

LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part twelve - Sunday, April 21st, 2024
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NEHEMIAH - REBUILDING THROUGH THE RUBBLE OF LIFE -
Nehemiah chapter 2

Nehemiah had the task of leading a group of exiles out of Persian captivity to ***rebuild the walls of the ancient city of Jerusalem***. Worship had already been restored at the Temple, but the city was still vulnerable and unprotected. God had delivered the people from captivity, but still required them to do the work of rebuilding.

A simple way to remember all of this is to note that the ***reconstruction*** process was basically (though not exactly) the opposite of the ***destruction*** process when God used Babylon to punish Judah for her idolatry. That time, Judah as a whole was taken, then the city of Jerusalem and the temple. In the ***reconstruction*** process, first the temple was restored and then the walls of the city were repaired by Nehemiah.

So the renewed worship came first - the restored center. But it was left vulnerable to attack and danger because the walls of the city - the protective structures designed to preserve the worship of God from outside corruption - were not in place.

We too, are redeemed people who live in fallen world. Every one of us deals with brokenness in some area of our lives. Problems don't disappear just because we've been delivered. Many things don't come together for us overnight. I wonder how many people wrestle with discouragement and even condemnation just because they've confused the **beginning** of the renewed life with the **completion** of it. ***Nehemiah teaches us to rebuild our fallen lives with wisdom.***

- 1) **WAITING UNTIL THE TIME IS RIGHT - 2:1** - “In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.”

There is an important truth tucked into these ordinary words. The month of "**Nisan**" is about 5 months after Nehemiah first became aware of the problem in the month of "**Chislev**" (**Nehemiah 1:1**). ***Five months.*** Before Nehemiah does **anything** he percolates in God's presence for five months. During that five months Nehemiah does two things: he **prays** and **watches for the right moment**.

"And it came to pass"(**2:1 KJV**). What a phrase. Things **unfold**. One day, after about five months, something started to unfold. ***Nehemiah is alert to how God might begin to answer the prayers he's been praying for almost half a year.*** In the New Testament Jesus called this kind of praying "**watching and praying.**" This is so important. Nehemiah prays, but he doesn't **just** pray. He's watching for God to crack open the door. And he's ready to move when God acts. He's not assuming his prayers take the place of his action.

- 2) **RESPONDING WISELY THROUGH PRAYER - 2:2-4** - “And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. [3] I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” [4] Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.”

Nehemiah is on thin ice here. The king, Artaxerxes, is not a godly man. Notice that Nehemiah had already prayed specifically about this problem in - **1:11** - “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Now I was cupbearer to the king.”

Nehemiah *anticipates* as he prays. Now he sees a crack in the door. He has a chance to answer the king's question about his concern for his people *without bringing up the subject himself or nagging*.

Now Nehemiah must think and act quickly. This is the one moment he must not blow. *Between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer, Nehemiah prays a brief prayer.* This too is very instructive. Because he's already been soaking his life in prayerful concern for five months, it's only natural to reach out prayerfully in this moment of crisis. Probably this is what Paul meant when he wrote about “**praying always**” (Ephesians 6:18). Emergency praying is strong and well defined when bathed in prolonged *exercises* of prayer.

- 3) **PRAYER BACKED UP WITH DILIGENCE - 2:5** - “And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.”

Your prayer life and your diligence must work well together.

Artaxerxes knew that Nehemiah was no slouch. ***He couldn't afford to be without him.*** This is a very important point to keep in focus when asking God to use you in some area of ministry. There are hundreds of points of application:

You are ***praying for your boss.*** Do you ***do a good job at work?***

You are ***praying for your teenager.*** Do you ***provide a good example in the home?*** You are ***praying for your church.*** Do you ***tithe or teach Christian Education, or a Core Group?*** The power of prayer is always best united with the power of godly discipline.

- 4) **THINKING THE PLAN RIGHT THROUGH - 2:6-8** - “And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. [7] And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, [8] and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.”

Please notice that faith and prayer don't exclude the need to ***think through a plan***. God ***does*** sometimes call a person just to follow without any other thought required (ie. ***Abraham***). But that is ***not the way He normally works***.

Nehemiah does not just say, "***Praise God, let's get these walls up!***" He takes the time to get ***letters of permission*** (7) because he is ***already anticipating opposition***. He has also calculated ***the materials needed to complete the walls and made advance arrangement for them*** (8).

This relates so clearly to the rebuilding of our lives after we come to Jesus. ***One of the reasons some people succeed and some don't is some plan and work to grow in God's will and way and some don't***. Most people don't lose out spiritually because they deny the faith. They simply begin to ***fill their minds with garbage***, or ***forsake meeting with fellow believers***, or ***try to profess Christ while sampling the sins of the world***. They don't plan and carry out the intentions to live for the Lord.

- 5) **MAKING SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE REAL SITUATION** -
2:11-16 - “So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. [12] Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. [13] I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. [14] Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. [15] Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. [16] And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.”

Nehemiah wants a real assessment of the situation, however bleak. He doesn't rely on hearsay or gossip. He wants an accurate assessment of all the facts. He doesn't want to whitewash over any problems. He wants the truth, no matter how painful it may be. Without this kind of in depth honesty he will gloss over serious situations. How important it is to deal with the *root* issue rather than outward symptoms of strain or discomfort. Make sure you have God's perspective on your situation before you rush to fix it.

- 6) **DEALING WITH OPPOSITION - 2:19-20 - “But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” [20] Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”**

See also **4:3 - “Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building— if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!”**

These remarks are made ***after the walls were put up***. As soon as you start to rebuild anything from the rubble of your life, the devil will oppose and taunt you through the whole construction project. And so will many people. **“Do you really think that this work will last?”**
“You've tried to change this before. You failed then. You will fail now!”

The important point here is to ***concentrate on the job, not on the opposition***. Never talk about your sins or problems with the devil. Speak of them only to Jesus. Don't deal with the enemy. The fight against despair and discouragement in any kingdom issue is never just a psychological battle. There is more. There is spiritual opposition. And that opposition only arises because the enemy knows the great potential in the reconstruction of any life for explosive fruit in the kingdom of God.