



Dr. Bob Lee, Senior Pastor
February 17, 2021

Dear HRBC Family,

Thank you for your participation in the sermon series on the Book of Nehemiah. We spent seven weeks on this critical part of salvation history. I felt that it was very timely. Though “ancient” history, the story of Nehemiah and the Jewish exiles is relevant to us as individuals and as a congregation. Like Nehemiah, may we be captured by God’s vision for our future. And may we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit as we seek to live as faithful people who are transformed, refreshed in spirit and renewed in faith.

In Nehemiah 9:1-37, we find one of the most beautiful and fervent prayers in all of scripture. As we approach the Lenten season, let us look to vv. 1-3 of this prayer where the people were moved to confess and repent of their sins as they worshiped:

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads.² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors.³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God. (Neh. 9:1-3)

Note that they fasted, put on sackcloth and put dust on their heads (think about Ash Wednesday). They stood and confessed their sins as well as the sins of their ancestors. Today we would say that they confessed “generational” sin. While they did not commit the sins of years-gone-by, they were affected by them. Often, the generational sins of our families of origin find their way to us and, knowingly or unknowingly, we repeat the behavior. (Think of things like idolatry, alcoholism, dishonesty, infidelity, anger, betrayal, etc.) Though the exiles themselves may not have committed the sins of their ancestors, they confessed them to God to be forgiven and free.

This prayer in Nehemiah chapter 9 preceded the agreement that the people collectively made with God and one another. Not only did they verbalize their intentions, but they decided to put them in writing (see 9:38). If you read the rest of Nehemiah, and prophets like Malachi, you will see that the people of God vacillated between faithfulness and disobedience. This points toward the need for a Messiah whose name would be Immanuel, "God with us." His suffering, death on the cross and resurrection would be the ultimate means for our freedom.

I think that the end of the Nehemiah series is a natural segue into the season of Lent for us. Lent is a forty-day journey (not counting Sundays) that is based on Jesus' own forty-days of temptation in the wilderness by Satan. During this time, we are to enter a time of deep reflection as we consider our own temptations and the desert places of our lives. We remember our own humanity and our own mortality as we seek to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ our Lord.

To guide us through the Lenten season, we will begin a five-week series called "Stories of Faithfulness" where we will explore God's faithful promises as a God of covenant. I am thrilled that Dr. Megan Strollo will lead off our series this Sunday! Dr. Strollo is Assistant Professor of Biblical Languages at Union Presbyterian Seminary and serves as Theologian in Residence with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia. Here is a schedule of the upcoming sermon series:

Date	Sermon Title	Scripture
Feb. 21 2021	"A Rainbow Among Clouds"	Gen. 9:8-17
Feb. 28 2021	"The Essence of Covenant"	Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Mar. 7 2021	"Covenant in Community"	Exodus 20:1-17
Mar. 14 2021	"Experiences in Covenant"	Numbers 21:4b-9
Mar. 21 2021	"The Covenant on the Heart"	Jeremiah 31:31-34

There is a lot of information to help you prepare for Lent in this week's *Milepost*, including the helpful Ash Wednesday kits. If you need a kit or have questions, please call the church office and let us know. We will be happy to help!

In Christ's care,



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