

3. PREPARATION FOR THE MIGHTY TASK

Let's go back to the last verse of the chapter 1.

For I was the king's cupbearer.

So here is a man, who out of his concern and after the confession of his heart, commits himself to a project. He asks God to begin moving in the king's heart. Now this is always how any return to the grace of God must begin. We get concerned. Then we confess. Then we commit ourselves to action and ask God also to act in our behalf, for invariably in an enterprise like this there are factors over which we have no control, and God must arrange them.

A. PRAYING AND WAITING

Neh. 2:1a And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes,

Notice that the month of Nisan is April in twentieth year of King Artaxerxes. But we read that when Nehemiah heard about the wall of Jerusalem was Chislev, which is December in twentieth year of King Artaxerxes. Does it mean we are going backward from December to April in the same year? Does it mean the Bible is contradicting itself? NO! The year of an ancient kings does not start with January nor August of fiscal year, but it starts at the month of inauguration of the king.

Between the end of the chapter 1 and the beginning of the chapter 2, there was four month gap filled with prayer and waiting.

Neh. 2:1b-2 when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid,

The king's words pass through Nehemiah's heart like a chilling wind – because it is a crime punishable by death to have a sad countenance, for it might suggest dissatisfaction with the king. The Bible is so honest and straight forward that it does not hide the human side of Nehemiah's fear.

B. THE TIME TO PRESENT OUR PETITIONS WITH PRAYER

So, Nehemiah chose his next words carefully.

Neh. 2:3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

In the following verse, we find the quality of the man of God.

Neh. 2:4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

When Nehemiah prayed to God, it was not a prayer to spare his own life, but it was the pray for God's will and guidance on the king's heart. Nehemiah recognizes God is in control. We need to remember this attitude of Nehemiah. We face many challenges against our faith in Christ Jesus from non believers or cult people. Do we just answer them as we know, or do we make a quick prayer to God who can put words into our mouths to speak about His will in our lives and their lives?

"It is possible to move men. through God, by prayer alone." was said by Inland China missionary, Hudson Taylor. Nehemiah was equipped with the only tool to change his boss' mind - Prayer. It was a tool he may have learned to use from Solomon.

Prov. 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

In other word, even though it looks like that the king is the one who decides the fate of Nehemiah, actually it is God who change the king's heart.

Prov. 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

C. PREPARED FOR THIS MOMENT

Neh. 2:5-6 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

Nehemiah was so confident that he put a time schedule without seeking the city of Jerusalem.

1John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

The date the king Artaxerxes gave his permission to Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem has to be one of the most important dates in history. Because according to Daniel 9, from the date of rebuilding of Jerusalem till the entrance of Messiah would be 483 years. So here March 14, 445 B.C., the command was give to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem by a heathen king. Each Babylonian year contains 360 days. So if you calculate 173,880 days from the date of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, it falls upon the date of Jesus' triumphant entry of Jerusalem, April 6th, 32 A.D.

Reflected in the king's questions is a deep appreciation for Nehemiah and his work – he wants the cupbearer to come back. This says something important about Nehemiah. Although his heart longs for Jerusalem, he has carried out his duties in this foreign land with the same meticulous care he would have given them in his homeland.

Col. 3:22-25 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

When Nehemiah return to Persia after rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and governing Judah, it was 12 years later.

D. THE QUALIFICATION OF A GOOD LEADER

Setting a timeline is very important for leadership quality. The ability to plan and organize. Nehemiah's well thought out itinerary came from planning his way through the whole project while prayerfully waiting on God to move Artaxerxes. Going out in faith doesn't mean you go out haphazardly without any plan. Jesus Himself warned.

Luke 14:28-30 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- lest, after

he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

Neh. 2:7-9 Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

Nehemiah was prepared, but the same time He realized the hand of his God was upon him. He didn't forget to remember who is in charge. We should know that when good things come upon us, it is not because we are so good, but the hands of God were generous to us.

E. THE ENEMY WITH PRESSURE AND OPPOSITION

Between verse 8 & 10, we have over 800 miles distance.

Neh. 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

Do you recognize these names? Whenever you read of Ammonites, Amorites, Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, or any of the other "ites," you have a picture of the enemy of God---the flesh. This satanic agency within man inevitably resists the work and the will and the ways of God. Here you have this same enmity; when the enemies of God.

Immediately courage is needed. Whenever a man like Nehemiah says, "I will arise and build," satan always says, "Then I will arise and oppose." Satan makes things difficult when we start turning back to God.

This opposition against Nehemiah is a type of the pressure and opposition from the world and satan.

Exod. 5:6-9 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words."

Can we walk with God when we feel like we just jump out of frying pan into fire? Somehow whenever we try to follow God wholeheartly, the things get worse. For many people, opposition raises serious doubts about whether we're in God's will. In Nehemiah's case the opposition of those who despised the things of God served as an affirmation that he was doing God's will.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Changing the heart is God's specialty.

No matter how important the person, God is the One who decides the direction a heart will bend.

2) Prayer and waiting go hand in hand.

You haven't really prayed till you've learned to wait, to abandon your own efforts at manipulation and wait on God to work in His timing.

3) Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning.

God honors and expects careful thinking and planning from His faithful children.

4) Opposition often affirms being in the will of God.