

## Nehemiah Ch 2:1-20

The characteristics of godly leadership just ooze from Nehemiah, they spill out of him everywhere. Last week we were able to glean several aspects of character and conduct that were evident in the life of Nehemiah, and not only Nehemiah but that remain true and constant in the life of *anyone* that God really uses. We all want to be people that God can use, but before God can use us, we have to be *usable*. What does that mean? Are these aspects of rigid legalism? No, but rather simple wisdom in allowing the Holy Spirit to have His way in my life that I might be a vessel prepared, and ready to be used of God in *whatever* way He may want to use me, *whenever* He may want to do it. And one thing that I didn't specifically point out last week that sort of blankets all the rest is that before I can be usable, I have to be available. Nehemiah was available to the Lord, what does it mean to truly be available. It's not as simple as simply saying, "I'm available" for instance, if you're out every weekend drinking, or involving yourself in illicit relationships with other people, than regardless of your lip service, your lifestyle demonstrates that you're really *not* available at all. Nehemiah was set apart *to* the Lord, available and prepared to be used *by* the Lord. He was a man of compassion, of genuine concern, he was a man of prayer, that is he stayed in communion, and communication with God, he was a man of confession, (true humility) he didn't try to justify himself or those whom he prayed for, he just identified *with them* and stood in the gap on behalf *of* them. He was a man of proper perspective, he knew that in and of himself he could do nothing, but that with God *nothing* would be impossible. And he was a man of the Word, he knew the Word, and wielded the word with accuracy and authenticity, he didn't twist it to his own gain, or somehow inflect a standard on others that he himself wasn't subject to. He rightly divided the Word and willfully submitted himself to the counsel *of* the Word. And we're going to continue to see various qualities and characteristics displayed in the life of Nehemiah that we do well to prayerfully pursue for ourselves, that God might work such godly character *into us* that He might be truly glorified *by us*, that He might uses us in radical ways for His name's sake.

The overall quality that seems to surface in Nehemiah's life here in ch 2 is his faith; he was a man of faith. God uses men and women of faith, the bible says that, "...*without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*" Heb 11:6. And with Nehemiah we'll see him demonstrate his faith in 3 different ways this evening. #1 His Faith Was Patient, #2 His Faith Pursued, and #3 His Faith Provoked.

And along with that ch 2 shows us that not only was Nehemiah a man of faith, and that he was patient in his faith, but he was also a man of proper timing, preparation and proper planning. And I point that out because often times people make the mistake of thinking that if they're preparing, or planning something out in advance that they're really not walking by faith. But really quite the opposite is true, it's by faith that we plan and prepare, if you're not planning, odds are you're *presuming*, and to presume upon God in a situation is in no way shape or form, faith. It's by faith that we prayerfully pursue God and plan/prepare for that which He places on our heart.

We left off discovering just who Nehemiah was vocationally speaking; he was the cupbearer to the king of Persia. Which translates to the effect of he was man of wealth, of much influence, power and had a prominent platform in the most powerful kingdom on the globe at that time. He wasn't a simple petty servant who made sure the king wasn't being poisoned from the wine he drank. The cupbearer was carefully selected, almost always in the presence of the king.

And for that reason he was to be generally good looking, wise, (being *around* the king so much he held the confidence *of* the king, because of that he might be called on at any given time to be an advisor *to* the king) he needed to be wise, charismatic/charming, able to keep the king's spirits up, set a generally good atmosphere for the king to be in. So Nehemiah had a lot of things going his way.

We left off with Nehemiah praying for favor in the sight of the king because of a certain request he wanted to make *before* the king. And he no doubt prayed this way daily until the Lord provided that opportune time to make his request.

