

Monday, July 14, 2008

Do you sometimes awaken in the morning, look ahead to your day and want to stay in bed? Do you often come to the end of a day or week, look back and wonder if there was any purpose to that day or week? There is a vast difference between living and living on purpose . . . between wandering or floundering and "staying the course".

The Bible is filled with stories of ordinary people who lived extra-ordinary lives, as they followed God and "stayed His course", even in difficulty. Defining Moments often determine the "course" of your life. That's why I chose the phrase "Where Destiny and Decision Intersect". This week, let's wrestle with this . . . what is the "course" of your life, and are you "staying God's course"?

In our Scripture reading today we are in Nehemiah 9 & 10. The crumbled wall around Jerusalem has been rebuilt under the leadership of a slave named Nehemiah, and the task was accomplished in the record time of 52 days (Neh. 6:15). Remember, he was born a slave in captivity and, like all slaves, would have learned early that his "course in life" was slavery. But his heart and mind were God-focused, and God gave him a passion, first to do a good job as food and wine taste tester for the king, but later to return to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding of the wall. Of course he had neither resources or authority to lead this project, except God had used his years serving the king to develop a trust relationship with that king, and when God opened the door of opportunity and Nehemiah presented the vision God had given him to rebuild the Jerusalem wall, the King provided all the resources and authority needed! Can you see how God may be working your past and present course in preparation for a future course in life He has for you?

In Nehemiah 9 & 10, the people, under Nehemiah and Ezra's leadership, define a new "course" they will live . . . a people consecrated to God! Carefully analyze their prayer. What purpose for living are they claiming? What is yours?

Tuesday, July 15, 2008

What do you desire your life's legacy to be? Nehemiah 11, 12 & 13 are, to some degree, Nehemiah's analysis of the "course" of his life. With Jerusalem now protected by the wall he had led in rebuilding, the city was ready to be populated and again assume its rightful place as a strategic city. The wall was more than stones and mud, it was a symbol of purpose, mission, determined and unified hard work, God's provision of leadership, and fulfillment of God's promise that He would gather His exiled people back in His land of promise. Note Deuteronomy 30:1-10, written by Moses nearly 1000 years before!

Please note an unusual statement repeated several times in chapter 13 . . . "Remember me for this, O my God . . ." A legacy is, in part, how we remember a person, right? Do you see that Nehemiah, the slave wine taste tester who became leader of God's people at a strategic moment in their history, has come to the end of his life concerned about how God will "remember him". How will God remember you? Of all that your life has been to this point, what do you think God finds most significant? Be careful . . . don't assume it's the time you've spent in church or other "religious activity". Do you notice little of the story of Nehemiah is "religious activity"? He's a man of practical action. Humble taste tester for the King / hard working laborer leading people to rebuild a broken wall / organizer of a city / challenger of evil, etc. Nehemiah knew, as we do, that God knows all, sees all, understands all. Like you and me, he sometimes felt insignificant, unsure of himself, maybe even a failure. But at the end of his life, he had done the best he could to follow God's leading in his life and leave

a Jerusalem well established and in order! He also left an honorable reputation with the King whom he faithfully served!

I believe the key to Nehemiah is chapter 1 of his story. Read it again. Note his character and his heart for God! His legacy is his passion to "stay God's course" for him.

Wednesday, July 16, 2008

By my calculation, the "mid-point" of summer was this past Monday. Today is day #52 of the 100 days of summer 2008. Stop . . . think back . . . what has God done thus far in your summer? What "defining moments" have shaped you and your summer? How are you changing?

Our reading of Nehemiah concluded yesterday and today we begin Esther. But before leaving Nehemiah, may I offer these important lessons. . .

The close of Nehemiah's story leaves a Jerusalem well in the process of becoming, again, a major city in the Middle East. Repopulated with thousands of Jews who were descendants of those who had been tragically taken captive during Nebuchadnezzar's three invasions (605bc, 597bc, 586bc), Jerusalem was buzzing with hope. Note Psalm 126!

The rebuilt Temple, while not as spectacular as Solomon's, was none-the-less, the place of encounter with God, the place of repentance and worship, the place of national hope in God's Presence. Sadly, as far as we know, it did NOT contain the "Ark of the Covenant" which had been taken captive and possibly desecrated by destruction.

