

Nehemiah 2:11-20

Nehemiah was a Jew believing in God as understood in the Jewish transition. He was part of the Jewish nation in captivity in what is now Persia. The best and brightest young Jewish men were taught the language and the literature of the captors and forced to work for their captors often as officials in the government.

God through His prophets have commanded the Jews to engage in the community they live in and serve in a way that benefit the community.

Nehemiah, as we have heard was the cupbearer for the king and had a high standing with the king. This was a nice cushy job being the king's cupbearer. He was in a position of trust with the king and likely lived in the palace compound and had need of nothing materially.

To get Nehemiah out of his complacency, God first had to break his heart. He sends someone who came back from Jerusalem to tell him about the sad situation in Jerusalem. God then breaks his heart for the people and for God's glory. Nehemiah wrestles with this issue for 4 months until he was ready to put his life on the line in bringing the issue that was burning in his heart to the king.

After receiving the message about Jerusalem, his first response was to go to God in prayer. He did not have a casual chat with God but pleaded with God to intervene for his people by changing the heart of the king.

He repented of his sin and that of his people. He acknowledged that they got what they deserved, He also pleaded for God's help and intervention in which would be a very big task to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. He knew only God could intervene and resolve this issue. Courageously he shared his anguish with the king and God touched the heart of the king.

In response to God's intervention the king does not only send Nehemiah to rebuild the wall. He gave him a letter to local government to give him provisions he will need. He also wanted to make sure he gets there safely and send him with officers of the army and horsemen. A formidable entourage!

After a nearly 900 miles or 1500 km journey of walking or riding a donkey, for 3 months through the desert, Nehemiah sees Jerusalem. I can just imagine the anticipation of seeing Jerusalem for the first time. Then the disappointment and disillusionment when he saw the ruins and the rubble and the people living in that situation. He realized then the gravity of the situation.

Jerusalem was the royal city of David and the place of God's temple and the home of the Jewish nation and it was laying in ruins!

The confession that Nehemiah made before God, that Moses and the people were told that God will bless them abundantly if they obey God and that they will suffer greatly when they did not, and he saw the evidence of their sin before him.

Jerusalem was the focus and identity of the Jewish nation in exile. We get a glimpse of what Jerusalem meant to these Jews in captivity in Ps 137

1By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.

2On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.

3For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4How shall we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?

5If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill!

6Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!

7Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem,
how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare,
down to its foundations!"

8O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you
with what you have done to us!

9Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones

The Jews were heartbroken to be away from Jerusalem that was in ruins!

Nehemiah realized that Jerusalem is in a bad situation – the city has been destroyed, with the wall broken down, but also that the people were in rough shape spiritually.

The broken walls leaved the people in the city very vulnerable. Since a city without a wall could be attacked and robbed or defeated and any time. There is also the moral vulnerability that comes from living in the ruins. Although it is a desperate situation, they were living amongst the rubble and did not feel the need or had the motivation to correct it. They were also aware of the opposition they would encounter. The enemies wanted to keep them vulnerable for them to not be a threat to the neighbours and to be easy pickings for the neighbours.

Why did the city have walls in the first place?

Walls were there for the protection of the city and its inhabitants. It also allowed a people to be independent and self-sufficient. It allowed the people to build an identity and a pride in their city.

Why did the enemy brake down the wall?

They could have just plundered the city or even taken it over. Destroying the walls is a sign of contempt and a message that the people are destroyed. Those that would still live there would be under the mercy of the neighbours.

Living amongst the rubble would initially be upsetting, but as you live amongst it day by day one gets desensitized and one accepts it as normal. This is an extremely dangerous thing, because then you are not motivated to overcome and do what needs to be done. Your offspring grow up with it as being the norm and it would not bother them either.

Nehemiah spent 3 days at Jerusalem. He had to get his emotions under control. It gave him time to get to know the people and assess their state of mind, assess the damage and the work that needed to be done.

The 3 days in Jerusalem gave him the opportunity to:

Look around- what is the task at hand and what will it take to accomplish the task at hand.