Vs1-3

Now there are some things that we need to draw out here, this is the patience of Nehemiah's faith. You remember back in ch 1 that he received the news of Jerusalem's state in the month of Chislev (December), but in the opening vs of ch 2 we realize it's the month of Nisan (Mid March-Mid April). What does that tell us? That Nehemiah has been waiting and praying for the Lord to grant him favor and open this door before the king everyday for at least 4 months. Patience in prayer is such an important thing, we generally like to pray about something once or twice before we make a move, but Nehemiah didn't do that. He prayed *to* the Lord, but then he waited *on* the Lord to confirm that direction for his life by waiting on God to open the opportunity for him to speak to the king vs him just piping up and saying, "Excuse me king, I have a favor to ask you." Nehemiah didn't take the initiative, he let God do that, his was to respond once the initiative had been taken. In other words he wanted God to be leading this thing every step of the way, if God wasn't in it, he didn't want to do it. So by faith he waited on the Lord to provide the opportune time to speak to the king. The bible says that we're to, "... *imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*" Heb 6:12 Notice it's not "Faith and impulsiveness" it's faith and *patience*. Isaiah tells us, "*Whoever believes will not act hastily.*" Isa 28:16 True faith brings us that calm reassurance that God's in control and it keeps us in check from running out there and trying to make happen in our own strength that which He wants to do and that which only He *can* do the way it needs to be done. Remember these vs, "*Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today... The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace*" Ex 14:13-14. And again, "*Be still, and know that I am God;*" Ps 46:10 Does there come a time to act? Absolutely, we'll find that Nehemiah was a man, who *worked practically*, but he pursued his *path prayerfully*, he beautifully blended practicality with spirituality.

There's another reason why the mention of the month of Nisan is important to us, because back when Daniel was taken into Babylon perhaps you remember he was given this prophecy. *"Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times."* Dan 9:25 I'm going to keep this as brief as I can so that we can keep moving, but the idea behind "weeks" there is literally "seven's." 7, 7's and 62, 7's, those 7's translate into 7 year periods. So 69, 7 yrs periods, using the Babylonian calendar (360 days per yr) works to being 173,880 days. So what this was saying was that from the day the command is given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (which we have right here in Nehemiah ch 2) till the day the Messiah came into Jerusalem would be exactly 173,880 days. So right here before us in our text the time clock just started ticking. Now as for the exact day of Nisan scholars had to figure that a little backwards, basically we know that Jesus was crucified on Passover, the week before Passover Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on what's become known as His triumphal entry. Long story short if you subtract 173,880 days from April 6<sup>th</sup> 32 A.D. (the week before Passover that yr) you come up with March 14<sup>th</sup> 445 B.C. Or Nisan 14, which correlates exactly with what Nehemiah, is telling us here.

So this is a pretty amazing portion of scripture for a few reasons. Something else we see here is the fact that Nehemiah says, "I was trying to hide it, but my best game face wasn't cutting it that day and the king noticed that my countenance was down, so I became dreadfully afraid." Why? Well, because 1<sup>st</sup> of all the king was very sheltered from having anything enter his presence that might bring him down, we read in Esther ch 4 that when Mordecai learned of Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews that, *"...he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth."* Est 4:1-2 It was literally a capital offense to be bummed in the King's presence. This could've cost Nehemiah both his job and his life, all the more when it's your cupbearer whose countenance is down because this might mean he's somehow displeased with the king and an assassination plot could be underway. It just wouldn't be a difficult thing for the cupbearer to assassinate the king. So as a general rule you kept personal matters and personal emotions divorced from your professional vocation, so when the king says, "Nehemiah what's wrong, your face looks distraught?" Nehemiah's heart sank, and a lump came up in his throat, and he immediately blessed the king and said, "May the King live forever!"

And I want you to notice that he didn't use the word, "Jerusalem" in his vocabulary, why? Wisdom, remember back in Ezra ch 4 when Artaxerxes commanded the cease and desist order regarding the rebuilding and restoring of Jerusalem? And he said, "They can't begin rebuilding until the command has been given by me." I have no doubt that Nehemiah was aware of that command, that the king had perceived Jerusalem as a city of rebellion and trouble, a thorn in the side of his kingdom. And now he's about to ask the king for a reversal of that edict, this is a mountainous type moment. But that's ok, remember Jesus said the faith of a mustard seed could move mountains, and we're getting ready to see that happen.

