brief survey of the Bible.

A. Is there something – is there a problem – for which you need the blessing of the Lord today?

1. You can blurt out your need in an **ejaculatory fashion** the way Nehemiah did in chapter 2 – *“Help Lord.”*
2. Or in the quiet of your closet, you can come boldly before the throne of grace, simply as one of His children, to *“obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*
3. You can present **itemized lists** of your needs and desires.
4. But my theme tonight is this: Our prayers will be more effective – more God-moving – if they are preceded and built upon Biblical foundations.

B. As I was looking at **verse 31**, my heart got hung up on the words *“for thy great mercies’ SAKE thou didst...”*

1. Not unlike ourselves, the Lord does things for reasons.
2. The righteous God moves in certain ways motivated by certain clearly defined principles.
3. And if we keep those principles in mind, then our prayer requests can take on new life in Heaven.
4. **Romans 8:26** – *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*
 - a. We may not know for **WHAT** we should pray, because we don’t precisely know God’s will.
 - b. But the Holy Spirit has shown us **HOW** we should pray.

C. Take for example that subject of **God’s mercy** which I mentioned earlier.

1. As said there are about three dozen scriptures which describe God as *“merciful.”*
2. And there are some passages which actually say that **God is moved** by His own **merciful nature**.

D. Turn to **Psalm 6** where David acknowledges that God was displeased with him.

1. *“O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.*
 - a. *Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.*
 - b. *My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?*
 - c. *Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy MERCIES’ sake.”*
2. David could find no reason in himself for God to deliver him.
 - a. He couldn’t plead past righteousness, good works or religious connections.
 - b. Never do we read that David reminded God that he had delivered Israel by killing Goliath.
 - c. And he wasn’t foolish enough to try to make promises about potential future service or devotion.
3. He had no where to turn but to the Lord Himself, and specifically to God’s merciful nature.
4. *Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy MERCIES’ sake.”*

E. In **Psalm 31** David doesn’t refer to God’s chastisement upon him, but he was still in distress.

1. **Verse 14** – *“But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God.*
 - a. *My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.*
 - b. *Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy MERCIES’ sake.”*
2. It is never inappropriate to plead for God’s mercy, because He is a gracious and merciful God.

F. Whoever the poet is in **Psalm 44:20**, he again uses the Lord’s mercy as a gentle pry bar.

1. *“If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;*
 - a. *Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*
 - b. *Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.*

- c. *Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever.*
- d. *Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?*
- e. *For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth.*
- f. *Arise for our help, and redeem us **for thy mercies' sake.***"
2. So you are praying for the salvation of your child.
 3. You can't plead his worthiness, because he has none, and you can't plead your own for the same reason.
 4. But you can, like these psalmists, assert the Lord's own mercy.
 5. *"Lord, for thy mercies' sake save my child. Save him for your glory ."*
- G. Or we can ask God to bless and meet our needs **for Himself generally** – for **God's NAME'S sake**.
1. In **I Samuel 12** (you may turn there), Samuel was rebuking Israel for her desire to be like the rest of the nations – they wanted to have a human king.
 2. **Verse 16** – *"Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes.*
 - a. *Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king.*
 - b. *So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.*
 - c. *And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain.*
 - d. *For the LORD will not forsake his people **for his great NAME'S sake**: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people."*
 3. The Lord does many things for nothing else but His only glory – for His name's sake.
 4. And when we have requests to make of Him, it is not inappropriate to plead for that glory and name.
- H. When **Hezekiah** prayed for an extension on his life, the Lord replied, *"I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for **mine own sake...**"*
1. **Psalm 143:11** adds another argument to that of God's name.
 - a. *"Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for **thy righteousness' sake** bring my soul out of trouble."*
 - b. Yes, the word *"righteousness"* refers to God's acting rightly – dealing justly.
 - c. It is a part of the nature of God – a part of God's name – to act righteously.
 - d. We have the Biblical example to plead God's righteousness when we come to Him in prayer.
 2. Then **Psalm 115:1** ties something else to God's name. Use it. Plead it. Pray it.
 - a. *"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for **thy truth's sake**. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?*
 - b. *But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."*
- I. What is your **favorite Psalm**? Almost everyone, especially early in his Christian life says **Psalm 23**.
1. *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
 - a. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*
 - b. *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness – **for his NAME'S sake.**"*
 2. Are you looking for the Lord's pathway? Are you seeking His will?
 3. I won't tell you not to pray simply because it is good for you. It is good for you.
 4. But I will urge you to look at David's words – *"he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness **for his NAME'S sake.**"*
 5. *"Lord, for your own glory, show me your will ."*

