

NEHEMIAH

The Restoration of God's People

Sermon 02: "The Realities of Serving God"

Scripture: [Nehemiah 2: 1-20](#)

Theme: *To serve God realistically, we must learn to wait on Him, to work with people, and to wrestle wisely with problems.*

Nehemiah has heard what has happened to the city, the wall has collapsed, and is now moving on with his job. However, he is trying to hide his broken heart from the king. The king is able to read right through Nehemiah's "Sunday best" and see that Nehemiah has something that is hurting him more than just not feeling well.

Notice Nehemiah's response 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?*"¹ Nehemiah does not try to hide his "messiness" from the king. He comes right out and says that the city he came from, where his heritage is, the graves of his fathers, has been ruined and he is deeply saddened and upset by this.

Notice how the king has some sort of compassion on Nehemiah. Was Nehemiah just that great of a servant to the king that he received such compassion and opportunity? Did the work of Ezra 12 years earlier have such an impact on the king that he came to have a heart for the Jewish religion? Through the faithful service of Ezra and Nehemiah, is the king coming to understand the Lord more fully?

Nehemiah must have had a natural gift of leadership, because in verse 9, we see that he had offices and horsemen sent with him. It is Nehemiah's plan to only have a core group of people know what is going on, so to not attract any attention to them by surrounding enemies. After he decides what the plan is, he does what any good leader would do; he goes and inspects the ruins of the city. He walks all along the perimeter inspecting everything; he even takes time to name the gates that he went to. Nehemiah is highly in tune with the city that he is caring for and has a heart for it.

Just as things were beginning to go well for them and as the people were getting behind the game plan, they quickly faced opposition from the government. The governor, Sanballat the Horonite, along with Tobiah, the Ammonite servant, and Geshem, the Arab, heard of what was going on, they were quick to step in and offer their two cents. The plan that Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem had come up with was quickly put into question once the government agency showed up and questioned them. At once these men had to answer the question, "*Are you rebelling against the king?*" Notice how Nehemiah responds to this...

¹ Nehemiah 2:3

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Nehemiah knows that he has the king's approval; the people of Jerusalem know that they have the king's approval, and we, the readers, know that they have the king's approval. So why does Nehemiah leave this detail out? Why doesn't Nehemiah get these pesky government people who are weighing them down off their back? As the ESV Study Bible puts it, "*Nehemiah knows that the king is on his side, but he attributes his authority to the God of heaven. He clearly distinguishes between God's people and the enemies of God who oppose the work. Once he is convinced that they are opposing the work of the Lord, he makes no effort to include them or even to pursue further discussions with them*²." Nehemiah, being a leader of the people of God and having a proper heart for Jerusalem, stands before the Lord declaring that this is His work.

We face similar instances like this still today, whether it be in the church, the work place, families, friendships...etc. Some of us feel that we have an idea, and that it is from the Lord. We then take it to the next group of people (church leaders, coworkers, boss, spouse...etc.) and sometimes we get the go ahead and do it from them, but other times there is some resistance. When we get that we often feel that our ideas are not good enough or that we heard from God wrong, or that we are totally out in left field.

However, Nehemiah offers some great wisdom in being a leader. When he faced opposition from people, Nehemiah knew that he was right. He pressed on and called the other party out by saying that this is what the Lord would have for the people of Jerusalem. This is not to say that we are to have a deaf ear to criticism because there can be some great wisdom in constructive feedback. Often times it is even healthy, but we cannot let little bumps in the road derail us from the mission that God has us on. We are to cling tight to Jesus and his word, to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading, and pray diligently that what we are doing is for the sake of God and his glory.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

1. How can we guard ourselves from disappointment and cynicism when things do not go well in our service for God?
2. When do we cross the line from proper planning to excessive planning? What factors can we watch out for?
3. How can a person who does not work well with people learn this essential skill? What steps would you advise?
4. How can you know when to be diplomatic and when to confront boldly? What guidelines should we follow? (Check out Jesus' various interactions with people in this regard.)

² ESV Study Bible footnote for Nehemiah 2:20.

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SUMMING IT UP:

“Making sensible and careful plans for serving God does not conflict with reliance on His providence, and reliance on His providence does not excuse failure to plan.”—*John MacArthur*

1. What problem or situation in your life do you want to confront with greater boldness this week? How can Nehemiah's life serve as a pattern for you?
2. What were the concrete ways Nehemiah demonstrated dependence on God? What are some specific ways you can better trust God this week?
3. What were the concrete ways Nehemiah planned and prepared for his wall-building endeavor? What are some specific ways you can better plan and prepare in your service of God this week?
4. How can you respond to criticism in a more God-honoring fashion in the future?