But rather than mention Jerusalem by name, Nehemiah simply says, “The city, the *place of my fathers’ tombs* lies in waste.” He’s throwing out the sympathy card, “The place where my ancestors are buried has been burned and lies in ruins, such disrespect for the dead of my own ancestors how am I supposed to feel?” He’s being completely honest, but he’s not invoking negativity in the king, it’s a “Wise as serpents, gentle as doves” type of a maneuver.

Vs4-5

You see he’s avoiding that word, “Jerusalem” he speaks of “Judah” and the city of his fathers’ tombs. But here we have a couple of more things, obviously I’d have you note that he started *praying* before he started *saying*. Vs 4, the king says, “What do you want me to do about it?” And we read, “So I prayed to the God of Heaven.” Now this prayer couldn’t have been very long, a long period of silence may’ve been misinterpreted as being busted for something that he wasn’t prepared for and again could’ve cost him his life. So it was more than likely a, “God give me the words,” or a “God help me,” kind of a prayer and from there he went on. Now I’d never want to take away from the fact that he’d no doubt spent countless hours in prayer over the matter throughout the last 4 months so even in this instant he’s really drawing out of an accumulated resource (if you will) of a carefully cultivated ongoing relationship with the Lord. This isn’t the quick prayer of a desperate man who at his wits end cries out to God just before his plane hits the ground. Not to say that God wouldn’t save that guy, only God knows the heart. But my point is that as wonderful as long labor-intensive prayers might be, they’re not any more powerful than a precise to the point prayer. The strength of prayer isn’t found in the length of prayer.

Remember when the Lord called Peter out to walk on the water with Him? Peter stepped out, things were going good, then he got a good look at the storm around him rather than keeping his eyes on the Lord in front of him, he let his circumstances overwhelm him and he began to sink. Remember what he said? “O Gracious heavenly Father, rich in mercy and abundant in grace, hearken Thine ear to me and give heed unto my cry...” Is that what he said? No! He cried out, “Lord save me!” It was a prayer that was precise and to the point, and it moved the hand of God just as effectively as any other prayer ever has, Jesus reached out His hand and just like that re-established his footing.

But O that we would learn the lesson of placing our heart in *God’s hands* before we stick our foot in *our mouth*. When you’re engaged in that conversation, or confronted by a sticky situation, “God give me the words, God give me wisdom, God show me how to speak.”

And he says, “If it pleases the king and I’ve found favor in your sight, I ask that you would send me to Judah, to the city (in reference to Jerusalem specifically) of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.” I want you to see the wisdom in asking that the king send him rather than asking that the king would simply let him go. Because if he’s let go he’s on his own, if the king sends him he goes under the covering accountability and authority of the king himself. So he says, “I want you to send me.”

And when it comes to ministry how important it is to have that covering, the accountability of being sent rather than just being let go, there's a distinguishable difference there. Nehemiah was asking to be sent, but there's a few other things revealed about Nehemiah in these vs, #1 That he was a man of vision, what was his vision? To rebuild the city and it's walls, no small task, but the vision was there, he just needed the *provision*, which we'll see come together in a minute. But we also see that he was a man of sacrifice, he had wealth, power, and prominence in the most powerful kingdom on earth, but he was willing to sacrifice what was gain to him in this kingdom if it meant fulfilling God's call and investing in God's kingdom. 3<sup>rdly</sup> he was a man of commitment, he didn't say, "Send me to Judah and I'll tell them what a lousy job *they've* done, establish a labor union, and once I get them to working, I'll return." He was personally committed to the task, he'd counted the cost and was willing to commit, there's a huge lack in this area it seems in the body today. Counting the cost, and committing, I find that we're generally all about *convenience*, but one of the things I've sought to invest into the servants around here is that God honors *commitment*. Nehemiah was a man of commitment.

