

Re-Building The Walls:

Nehemiah ch. 1: Nehemiah's Prayer

By Rev. P. Michael Williamson September 13th 2009

This is the first in the sermon in the series on Nehemiah. Why do we want to study a book from 2500 yrs ago? Because it has many things to teach us about how to relate to God, how to be involved in a divine mission and how to get others enlisted in the same divine mission, and one sermon title I saw on Nehemiah was "HOW TO TURN WHINERS INTO WINNERS." What else can we learn? How to work with others, how to overcome discouragement, how to celebrate God's achievement and finally keeping our promises, that is by way of Introduction. What about the background: where are we in history and what has led up to chapter 1 of Nehemiah.

Time Line:

1. **Exile 587/6 BC** Destruction of Jerusalem & Temple by the Babylonians which had be prophesied by Jeremiah for many years when the people were taken to Babylon.
2. **536BC** Exiles first return Zerubbabel & 50,000 When Cyrus was King of the Persian Empire he had overrun the Babylonian Empire. The Persian King had a very different policy of allowing people to remain in their homeland and worship their own gods.
3. **457BC** Second Return Ezra the Priest when Artaxerxes was King over the Persian Empire. Ezra had helped rebuild the Temple and had brought about some reform in public life. But because the population was sparse they were becoming demoralized as they were the laughing stock of the surrounding nations. This is the reason, Jerusalem was a shadow of its former glory any one could invade it at any time as there were no gates and the walls were minimal. Why would walls and gates be important? Because you needed to be able to defend your city and it's people. National security was an element that gave people pride in their own country.

This was what Nehemiah heard from his brother after their return from Jerusalem.

4. **445BC** Nehemiah's Re-Building the walls project. Artaxerxes was still King. (Nehemiah overlaps with Ezra)
In Jewish scripture Ezra & Nehemiah are one book.



Possible tomb of Artaxerxes

What was Nehemiah's position in the kingdom of Artaxerxes?

He was a cupbearer for the King – he was often in the King's presence, he was a trusted adviser to the king, it was a dangerous position to be in as he had to taste the king's wine in case it was poisoned. He was like a prime Minister so he would have been influential. He would have been a body guard to the King keeping his ear to the ground for palace intrigues, or coups. God had placed Nehemiah in this influential position because God was working his purpose out in the world and for the Jewish people. To Nehemiah it was just another ordinary day in his life but everything was about to change.

Chapter #1 Read verses 1-3

Nehemiah cared; throughout the book we will see his caring response to people in need.

1. Nehemiah cared enough to ask v.1

Affluent and influential, Nehemiah had every excuse for not getting involved. Jerusalem was 2-3 months journey 900-1000 miles away and the situation sounds as though it was beyond redemption. Surely God would be able to use Nehemiah to better effect in the palace of the King, to influence the whole empire, for good and for God. But when his brother returned he cared enough to ask what was happening in Jerusalem.

Application

What strikes me is that we need to care about what God cares about. We need to be interested in things beyond ourselves, beyond our local community in other areas of the city, things across the nation and across the world. What does God care about? God cares about the widows, orphans, the poor, the hungry, and the destitute. Do we care enough to ask?

2. Nehemiah cared enough to pray v. 5-10

When Nehemiah heard the story of trouble and disgrace of his fellow countrymen he was grieved, wept, fasted and prayed for many days (probably about 4 months before he came before the King in chapter 2). Nehemiah's heart was broken for his people and Jerusalem even though it was likely a place he had never been, he was born in exile. The exile had happened 142 years previously.

In Nehemiah's prayer he first of all praises God for who he is and then reminded God of his covenant with his people and asked God to hear his prayer. He so identified with the people that when he came to confession he referred to it as "our sin" he included himself and his family as those who had sinned. And he again reminds God of what he had told Moses: "if the people strayed from God's ways he would scatter them among the nations." But Nehemiah also knew that God had made provision for restoration. "That if the scattered people turned their hearts back to God through genuine repentance God would gather the people from the nations and bring them back to Jerusalem and the Promised Land." Nehemiah must have read and studied his bible because he is quoting from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He is a man of God's word and of prayer.

Application

Do we care enough to pray for what is breaking God's heart, those things in the world that are not right can be put right when God's people first decide to pray and seek the Lord and then act upon what they hear. We can also remind God of his promises.

3. Nehemiah cared enough to volunteer v.11

Nehemiah knows he is about to go into the presence of the King so he prays for success in carrying forward what he senses is God's plan of restoration for God's people and The city of Jerusalem. Remember Kings were paranoid despots and so one wrong move and you were in the lions den or in the fire furnace. Nehemiah also indicated that he realized that he was not the only one praying but that there were like minded Jews who were praying with him for God's people to be restored and Jerusalem to be revived.

Nehemiah was not guaranteed success for the project but he was assured that God was with him as he took the first tentative steps in what he sensed was God's calling.

Nehemiah was not engaging in a solo project, he knew he needed others to complete this massive building project. This undertaking required the dedication of a large group of people; it would take a community inspired by God through Nehemiah to accomplish anything significant.

Application

Do we care enough to volunteer? Or do we more often than not say "Here am I send Him! Are we prepared to volunteer in places of ministry that will make a difference in our community? Perhaps in a place where it seems beyond hope; I will say it again "Nehemiah was not guaranteed success for the project" but he was willing to risk asking the King to see if he could go to Jerusalem.

We are never guaranteed success but if we sense God inspiration and his leading it is then up to us to step out in faith and take the risk. Sometimes we will need to do this as a team, or have a community response. When we work as a community we can accomplish great things when God inspires and guides our activities.

Do we care enough to ask?
Do we care enough to pray?
Do we care enough to volunteer?

OR ASK => Pray => Volunteer

