



HG234: Nehemiah - Be Determined
The Mountain Starts To Move

Nehemiah 2:1-20

Home Group Study Notes

23 January 2022 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

What and where is the highest mountain (or hill) you
have ever climbed? Or are you afraid of heights?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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Right Job, Right Place, Right Time

Nehemiah had a good job in Babylon, as the king's cupbearer he held a unique position of trust in the King's court. It was his job to guard against any poison getting into the king's food and so he tasted everything before the king ate or drank. After hearing news from his brother that the people who survived the exile were in "great trouble and disgrace" and that walls around the city of Jerusalem were "broken and the gates were burned" 1:3, Nehemiah prayed and planned for several months and then chose his time to act. He was serving the king his wine and the king noticed that he looked troubled, not a good look for a cupbearer. Picking up on the king's change in behaviour towards him he became fearful and so he quickly affirmed his loyalty to the king then told him he was troubled because the city of his people was in a bad state of disrepair. The king was reassured and asks how he can help.

Because Nehemiah is totally reliant on God his immediate instinctive response when the king challenged him was to say a quick prayer for help and guidance. He didn't utter a word out loud, get to his knees or close his eyes but a mighty transaction took place between Nehemiah and God in that moment and the king never saw a thing. Never think you don't have time to pray or that your prayers need to be well crafted and beautifully spoken, the Lord doesn't need long prayers. A heartfelt prayer is all that's needed, it can be short silent and offered in a strange place but still be heard and answered by God.

He asks the king for a favour to allow him to go and rebuild the city walls, a request Nehemiah had prayed about and importantly had planned for so when the king asked how long he'd be away Nehemiah knew the answer and gave a definite timescale. He also anticipated what he would need for his journey and so he asked for letters to the governors to give him safe conduct and letters of authorisation to the keeper of the king's forest to give him timber. All his requests were granted. The king was not a Jew, he was in fact ruling over part of the kingdom that had held the Jews captive for over 70 years yet he not only released Nehemiah but it was like he gave him his credit card to go off and buy whatever he needed. Whilst Nehemiah had been praying for the last 4 months God had been working on the king's heart, essentially he was using a gentile king to save his chosen nation. God had placed Nehemiah exactly where he needed him to be.

Opposers

Not everyone was happy, there was opposition from Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite and we will see how they continued to oppose the work over the following weeks.

We need to be prepared for opposition when we undertake work for the Lord because there will be people who oppose us and our ideas and there will be always be plenty of discouragers.

... And Collaborators

Once he knew the extent of the work to be undertaken Nehemiah put his thoughts before the people telling them in v17 that it was a time to rebuild, the city was in disgrace, God's honour and name were at stake. He told them of God's hand being upon him leading the king to offer help in all this. The crowd rose and joined together in the cry, "lets rise up and build" If Nehemiah had lived in our more cautious days where we are less willing to get involved I wonder what response he would have got, probably a whole lot of us suddenly remembering things we had to do and places we needed to be.

Where Are Today's Nehemiah's?

I suppose we would say that Nehemiah was special, unique, equipped for the purpose, loved and called by God, but that actually sounds like you and it sounds like me, special, unique, loved and called by God to serve. I don't think that there is anything that we can see in Nehemiah that we shouldn't see in each other. He was no more precious or special to God than we are, he did no more than we are invited to do and are expected to do once we commit our lives to the Lord. He was simply a man who took his relationship with God seriously. Seriously enough to give up his comfortable lifestyle to go and build walls.

Be Careful What You Promise

Nehemiah was a man of action and vision, driven by purpose but he could not have done what he did if he had not been a man of prayer, prayer was at the heart of everything he did. From this chapter we also see him as a man of few words, careful about sharing with others too soon. For 3-4 months he had been praying and planning before approaching the king for help and later when in Jerusalem in 2:11 we learn that "he had not told anyone about the plans God had put in his heart." He bided his time and avoided distractions and other peoples opinions by keeping his plans between himself and the Lord...he may not have talked to others but he constantly talked with the Lord. He was careful with his words and we need to be careful with our words too especially those we use when speaking to the Lord. If we say to him we will do something we need to be people of our word and be mindful to do it. Have you ever promised the Lord you would do something if only he would answer a prayer, have you ever promised to give up doing something because you know it is not honouring to Him, did we promise at baptism to love him and serve him for the rest of our lives?

Temples Of The Living God

I think the thing that really dismayed Nehemiah was the fact that the all powerful God that he knew from scripture, was not the one reflected in Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt and God took up residence in it but the temple surroundings, the city of Jerusalem with its broken down walls looked a mess, and anything but a place for the One True God to live. It was a disgrace. If Lloyd Grossman featured it on his old programme "Through the Keyhole" you can just hear him saying, "What kind of a god lives in a place like this?" Today the Lord no longer lives in a temple made out of bricks and mortar but in one made of flesh and blood because his Spirit now lives in the lives of believers.

You and I are now the Temple of the Living God and others may look at my life and ask the same question, “what kind of a god lives in a life lived like that?” The Spirit of the Living God lives in us today but too often, although we see the supernatural in God, we fail to see the supernatural in ourselves. We need to be more serious about studying scripture and about our prayer life. If we want to serve God effectively we need to be absolutely convinced of his truth, goodness, beauty and his promises and we will only find that through his Word. And if we are to confidently share with others about his goodness, and his presence in our lives we will only be able to do that truthfully and convincingly if we have experienced his goodness in our own lives in response to our prayers.

