

Theme: Rebuild

This second message in the series:

Nehemiah 2: God-generated prayer and work

8th November, 2020, by Ian Fraser, to King of Kings Church, Sun Valley, Cape Town.

Reading. I read from The New International Version.

Neh 1:11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

Neh 2:1 In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before;

2 so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid,

3 but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

4 The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, **5 and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it."**

6 Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

When he had arrived in Jerusalem, and had looked things over, he writes, "I said to [the people of the city], "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. **Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.**""

Neh. 2:17.

From a vision given to Daniel, more than a hundred years earlier: "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' **It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble**" Daniel 9:25.

Introduction

Today we are going to learn that both prayer and work that God blesses is a gift from Him. He is able to work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 13:21). Rebuilding is a work of God.

“4 The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 and I answered the king...” (2:4, 5a).

Nehemiah was praying in the very place where God was working

He prayed before the king. He'd also prayed before the day (1:11).

Where was Jesus **when Peter cried** out while sinking? He was immediately there to grab hold of him.

Where was God when **Daniel's three friends were in the fire**? He was the seen as the fourth, among them.

Where is God **when you call for help**? He's working **in** your situation!

- “He is **near** to all who call on Him; who call on Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18) – **in your need** He is moving you to call on Him...

- “Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24) – **In our anxiety**, He's already at work, as we pray.

Paul asks for prayer **for boldness** in His situation (Ephesians 6:20); and

Paul asks for prayer **for words** to be given him, as he works (6:19); and

God promises Moses, when He sends him to tell Egypt's Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery, “**I will help you speak** and will teach you what to say.” (4:12), as if God is right there with him!

1. **God knows how to bless our station in life** – and make it a place of prayer

“I was cupbearer to the king – I had not been sad in his presence before” (1:11; 2:1).

What a stressful job! What a place for God's blessing and work. God was with him.

Remember **Joseph in Egypt**, and how God was with him, in his slavery;

Remember **David among the sheep**, despised by his brothers, but chosen by God. David knew God as his ever-caring Shepherd.

Remember **Naomi**, the mother of Ruth, with all her suffering and grief –

to the point where she renamed herself “Mara” (Bitter) – and what God brought about through her, and the new day of God’s people.

> Learn how God views your station in life – He is with you, and through you (if you hold on to Him with all the strength He gives you) He may be making you part of a far bigger picture than you could ever imagine.

God’s order of things is clear: God / leader / you and me.

When Nehemiah said that he had never been sad in the king’s presence before he was also indicating the high regard for his position, and his commitment to the highest quality of his work. God used that. Likewise, God may wish to use your quality of work to get you to His task.

God puts us in situations that He can use. Let’s be the best we can be.

2. God puts prayer into our hearts

“I prayed to the God of Heaven, then I answered the king...” (2:4, 5).

Was Nehemiah praying to God, or was God praying in Nehemiah?

Can 7 Billion pray with God attending to them all at the same time? No problem: “The LORD is near to all who call on Him, who call on Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18).

Nehemiah made his arrow-prayer to God right in front of the king. God is right there in every situation you and I are going through.

Nehemiah’s prayer was so short, he doesn’t even say what he said!

Sometimes all we can do is pack it all into one deep-felt grunt. Remember that Jesus warned against praying long prayers, as if God needs to be informed of all the details (Matthew 6:7, 8). Notice also that

Nehemiah prayed an ‘internal’ prayer. God sees our hearts (Mt. 6:8).

Nehemiah was afraid while he prayed. God is our comfort in our fearful state. When Jeremiah lamented the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and his army, distraught at what had become of himself and his people, he recalled in prayer: “57 You came near when I called you, and you said, “Do not fear.”” (Lam. 3:57).

In crisis moments the Holy Spirit may be moving you to pray for help -

Don’t resist Him, he may be welling up within you the very prayers that reflect God’s heart for you. Enter into His promptings to pray. The

Psalmist seems to understand this kind of moment when he writes: “My soul yearns, ... my heart & my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm

84:2).

> Let's get into what's happening when Nehemiah offers his quick prayer:

Is this Nehemiah praying to God, or is this God praying in Nehemiah?

The Holy Spirit might pray in you ahead of what is about to happen to you. Who of you, when you see a child step towards traffic, will not reach out and pull them to safety? Who of you, when your partner is battling against the wind, will not cycle ahead of him to make the slipstream? Is this prayer not the work of the Comforter making fit representation of your own heart's cry before the throne of grace?

This point was brought home vividly to me when I was travelling from a work assignment in Piet Retief, back to Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu Natal. There, I learned, the geology of the place is such that lightening has been known to strike when there are not even clouds around. I was heading out of Paulpietersburg. I drove into a cloudburst. Sheets of storm rain were lashing the car and bursting down all around me. This was a flood in one shower. As I turned a bend over a river I felt a cry coming up from deep within me, "Jesus, help me". As that prayer-cry rose up within me I was on the other bank going up the hill and I heard an almighty crash with a brilliant light.

Now you know that if the thunder and the lightening explode together you're in big trouble. My car had been hit by lightening. It smacked the radio aerial socket just above my head, and blew out the plastic housing. It burnt its entire electronics. Fortunately the engine kept running, and I was able to just make it to Pietermaritzburg for repairs before the battery ran down.

