

REBUILD

INTRODUCTION

Today we are launching a new series in the book of Nehemiah, called; 'Rebuild!' We believe it is time to rebuild. If life feels like it has been shattered into a million pieces... you can either give up... or you can set out with fresh new vision, to pick up the pieces, and rebuild. The season that we are in, and the season Nehemiah was in, although different, bear a lot of similarities to one another.

For those of you who don't know the backdrop to the story of Nehemiah, here is the context...

Jerusalem has been sacked. Years of sin and rebellion had caught up to them. And there was a reckoning. The Babylonian Kingdom, which we spoke about last week, turned their attention toward Jerusalem.

And King Nebuchadnezzar came, and he destroyed the city. He broke down her walls, burnt down her gates and destroyed her defences, and many of God's people were sent into exile into distant lands. After many years, a remnant group of God's people had returned, survivors. But they were still grieving and broken - a shadow of the proud nation they used to be.

Now we have to understand that this was an incredibly difficult time for them, because Jerusalem was far more to them than just a home, or a nice place to stay. For the people of God, Jerusalem was a centre-point of their faith. It was the holy city. It was the place of God's promise. It was the place of God's presence. And now... their beautiful Jerusalem was lying in ruin.

The special place, where they had so many wonderful memories, where God's people could live together, under the grace and rule of God, was now destroyed. The amazing place that was meant to be a model for us, for the rest of the world, to see what it looks like to be in relationship with God... a place where people could come who were hurting, and broken, to find healing, to experience God's presence, this incredible place, had now become a place of ruin and disgrace.

Why had this happened? Well, God had allowed this to happen because of their sin. And the people of God knew that. And everyday when they woke up, they were confronted with it outside of their windows. If they took a walk around the neighbourhood, the once beautiful city, and majestic walls of Jerusalem were now lying in ruin, with moss and weeds growing through the broken pieces. Daily they were confronted with this. The broken walls. The burnt gates. Reminders of their sin. Reminders of their unfaithfulness to the God that loved them.

It's not difficult then to understand how they must of felt. That feeling of hopelessness. That feeling, that it will always be this now. That everything was now broken and ruined. That was Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time.

But how does this relate to us today? Well, over the past few months - the world has changed. Perhaps many things had already changed, but COVID certainly pulled back the curtains to reveal a very fractured world.

We have seen how damaged society is. The racial tensions. The hate. The politics. The anger. The hurt. The blame. The violence. The corruption. The evil.

We have seen how broken families are. While lockdown has drawn some families closer together, it has also had the opposite effect on many others. Maybe lockdown just amplified all the real issues. You would be shocked to know how many marriages, even Christian ones, which look so good from the outside looking in, are in reality, on the inside, in such a fragile state, and so close to ruin.

We have seen how fragmented church communities are. Many churches are so demoralised right now. Churches have not been able to gather. Recent stats in certain countries, show that church attendance post-covid has now dropped to 36%. That means 64% of people have not yet returned to church. That is a massive drop. The impact of this has meant that many churches may not survive this season. It has been a case of, adapt or die. And some churches are facing possible closure.

So yes, in some ways, as Nehemiah looked at the brokenness of Jerusalem in his time, I feel that way when I look at our valley, our city, and our nation, and in some ways, our church too.

So I have been asking myself this question, how has King of Kings been affected during this time of disruption? Are we still the community God wants us to be? As his bride, wherever we gather, is this still a place of God's presence? Are we still a church of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are we still preaching repentance for sin and the reality of heaven and hell, and grace in Christ? Is this still a missional community of God's people - passionate about loving God, loving people, and making disciples?

Today we are going to look at Nehemiah chapter 1. Where we are going to be introduced to the man, Nehemiah. When we meet him, he is a man serving in Susa, the winter residence of the Persian kings, and though he is an Israelite, Nehemiah serves in a position of great trust and responsibility. He serves as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Like his personal bartender. His job is to ensure that the king's wine is constantly available and always good! So Nehemiah has full access to the king and he is well liked and trusted.