Look forward- how to go about accomplishing the task.

Look within- where was he stood with God and whether he trusted God enough to accomplish the task.

Look upward- realizing that his success is totally in the hands of God trusting in God for protection and success.

God gave him this special task to Nehemiah to rebuild the wall. Although the task must have seemed overwhelming, he had to plan on how to execute it.

Nehemiah knew he had to make a thorough assessment of the damage of the wall and what it would take to rebuild it. He needed to give an accurate assessment of the job at hand and the solution.

He needed to do his assessment in secret in order not to be prevented from completing the assessment.

He kept what he was doing from the officials what he was doing to prevent interference.

He proceeded with the investigation under the cover of darkness with a few reliable men to go with him. He did take his donkey with him, which could see better at night where to go. He went everywhere he could to make the best assessment possible.

Once he had the full assessment, he briefed the people that needed to help him fulfill this great task. He pointed out to them in what a dire situation they were. At the time they were a laughingstock for the enemies and neighbours. They were vulnerable and exposed to the whims of the neighbours and enemies. They were likely in poor frame of mind, anxious about their safety and their future. Spiritually they likely felt defeated since they lived with this situation and were not able to do anything about it.

Nehemiah emphasized to them that the only way that they could get out of this predicament they were in was to rebuild the wall. He also gave his testimony on how God called him to the task and supernaturally turned the heart of the foreign king who was their oppressor in their favour to send him off with provisions to rebuild the wall.

Nehemiah presented them with a comprehensive assessment of what the problem they faced. He also gave them the solution. He emphasized that this was a divine task ordered and endorsed by God.

Once the Jews understood the situation and solution and was convinced it was from God, they accepted it and got ready to work.

When their enemies saw that they are going to rebuild the wall, they were concerned. The Jews and their properties were easy picking without a wall. More than that the enemies knew that once the wall was built the Jews will move back and form community and will attend the temple services and could be united as a powerful people under God once again. That will make Jerusalem a potential threat to them.

In order to dissuade them, the enemies tried to put fear in them, accusing them of rebellion against the king, which in those days would have been considered treason and the penalty was death and likely the destruction of their city.

Nehemiah showed his godly leadership and told the enemies that the only true God is with them and will give them success. They will do God's will and build the wall. Moreover, their enemies will have no benefit in this success or part of their community.

The key to Nehemiah's success is that he was depending on God, irrespective of the challenges and the opposition. He knew that God called him to the task and God will give him success.

What can we learn from this passage in Nehemiah?

We need to be good citizens even in this world, in our cities and neighborhoods. We need to be model neighbours as God's representatives.

Living in the world we also need to evaluate whether we are living happily among the ruins without it bothering us! The ruins of sin in our lives and in that of the community should stir us into action. We should not allow ourselves to accept it as normal!

Unfortunately, we are unlikely to be effective to do God's will, unless he breaks our hearts. Just like with Nehemiah, most of us are comfortable where we are and what we do. We do not have a burning passion to uproot what we do and help other people. Yes, we are concerned and want everyone to be happy and comfortable.

Dear brothers and sisters have God broken your and my heart for our community or members of the community who are living in sin and their destination is hell?

Once God has broken our hearts for someone or something, we can be moved toward allowing God to use us in His service.

Before we can go to the next step like Nehemiah, we need to confess our sinfulness, repent, check our motives and get right with God. God is our only hope! For God to use us we need to be led by His spirit and not walk in the weakness of our flesh.

Gal 5: 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do

When God calls and sends us, we will succeed.

When God gives us something to say or do, even like Esther had to, it could cost us our lives. We need to be obedient for the sake of His kingdom and His glory!

God will give us tasks that we are not qualified to do- whether it is by training experience or personality.

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, and he knew nothing about building a wall. Since God sent him, he relied on God to provide. There were likely builders under the Jews, but they needed leadership and God's supernatural power to accomplish this task!

It has been said that "God does not call the gifted, but that God gifts the called."