- J. Have you sinned against your Saviour once again ?
1. Then listen to David in **Psalm 25** – *“For thy NAME’S sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”*
 2. And after that plea, listen to the Lord’s response in **Isaiah 48:9** – *“For my NAME’S sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.”*
 3. And **verse 11** – *“For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.”*
- K. Sometimes God promises to do various things *“for David’s sake,”* but don’t become confused about that.
1. It’s not what you think. It is not for David personally.
 2. This kind of promise is not based upon David’s goodness, his poetical skills, his defeat of Goliath or anything else in his life.
 3. When God says *“I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake”* – He is **referring** to the **covenant** God made with David.
 4. The Lord also might say that sort of thing about **Abraham**, because the Lord created a unilateral covenant with that man.
- L. Of course, you & I have no business asking the Lord for things based on the Abrahamic or Davidic covenants.
1. Those belong to Israel, and we shall reap the benefits of those promises only indirectly.
 2. But we live under **a new covenant** made between the Father and the Son – and the Lord Jesus is the mediator of that eternal agreement to us – **Hebrews 8 and 12**.
 3. When the Lord calls someone like you, and invites you to himself, remember you are no better than Abram from Ur...
 4. When the sovereign God invites you to put your trust in the Saviour, you may consider yourself as within the new covenant of salvation by grace.
 5. *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* – **Romans 8:28**.
 6. Even as saints and servants of God, no matter what we have done for the Lord’s glory, we still have nothing in ourselves with which to argue before God.
 7. But as the elect of God – people saved by grace – we can argue the covenant into which we have been placed.
 8. *“Father bless me, because you have saved me with the purpose of blessing me for your glory.”*
- M. There are several other arrows which the Bible puts into our quiver to use in prayer.
1. After the Lord declared His covenant with David, that man of God began to pray.
 2. **II Samuel 7:18** – *“Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?*
 - a. *And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?*
 - b. *And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant.*
 - c. **For THY WORD’S sake, and according to THINE OWN HEART,** hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.
 - d. *Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”*
 3. Again, I believe we have scriptural authority to plead just about anything we find from the lips of the Lord.
 4. *“God, what was it you promised? Lord, I humbly hold you to your word.”*
- N. When have you ever used **God’s goodness** as an argument to move Him?
1. **Psalm 25** – *“Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul.*
 - a. *O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.*
 - b. *Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause.*
 - c. *Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths.*

- d. *Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.*
- e. *Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.*
- f. *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me **for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.***

2. Maybe **“goodness”** isn't much different from **mercy**, but it **IS** a different Hebrew word.
3. God is holy; He is righteous, gracious and merciful, but he is also **good**.
4. The Lord Jesus said in **Matthew 7** – *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:*
5. *For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?*
 - a. *Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?*
 - b. *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”*

O. I'll conclude with one more weapon issued to us from the Lord's arsenal.

1. **Psalm 106** – *“We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.*
 - a. *Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.*
 - b. *Nevertheless he saved them **for his NAME'S sake**, that he might make **his mighty POWER** to be known.”*
2. Do you have a problem that only a miracle can correct?
3. Don't be afraid to pray for that miracle. God is in the miracle-providing business.
4. That doesn't mean He will do as we ask, but there is no reason not to ask *“that he might make his mighty power to be known.”*

IV. Conclusion:

- A. I won't tell you that the Lord will not hear the weakest of our prayers – your sobs, your prayerful moans.
 1. I won't say that He isn't moved by the tears of His people, because we can see in the Bible that He is.
 2. And there is nothing wrong with bringing your list of burdens to the throne of grace.
 3. And despite some scriptures which seem to say **“stop praying about this or that,”** I see the Lord highlighting the importunate woman and her prayers. She would not give up.
- B. But to these and other things, I urge you to pray with the arguments which the Holy Spirit has put into our hands.
 1. **Speak reverently** to the Lord of His **mercy** and **goodness, righteousness** and **truth**.
 2. Ask Him to **glorify Himself** with omnipotence and sovereign power.
 3. Be as bold as humble Abraham in arguing with the Lord in your prayers.
 4. Use the Lord's own **words** and **promises**.
 5. If we want to see the Lord glorified as much as He wants and deserves to be glorified, we will find ourselves more effective in our prayers.