

STRANGERS + EXILES: STANDING IN THE GAP

June 18, 2017 | Pastor Keith Jenkins

Last week during our study in Daniel, Pastor Randy focused on the prayer life of Daniel. Daniel made prayer a habitual part of his life while in captivity. It strengthened and sustained him for decades while he was immersed in the Babylonian culture.

Key quote: "When you kneel before God, you can stand before men"...which Daniel did!

Maybe you were challenged like many of us were by this statement: "Effective prayer begins when we perceive a gap between where someone/something is and where God wants it to be"

Pastor Keith challenged us that if we see darkness around us, then we as the church (God's people) are responsible. This is the "gap" between what God desires and what is going on around us. Keith told about a pastor friend of his that helps us see this clearly: "I was reminded of a friend in ministry who was driving around his community in Missouri and was observing all the rundown buildings, dirt, graffiti, drugs, etc., and in an instant he heard the voice of the Lord "sternly say"... "As you drive through the community and you see people, places or things that don't look like my kingdom, and don't at a minimum pray about what you see, I will hold you accountable" ...scary!

The Scripture from Ezekiel 22...if you go back and read the verses leading up to our scripture it will sound a lot like our current culture's spiritual condition:

Ezekiel 22:29-31 "The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. 30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God".

Israel was spiritually unfaithful to God and engaged in

- Idolatry - false worship
- Leaders were oppressive and abused their power
- No honor for mothers/fathers
- Withdrew their hearts from strangers (no hospitality)
- Forgot about widows
- Profaned the Sabbath
- Sexual immorality of all kinds
- Extortion and the taking of bribes was common
- Spiritual leaders deceived the people: false prophecies, nothing was kept as holy (confusing the people, no longer did they know what was sacred and what was common, right or wrong, righteous or unrighteous, etc.)

We get frustrated with people, we run out of patience even become angry or give up on them.

But: God DESIRED TO BE GRACIOUS: (vs.30)

"...So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before ME (on behalf) of the land, that I should not destroy it....BUT I FOUND NO ONE.

Don't miss that God desired to show grace. What would have been the outcome if he would have found people to step into that gap? They (we) could step into that gap and speak life, speak God's word and kingdom purpose into that situation.

"So what would happen if we became intercessors and not accusers; the truth of the matter is you can't be both".

We must choose. Not stepping in is a choice. It's so easy to stand back and be critical. God's looking for men, women and young people who will step up, get in the game and become a watchman; an intercessor.

1. "SO I SOUGHT FOR A MAN AMONG THEM WHO WOULD MAKE A WALL"

("and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one")

- Walls were essential for security, and could demonstrate power/prosperity. That's illustrated by the Babylon's walls (chariots running on them), or Jericho's walls or even Jerusalem's walls.
- Walls keep enemies out and keep the inhabitants in.
- Walls had watch towers as well, that could see an enemy approaching or a friend in need.
- Enemies would have no choice they would have to lay siege...starve them out! (Impenetrable)

Satan said of Job, 1:10 **"Have You not made a hedge/wall around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land".**

To win a war...take the city...THE WALLS HAD TO BE BREACHED. A Gap had to be created and then exploited; only then would the inhabitants (we) be vulnerable.

- Our souls, cities, and nations have walls too. SIN causes a breach/gap; namely separation from God and the Effects of the kingdom of darkness take effect on our areas of responsibilities.

THERE IS A GAP between what the Lord desires for our city and what we are presently experiencing....

The Lord is looking for someone....anyone, not qualified, but available TO make a wall.

What will we fill the gaps with? Rants, negativism, criticism....

"We cannot become spiritual thermometers...just reading the climate of the day, but not affecting the temperature.... Thermostats....you can set them....turn up the heat!!!!"

2. "TAKE IT PERSONAL: PERSONALIZING THE BURDEN"

There is no more; "THOSE PEOPLE" We are them, and they are us....

Remember DANIEL identified WITH the sins/sinners of his day, listen again to his prayer in chapter 9:

Daniel 9:4-6 "And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, WE have sinned and committed iniquity, WE have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have WE heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to US shame of face"

Nehemiah does the exact same thing as he prepares to return to a Jerusalem that's walls have been destroyed by her enemies:

Nehemiah 1:1-4 "It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven".

- Maybe in our culture, that is saturated with news and information, have we seen & heard too much? Nothing moves us anymore. Maybe we've been desensitized?
- Does the evil, suffering and darkness around you move your heart anymore? Do you feel like Nehemiah, or do you just change the channel or walk on by?
- The bottom line is; we are either "INTERCESSORS OR ACCUSERS". We can't be both critics and/or judges!

3. WE ARE CALLED TO BE REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH!

Isaiah 58:12: "Those from among you Shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell in".

- We use our privilege and our place (forgiven and loved by God) that was given to us by grace to Interceded; building up the prayer hedge, a wall.

Numbers 16:46-48: "So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped".

- Taking our stand "between the living & the dead". As we read above the day after Korah's rebellion, the people murmured & sought to kill Moses...and he interceded.
- Our call, our assignment is crucial. We are literally standing in the gap between death and the living.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the introduction on page one, Pastor Keith challenged us that if we see darkness around us, then we as the church (God's people) are responsible. Discuss this "gap" between what God desires and what is going on around us. What do you see as your role as part of His church, His kingdom?
2. When we take another look at our scripture in Ezekiel 22, (Page 2) we see two distinct things. First the prophet describes a culture that is very similar to our culture today. Secondly, the very sad fact that God sought a person to "make a wall and stand in the gap". He looked for a person to stand in the gap and intercede for these people, but couldn't find anyone. What things arise in you as you read this, and how does this apply to our dark, evil culture today?
3. Okay some time for honesty. Do you ever get frustrated with people trapped in sin, (of various types)? Or shake your finger at a politician or things going on in our country or world? The truth for me, is that I run out of patience, even get angry; but God searched for someone to stand in the gap because he desired to be gracious! Let's examine ourselves in light of Pastor Keith's quote; "So what would happen if we became intercessors and not accusers; the truth of the matter is, you can't be both"
4. On page 4 of your notes, consider how Daniel and Nehemiah responded to this call to intercede, build a wall and stand in the gap. Notice Daniel personalized it by including himself with the nation he was interceding for. (Not "them", but "us") Also see Nehemiah's heart and response as he received reports of broken walls, burned gates and oppression on all sides.
5. Lastly, as we read our scriptures in Isaiah 58 and Numbers 16, what is the Holy Spirit saying about your role here? We see the assignment of "you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach". Also identified as those, (like Moses) who stood between, "between the living & the dead", standing in the gap between death and the living.