The wall was rebuilt, providing protection and stability to Jerusalem's future, and good leadership was in place, keeping the people focused on "staying the course" with God. Malachi, the final prophet of the Old Testament, brought God's final message of challenge to the people about the time of Nehemiah chapter 13, and then the Old Testament comes to a close . . . and 400 years of "silence" follow, as no prophet speaks any new word from God. A course has been set. God watches to see how His people will "stay the course". The next historical event recorded for us in the Bible is the angel Gabriel appearing to the old priest Zechariah in that same Temple . . . Luke 1!

Much changed in those 400 years. The Roman Empire arose, civilization matured, but the hearts and minds of all peoples languished, longing for hope . . . a Savior!

Thursday, July 17, 2008

Have you ever found yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, or the right place at the unexpected right time? Who would have ever imagined God's 'Esther plan'??

Evidently an orphaned Jewish girl living among the many exiles in Persia, unexpectedly Esther finds herself in the Emperor's harem, preparing for "one night with the king". As we have tried to understand "Defining Moments, Where Destiny and Decision Intersect", reading through the first five chapters of Esther yesterday and today, how many "Defining Moments" can you identify that shape her life and destiny? Take a few moments and list them, indicating their significance. How many of them are unplanned and unexpected by Esther? How many appear to be unfair or certainly not "God-honoring"? What does that teach you about "Defining Moments" in your life?

Remember, the Bible is not always organized in chronological order. While Esther follows Nehemiah in literature, in history she actually fits in the 57 year gap between chapter 6 & 7 of Ezra! Thus when Ezra 7 begins "After these things", do you see what it means??

As Nehemiah, Esther was living a "course" in life without options . . . they both were Jews living in captivity. Both could have assumed God had forgotten them, or the fact that their parents had not taken the opportunity to return to Jerusalem when given the chance (Ezra 1), they were destined to live negligible lives. But don't ever underestimate what God might be thinking or planning . . . as long as you are listening and available, and want to honor Him with the "course" of your life. Do you see both Nehemiah and Esther suddenly found themselves facing unexpected "defining moments" which had implications much larger than their own personal happiness or destiny! Learn well that "whenever God is doing a new thing, He does it through people . . . who are considered fortunate only in retrospect." (McManus "Chasing Daylight" p. 191)

Friday, July 18, 2008

This weekend is significant for Calvary Community Church, for we cross a line together . . . our 87th birthday! Likely none of us remembers 1921, but if you have time, do a little research this weekend to try and understand what life might have been like in Walworth County back then! Why would a small group of normal folks join together to form a church in Williams Bay in 1921? What has God done to sustain and grow that church to who we are today, Calvary Community Church? What have been some of the "Defining Moments" of our history? What is our legacy in Walworth County and around the world?

Today and tomorrow you'll finish reading Esther and once again be amazed at God's work through "Defining Moments" to accomplish His miraculous plan and purpose with His people in our world!! I wonder what will most amaze you in her story?

Do you notice God's name does not appear at all in Esther? God is not quoted nor is any other famous Jewish prophet or hero. Mordecai and Esther are identified as Jewish, but remember they kept her identity secret for a long time. Yet, when Esther sends word to Mordecai to call the people to fasting, we understand that would include, of course, prayer to Jehovah God. It seems it was another time in history when Jewish people were maligned, persecuted, ridiculed, thus we can well imagine any religious practices were done in private and possibly secret. A great time for "Defining Moments", right?!

Notice Esther 3:1, "Haman . . . the Agagite". Compare to 1 Samuel 15. Is he a descendant of King Agag??

Notice Esther 2:17. Why was he attracted to Esther? I don't believe it was only physical . . . something about her captured his heart. For a year she had prepared for her "one night with the king". I wonder if like Nehemiah, she spent extended time seeking God's face regarding His "course" for her and being ready? Are you?



Pastor Doug Anderson

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Staying the Course



A Disciplemaking Tool of



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Engaging With God

Highway 50 & Harris Road
P.O. Box 1200 - Williams Bay, WI 53291

(262) 245-6294
www.calvarycommunity.net