Today we are going to look at Nehemiah Ch 1, the first 10 verses, as I introduce this series to you. And the first thing that happens is that Nehemiah starts questioning what is really going on... vs 1;

In the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah, with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant, that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

He was asking his Jewish brothers questions. He wanted to know how the people of God were really doing. He wanted to know about the true state of Jerusalem.

God was clearly working in his heart. Awakening in him a concern and care for his people. And he is asking deep questions. And this is what they tell him in vs 3;

³ They said to me, “Those who survived the exile, and are back in the province, are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

It's not good news. Nehemiah learns that the people of God are still scattered. Some who have survived are back in the area, but they are living in trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down. The gates are burnt. Nehemiah takes this all in. Here is the first thing I want us to learn from Nehemiah;

1. Reflect like Nehemiah

Nehemiah was not like an ostrich that stuck his head in the sand. He lived his life with his eyes wide open. And he saw the brokenness. He saw the hurt. He saw the pain. He saw God's people scattered and lost. I want you to see how this affects Nehemiah, and what he does in vs 4;

⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days, I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Wow. Nehemiah sat down and wept. For days. Nehemiah's heart was broken for the city of Jerusalem and the state it was in. As he reflected on the situation. His heart was broken. And I have to tell you, my heart is broken as well. My heart is broken for this city. My heart is broken for this valley. My heart is broken for Gods broken and scattered people. Who am I talking about?

Do you know that we have modern day exiles. People who know no church community. They are scattered all over the place. Prodigal sons and daughters. People who used to say they loved Jesus, and followed him, but now... they are like exiles... far from the Father, far from their church family and spiritual home.

Nehemiah was not afraid to live with his eyes wide open. He reflected on this. Nehemiah gets the heart of Christ. And looks what he does, just like Jesus, when he looked over Jerusalem, and wept that they would return to him, so to Nehemiah cries over Jerusalem.

King of Kings, do you weep over our valley? Do you weep over our nation?

Nehemiah is moved by the Holy Spirit for the state of Jerusalem. And in this soft and fertile heart - God begins the process of calling a man toward his purpose. The call of God begins to form in his life. And maybe God has been moving in your heart too - for the state of our valley, our nation, our church. Perhaps God is stirring some new callings here today.

I also find his name so interesting. The name 'Nehemiah' is made up of 'Nehem' meaning 'comforter', or 'consoler.' and 'Yah' - meaning 'Yaweh' (JHWH). Jehovah the comforter and counsellor. To put it simply, Nehemiah means '*God the counsellor, the one called alongside to help.*'

The Holy Spirit is working in his life - Nehemiah is weeping and fasting and praying.

All this happened while he was working in Susa. This is in modern day Iran. It is miles and miles away from Jerusalem. Nehemiah had probably never even been to Jerusalem before. We read in 2 Kings, that King Nebuchadnezzar,

“...carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land” (2 Kings 24:14)

So Nehemiah never even grew up there, but God is working in his heart, and wants to do something through him. Maybe God is doing something similar in your heart today. Because God does not abandon His people, nor does God leave them without hope.

For as the prophet Jeremiah proclaims, **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give**

you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me, and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

¹³ You will seek me, and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you, from all the nations and places, where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back, to the place from which I carried you into exile.” (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

This is a time to reflect, and to seek the Lord like Nehemiah. But it's not just a time to sit in reflection and prayer. It is also a time to revive and to rise up!

2. Revive like Nehemiah

It is a time to awaken our hearts in prayer and revival! Nehemiah was a prayer addict. Prayer was always his first response, regardless of what happened. Take a look at what Nehemiah does next in vs 5;

⁵ Then I said: “Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, with those who love him, and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive, and your eyes open, to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you, day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.

Nehemiah knew it was a time to Rekindle. To Refresh. To Reconnect. To Remember his great God. The great and awesome God! Who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commands.

So Nehemiah reaches out to God - and says please Father, let your ear be attentive, and your eyes open to my prayers which I will offer day and night for your people. This friends, is called revival prayer.