There are occasions where one should keep what God has called you to do secret till it is the right time to reveal it. If revealing the purpose of your mission prematurely might jeopardize the outcome.

It is always good to spend some time to understand the task at hand. It is always necessary to investigate and assess the current situation and to look at the mission from different angles and get the most accurate information available.

We too need to do our homework and make good assessments and count the cost for any task, but also for our mission God gives us individually and corporately. The main thing is to obey God and get our directions from Him. Since Christ is our Lord- our decisions must be based on the Bible and the leading of the Holy Spirit and never transgress the principles in the Bible.

Often it involves risks, but if God has ordained it, the risk is worth taking.

In order to make a good assessment of the situation we need to take time to look:

Look around- what is the task at hand and what will it take to accomplish the task at hand.

Look forward- how to go about accomplishing the task.

Look within- how is your relationship with God and is there anything that hinders that relationship?

Look upward depend un God for your direction and success.

It is always good to start with a small group of like-minded people before engaging the masses. That it is why is important to have a small group of people you are in communion with and are accountable to.

When we do good work through God, the enemy will be upset and work to foil our plans.

We live in a post Christian world with a very liberal agenda as well as being very self-centered. Anything that confronts the society or individuals with the reality of God and the possibility of having to be accountable to God is seen as very offensive.

The Bible says states in Acts 4: 12And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

This name is Jesus Christ and that is very offensive in the mind of our larger community!

Still as Christians we should not be known for what we are against, but rather what we stand for.

When we obey God and do what He asks of us, we can ignore the jeers and rejoice that we are allowed to suffer for His sake.

We must always make sure that whoever we align ourselves with are likeminded and they have the same relationship with God that we have.

We also need to have such an intimate relationship with God that we will be able to hear from God when He speaks to us. That can only happen when we make time to hear from God. We need to have a time daily where we read the Word and pray in such a way that we can make our hearts desires known to God, but where we can also hear from God.

Heb 4: 12For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

God will reveal everything to you if you take the time to listen.

When we hear from God, we need to obey at the time in the way He commands us to do it.

When we are ministering to people, we pray that God will use us, and that God will do a miracle in their lives. We cannot change anyone's life, but God can.

In all we do, we need to be careful and prayerful not to please men instead of God. We cannot change the message of the Gospel in order to appease someone or the community. The Gospel will change them!

What you need is a full commitment to serve God!

Rom 12: 1I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2Do 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.

Dear brothers and sisters the Lord has called you for a purpose. You need to have God break your heart for a person or people or even a cause!

Rom 8: 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose

We all like to hear that all things will work together for good for us, but we can miss the statement that it is for those called according to His purpose. God has a purpose for you, and you will not live a fulfilled life without finding and accomplishing this purpose by the power of God.

God will unlikely call you to build a city wall, but He calls you for a purpose he created and predestined you for.

I pray that your time with God in your devotions are so rich, that you will be able to hear his voice calling you to your purpose. That God will delight in you and bless you as you obey Him and bring glory to His name.

As we learn from Esther 4: 13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will

rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" 15Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."

God put Esther in a place and a specific time for a purpose. Esther accepted the difficult challenge, trusting in God and put her life on the line. Esther's actions were blessed, and her nation was saved from extinction just as Nehemiah fulfilling his call saved the Jews.

God has put you in the place you are at this time for a purpose. There are a lot of people out there that needs saving. Spend time with God and ask Him what He is calling you to do. Ask Him to break your heart for the people He is sending you to. God will equip and bless you.

When God calls you to a task, He guarantees success. His success might not look like what you had in mind. It would be better! When we minister to people, we need to closely walk with Jesus to guide and direct us. We need to speak the truth in love. We need to use the Bible to allow God to do His work, since God said in Isaiah 55:

10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Dear brothers and sisters hear this message from Nehemiah, remember the lessons from this passage and obey God!

Our mission as a church and your and my responsibility as a member is to "Passionately proclaiming the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people."

Dr. Hermann Nell, 01-31-2021