I'd imagine that when the king said, "What do you request?" That Nehemiah's heart just began to race, all the power of the kingdom is bound up in that question, God is granting him favor, all these months of praying and fasting is coming around in a positive direction. The bible says, "*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*" Prov 21:1

Vs6-8

So like with Ezra he acknowledged the favor of the king as the good hand of God upon him. It really wasn't the king, he was just the human instrument, the fact is that the Lord was granting his request through the *means* of the king.

Back in vs 6 we begin to see that he was a man of accountability, the king said, "How long will you be gone?" And he was able to give him a timeline, that's called accountability, and it's a good thing, deadlines give us a sense of purpose and urgency. I know that with this place things were creeping along at slug speed for months, once I believed the Lord laid a deadline on my heart things were moved into hyper-drive. Having a goal and sticking to it is a healthy thing. But the other thing that we tucked away in there is forethought, for Nehemiah to be able to respond immediately means he'd been preparing, planning and thinking this thing through in advance.

And this is where we see that "Faith that pursued" because this is a mountainous request. "What do I want, I want you to send me to rebuild the walls and the city of Jerusalem. I know you declared that the work was to cease, I'm asking you to reverse that order." "When will you be back?"

“I’ll be back with in this amount of time, and as long as we’re on the subject I’d like for you to give me letters of your personal authority granting me access to any route I need for the governors beyond the rivers and I’d like you to give me all the supplies on this material list, a letter to Asaph the keeper of the kings forest so that I can make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and my own personal residence while I’m there.” ;o) He saw that God was opening the door that he’d waited patiently on, and when that door opened he pursued it to the full. “I’ve got vision king, but I’m asking you for the provision.” Here’s the need, I know you have the means to meet it and so I’m giving you the opportunity to get behind it and be apart of it.”

So he had a plan, he was prepared for the moment, prayed up even in the moment, waited for the proper time to engage the king and began to execute his plan and God honored it because God had ordained it. This is the way God works, He’s a planning kind of God, He has a plan for you life, for the order of this world, He has plan for the salvation of mankind, all of which were worked out in eternity past, then He executes those plans at the proper time. He wants to work in us the same way, what’s your plan? Are you prepared, prayed up and waiting on the proper time to execute that plan? If you don’t have a plan, pray for one, remember where it starts? Concern, compassion, a burden in a certain direction, then I begin to pray over that, and through prayer so often God prepares *me* to be the one called to that, gives me a plan and an approach to take care of that (whatever it may be). The bible says, “*The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.*” Prov 21:5 Patience, and planning, key elements of the godly leader, Prov 16:9 “*A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.*” Nehemiah had all these plans, but when they came together what did he consent to? “The good hand of my God is upon me.” The Lord was directing.

#### Vs9-10

There comes a time to put feet to our faith, talking about it, praying over it and planning for it are great things, but if it never makes the transition to actually walking *in it*, then the rest of it was for nothing. I want you to notice that all the praying, planning, and preparing in the world that Nehemiah did over the last 4 months meant nothing to those would be enemies of Israel, God’s will, God’s work, whatever. But when the transition took place of actually pursuing those prayerful plans, they took notice, and they were “deeply disturbed” God’s opportunities equals the enemy’s oppositions. As long as the people of God were vulnerable, weak, and under stress these guys were ok, when someone took notice and wanted to come along side them so as to strengthen them, that began to stir them up. Now some people take that logic a step farther and say, “I know that when I step out, the enemy will step up, so I’m not going to do anything so I don’t have to deal with the opposition.” That’s faulty logic and a lie from the pit, listen, you’ll never have a better life by holding back from serving Jesus Christ or letting Him use your life in an active role. Tough times are going to visit you regardless, but if you’re not serving the Lord, or growing through being used *by* the Lord, than when they come you’re the one ill equipped to deal with it. Therefore the enemy gains a foothold and victory over your life, don’t by the lie that it’s somehow better, or a safeguard from tough times to just not serve the Lord, that’s what the enemy would have you believe.