> That was the clearest experience of the Holy Spirit praying in me ahead of what was about to happen. Prayer is a gift of God. **God puts prayer into our hearts!**

3. God works us into His kingdom-building purpose

“God put a work in my heart for Jerusalem” (2:12).

How did God put a work so quickly into Nehemiah’s heart? It seems that this chapter two follows immediately after he had just heard about Jerusalem’s state? A clue to answering this question is the mention of two months, one at the beginning of chapter 1, the month of Kislev (1:1), the Nisan, at the start of this chapter.

Kislev (1:1) to Nisan (2:1) is a period of four months! As God worked a plan in Nehemiah’s heart through this period, it seems then that he needed that length of time in order to be ready for that quick prayer of verse four.

The time it took to build the wall (52 days) was way shorter than the period to prepare for it. Chapter one shows that God was forming a prayer-worked relationship with Nehemiah, as we learned last week, to prepare him for what lay ahead.

You may be in a period in your life where you feel that God is not answering your prayers. Perhaps, like Nehemiah, He is developing and training the way you talk to Him.

You may be estranged from God because of a sense of indifference towards Him, or because of a grievance you have against Him. The Lord Jesus Christ came to deal with all of that, and by His work on the Cross open the way for a new birth of our souls, and a reconciliation with God where we relate to Him in a space of forgiveness, love and purpose. That’s where prayer can start taking shape, and where God and His Word may start to mean something to our hearts. I hope that this stirs you to make peace with God, in these troubled days.

In the 4-month silence from God, Nehemiah was driven back to the Word of God, where He reminded himself of God’s kingdom work for the nations, of God’s role for His people, and what He wanted to do for the world through them. This is important for us today. Let God revive in you His kingdom-building passion – His eternal purpose. All this is found in Jesus Christ.

Could you trust God to put a work in your heart here, and in the place He has called you to serve Him?

God-wrought prayers are given through Word-informed planning.

“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done **has been done through God**” (John 3:21).

God’s work done God’s way, then, has God’s ear.

4. The urgency of rebuilding: God’s kingdom clock is ticking...

"[I looked things over, in Jerusalem], then I said to [the people of the city], "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace"" (Neh. 2:17).

The reason Nehemiah wept: God’s clock is ticking, and we’re not supposed to be like this. Jerusalem is still in ruins!

2 Discouragements hamper a building spirit (1) Trouble and opposition; and (2) Apathy of heart.

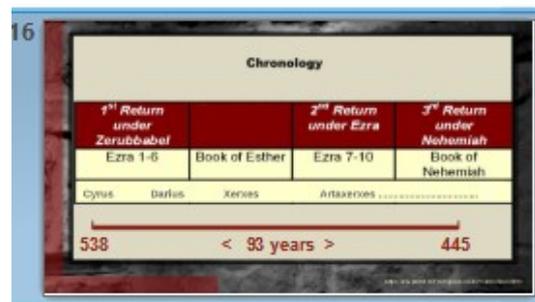
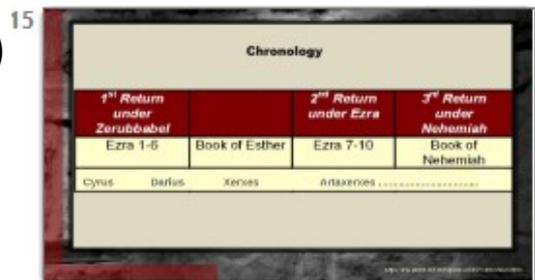
Nehemiah called it a state of disgrace (2:17).

Why did he weep when he heard that the walls were broken down and that the city was in ruins? The state of the city was common knowledge (cf. Ezekiel 33:21ff).

Cyrus’ decree in 538 was that those who wished to return to Jerusalem should do so, and rebuild the temple. The temple was built eventually by 515. But 70 years

later Jerusalem was still in ruins! 93 years after Cyrus’ decree the people were stuck. They were disheartened by their troubles, and had grown apathetic and self-preoccupied. This floored Nehemiah. He wept because the people had lost their vision and their purpose for being at Jerusalem.

This is instructive for the Church at large today, wherever God’s people have the freedom to openly worship and serve Christ Jesus. Trouble and



opposition on the one hand, and immobilizing discouragement with laxity of heart on the other, somehow seem to grip and hold on to each other. It was enough to move Nehemiah to risk his life before the king, in order for this disgrace to be removed. The city and its wall had to be built – quickly!

Can we catch the fire of Nehemiah's passion for God and for His people? **If there's one thing we should never get settled in, it's allowing ourselves to become a defeated and apathetic people, in our troubles. How wonderful to be on fire for the Lord. Let's keep the fire burning, and the purpose bright.**

Let's encourage one another to join God in His building and rebuilding work in our lives, our church, our community. His clock for the coming of Christ is ticking. Remember Daniel 9:25, 26: "It will be rebuilt, but in times of trouble." God keeps His promises in a time of trouble. We are not to be surprised by both. His building work will be done. Let us rise up, and rebuild what our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to build – He has laid the foundation, which is Himself. Let us build on Him.