We Need To Be In Order To Do

We can read this chapter and conclude the message is all about what we can do, how we can serve, what we can volunteer for but if that is all we think about I think there is the chance that with everything else going on in our lives we may be overwhelmed and quickly move on to Chapter 3! So rather than only concentrate on Nehemiah's willingness to work and do, I'd like us to think about who we can be when we live a prayerful life talking and listening to God and being open to Him. I say this because of what Nehemiah said at the end of Ch 1. Nehemiah had just finished his passionate prayer to the Lord confessing sins and reminding him of his promises and asking for his help then he said, “I was cupbearer to the king.” These 6 words are incredibly important and say so much about Nehemiah and how God worked through him. Cupbearer to the king was a very important roll, respected and one of influence and trust, Nehemiah was a valuable employee, (if expendable). He had to be of good character but the skills he needed were very different to those that made him a national hero and project leader of one of the greatest building projects of all time taking only 52 days to rebuild the walls round the city of Jerusalem.

We Can Be Heroes

It makes me think of how our view of who we used to see as being important in the workplace pre Covid and who became national heroes during this Covid pandemic. The checkout lady at Waitrose, the shelf fillers at the Co-op, the delivery drivers, the postman, teachers, carers and everyone working in the NHS. Those people became pandemic heroes. The message throughout scripture is always the same, we see God using the most unusual, the normal, the mundane people to fulfil his sovereign plans. We may be too busy to take on jobs that need to be done but as we see here from Nehemiah none of us are ever too busy to pray.

I will never suggest to anyone that they should be doing more, I have my own struggles. On occasion some of the things I do are done under protest, I say, “I can't do this Lord, and I don't want to do that, and, I'm no good at that sort of thing” but once I've calmed down and taken time to consider, I hand whatever thing that I feel is difficult for me to do back to the Lord and say, “well if I'm doing this Lord you need to help me,” and when I'm really rebelling, what changes my mind and my heart is when I hear Jesus ask me to do it because, I'm sorry to say, I might unwilling to do it for whoever is asking, but I'll do it for Him. I find Jesus is hard to say “no” to.

Like Nehemiah, as followers of Christ we too are cupbearers and God calls us to serve where he has placed us and every role we play is important if we are doing it for the Lord.

If our purpose in life is to find satisfaction solely in what we choose to do and motivated by, and working towards making life easier and more comfortable for ourselves, by ambition at work, better this, better that, we will go to bed at night dissatisfied because we will always want more but if we are satisfied with Christ and find all our purpose and meaning in Him then our lives will be rich and our service will be fruitful and satisfying.

Jesus, He Can Move The Mountains

Covid has affected us all in many different ways, some of us find it more difficult now to pick up life where we left off, we are all understandably more anxious about going out and mixing with others and we have been left with mountains of concerns. Self doubt, fear, apathy, tiredness, mental health issues, however, like Nehemiah, we can decide to face these mountains and seek to move them or we can stay in their shadow, and we all know Who it is who can move mountains. Jesus just needs to see a mustard seed of faith in us. He just needs to see a small willingness in us to serve and he can work. Spirit filled believers change the world, whereas tired overwhelmed volunteers burn out and drift so ask the Holy Spirit to fill you to overflowing, to remind you of your first encounter with Jesus, to light the fire that may need stoking, ask him who it is he wants you to be and the purpose for your life. He is the God of the impossible, the God of revival, the God who can move mountains, yet somewhere along the way we have made him too small and lost some of the fear of God.

Nehemiah was a student of scripture, he was brave and courageous, he trusted God and lived for the cause of God's Kingdom, he was also a prayer warrior and it was only because of this and the time spent in prayer, that he became the man God created him to be, leader and servant to both God and his people and someone God could trust to get a job done. May we be faithful to grow where God has placed us in order that his purpose may be fulfilled in us.

"Dear Jesus, help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Thy Spirit and love. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine"

20th Century Albanian Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

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Emmanuel Church Text for 2022

*"But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,
the purposes of His heart through all generations."*

Psalm 33:11



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Have you ever had a project or a prayer matter that you have felt like giving up on but that resulted in great blessing when you persevered?

2. Nehemiah wept and prayed because the city was in ruins and God's honour was at stake, what moves you to tears and starts you praying, and keeps you praying?

3. God's honour is no longer at stake in buildings of bricks and mortar but is now at stake in the lives of his people. Are there any repairs that need to be made in your life? Is this something we can sensitively and gently discuss with others in our group and support one another in prayer about?

4. Nehemiah was a man who took his relationship with God seriously. How seriously do you take yours? What are the kind of things that make it hard for you to be more committed to the Lord and to others, e.g. commitment to your home group?

5. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king, he became a great visionary leader and project manager because he was open to God and ready to be the answer to his prayers. Do you believe God would choose to use you? Do you believe he would choose to use you in preference to someone else?

6. Other people are often able to see gifting and skills in us that we don't see in ourselves. Are you able to discuss this in your groups to encourage one another?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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