You will see in this rebuild series, that much of this study in Nehemiah will focus on the prayer life of Nehemiah. You are going to see, Nehemiah prays a lot. He is a person of deep prayer, and he seeks God's guidance and favour before taking action. Most of Nehemiah's prayers are short, though the prayer recorded in chapter 9 is the longest prayer in the entire Bible. Nehemiah captures God's longing, for all of us to be people of prayer and revival.

Here is the next important thing God wants to teach us;

3. Repent like Nehemiah

In the modern 'progressive' church, repentance is like a lost key. There are so many 'spiritual people' out there today, who believe in all kinds of things, they are on all kinds of roads and pathways, but there is only one way that leads to life through Jesus Christ, and genuine repentance. Take a look at Nehemiah's prayer; in vs 6;

I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself, and my father's family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

Nehemiah understood how dangerous sin was, and he knew how to come in repentance before a holy God who will hold people to account. Friends, I need to remind you today, that although God is loving, he is also a God of justice and wrath. People who chose to live in sin, will not be spared by a loving God whose soft heart will win out. Hell is a real place. Heaven is a real place. Choosing sin, is choosing hell.

So Nehemiah confesses his sins, his families sins, and the sins of the Israelites. What sins do we need to confess to the Lord today? What sins do you need to confess to the Lord today?

Nehemiah knows the scriptures, he understands the importance of repentance, the power of repentance, and he quotes the Moses in vs 8 & 9;

⁸ "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ but if you return to me, and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'

Repentance is a powerful thing.
Reflect like Nehemiah
Revive like Nehemiah
Repent like Nehemiah
Lastly today;

4. Rebuild like Nehemiah

Realising that the walls of Jerusalem are lying in piles of rubble and that God's people are vulnerable, Nehemiah decides to do something about it. He uses his

position of trust, and receives permission from King Artaxerxes to travel to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. A cupbearer to the king, is going to become a leader, a warrior, a builder, and in the process, a rebuild God's people into a nation.

What we are going to see over the next few Sundays, is how Nehemiah and the people of God - rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and in the process, rebuild more than just the physical walls, they rebuild faith, they rebuild identity, they rebuild purpose. Nehemiah prays for this in the final vs of this prayer. He says; God!

10 "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 11 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 favour in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

God was at work - rebuilding his servants, rebuilding his people, those he had redeemed, and those who revered his name - and God was going to use Nehemiah to do it. He had already been working in waves though...

A 1st wave, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (see Ezra 1-6). A 2nd wave, led by the scribe Ezra, returned to Jerusalem to initiate a spiritual and social renewal among God's people. Ezra sought to rebuild the community by teaching Torah (see Ezra 7-10). Now God would be using a 3rd wave under the leadership of Nehemiah, who he would send to Jerusalem, to rebuild the walls of the city (see Nehemiah 1-6) and along with the scribe Ezra, to rebuild the spiritual life of God's people (see Nehemiah 7-13).

Church, it is a time for us to rebuild as well.

What do we have to rebuild?

I believe we have to rebuild a culture of prayer and worship. It's far more than a Tuesday night or Friday morning prayer session. Are we seeking God? Are we worshipping God?

I believe we have to rebuild our missional identity. Is our mission still white-hot? Mission is meant to be far more than a couple of photos on a wall and an annual event. Mission has to live daily in the soul of countless people in our congregation. It is something that has to motivate all the action in King of Kings. It has to consume us. Often a church that has stopped growing, has lost the urgency behind its mission. I want to remind you that our mission, is actually Christ's mission...it's the spread of the Gospel into the world for which Jesus died. So when was the last time you invited someone to church? It's time to rebuild our missional identity.

I believe it is also a time to rebuild strong leadership. Like Nehemiah's leadership. The book of Nehemiah shows the importance of strong leadership in the completion of a vision. With the right leadership, the Israelites were able to complete a project in 52 days—a project that, for 80 years, people had said couldn't be done. We need more leaders like Nehemiah. We need a vision that drives us forward. We need a great cause - and we have it - the greatest cause in the world is the Kingdom of God! Nothing else lasts for eternity.

I believe it is a time to get our house in order. Not only the church, but also our families. Our homes. Our marriages.

Let's rebuild like Nehemiah

Amen.

Let's pray.