## Vs11-16

What's he telling us? He was surveying the situation, making what? A plan, he was preparing for the task that lie ahead of him. And notice the secrecy with which he's doing this.

He makes sure to tell us twice that no one knew what God had put on his heart, and that what he did, he did by night. He no doubt wasn't sure who he could trust yet so he's exercising wisdom in just telling no one. But also God's way more into privacy than He is publicity. He didn't come marching into town (I'm sure his presence was duly noted, he'd come with supplies, military personnel the whole bit) but he didn't march into town as though here he was to save the day. And he took a few days off just to rest and re-gather his thoughts, than he began to formulate a plan. But I love the low profile, we're all too often all out loud about what God's placed on our heart, we're not prepared to take action, nor do we have any real plans, but here it is, God's stirring me this way! Nehemiah didn't do that, he just let God develop and place into action the whole thing in His time, done His way.

Something else we should see quickly before we get too far gone is the fact that when he made this journey of a minimum of 2 months (he was on horse back) he did so with a military escort. He prayed about it, asked for provision, safe passage and the whole bit. Remember when Ezra made this journey, he prayed about it, but decided to go with no military escort, and no letters of safe passage, now they'd both prayed, they both trusted the Lord, who was right? They both were, God's not into cookie cutter Christianity, He may use you in one way, He may lead me in a completely different way, we've both been obedient, done things God's way, but He's led us differently. We're not to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, God does different things, in different ways, in different people's lives.

Well everything lie in ruins, the wall was just rubble at best, and sometimes before things can get better we have to see them in the reality of what they are, then we can move forward from there.

## Vs17-18

This is that faith that provoked, his faith was contagious, stirred others to action, he came to them was honest with them. He said, "You guys can see the distress we're in now." This isn't a good thing, but notice again the collective identity, "I didn't come here to criticize you, but rather to labor *alongside* you." He also shared with them the end result, "We'll no longer be a reproach." He's saying this is a *disgrace* to both us and to God, but together we can work and bring *glory* to God. He's effective at communicating the co-laboring effort, they need each other. And he tops it off by encouraging them in the Lord, "The hand of God has been good upon me, and these are the words that the king has spoken to me." And they say, "Let's do it." It's not about Nehemiah, or raising him up, it's about the Lord, and exalting Him together, and that idea people can get behind. He didn't have to offer them an all expense paid vacation to the sea of Galilee or any other carnal manipulation, he just said, you guys know this needs done, God's leading us to *do* it and He'll be glorified *through* it. And they were provoked to the good work of rebuilding the wall.

Vs19-20

Ridicule, one of the enemies 1<sup>st</sup> attempts of opposition. “You go pray for that person!? Give me a break, you encourage that guy by the word, whatever.” Laughed to scorn, and we become paralyzed, immobilized in the work. It was obvious to Nehemiah that these guys didn’t have a clue, far from being in rebellion to the king, they were under the authority of the king. But notice he didn’t get into any of that, they were on a need to know basis and they just didn’t need to know Nehemiah’s business. He just said, “God’s doing this work, and you’re not going to stand in the *way* of this work.” His faith was patient, yet it pursued the proper path in the proper time, provoked others to enter the work. And he was a man with a plan who was prepared to act when God would open the door.

Prayer Points: God help us that we might be prepared to act when you open the door. Help us not to be people of presumption but that we have a plan that accords with your purpose for our lives. Help us to be patient, people of proper timing, sensitive to the stride of Your Spirit. Teach us to be truly available to You, ready to be used *by* You, that we might bring glory *to* You.