

Read

Nehemiah 1:8-2:10

8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 but *if* you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, *yet* I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.’ 10 Now these *are* Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

For I was the king’s cupbearer.

Nehemiah Sent to Judah

2 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, *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. 2 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, 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?”

4 Then the king said to me, “What do you request?”

So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 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.”

6 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.

7 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, 8 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.

9 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. 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.

[The New King James Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ne 1:8–2:10.

Welcome to God's word for you a Ministry of Sharon RP Church in Southeast Iowa. Want to thank you for listening today, and we pray that you'll be blessed by both hearing God's word as well as having it applied to your life and your heart.

Well, please turn over in your Bibles with me to the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, Chapter one, and will be beginning our reading at Verse eight and we'll be going all the way through Chapter two verse 10. So the sermon text is, Nehemiah chapter one beginning at verse eight. Going through chapter two, verse 10.

But before we read the text, I wanna ask you a couple questions. Have you ever really wanted something? I mean, have you ever really, really wanted something? I mean, have you ever really wanted that car, or that ATV, or that house? Have you ever really wanted that new thing? All of us have wanted things, but some of us want things more than other things. How many of you have wanted something so bad that you've went to God and prayed for it? How many of us have gone to the Lord with tears streaming down our face, pleading that God would heal that person in our lives? Pleading with God that He would save that child. We desperately want to be saved. See there are things in our life that we just kind of passively want, and then there are things that we know that only God can answer those desires.

And as we read through Nehemiah, we left him last week after his prayer sitting in the ashes, with tears running down his face, not being able to eat, because his heart is in turmoil. Because he wants something that only God could provide.

Look with me at verse 8.

“Remember, I pray, the words that you commanded your servant Mose, saying, If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the nations. But if you were to turn to me and keep my commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the furthest parts of the heaven, and I will gather them from there and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling place for my name. Now, these are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. Oh Lord, I pray please let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and the prayer of your servants who desire to fear your name, and let your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.”

So, we find Nehemiah in his prayer desiring redemption. We find the people of God not in the land of Israel, where they were brought out by God from the Egyptian slavery. But we find them a five-month journey away in Babylonia. We find them captives in a foreign land, subjected to the to the Medo-Persian King and there's no, in Nehemiah's heart, he knows there's no way out of this unless God answers this prayer. And so that's what he does. He goes to the Lord. We spent all last week looking at how Nehemiah prayed for redemption, crying out to God to save His people, to gather His people back. See, this week we need to realize that it is only God who can redeem us. It is only God who can redeem his people.

And here we find Nehemiah still in that depressed state. When we open up chapter two, we still find Nehemiah depressed. Four months later. Look with me at verse one. “And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of the King of Artaxerxes, 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.” Seen Nehemiah was good. Nehemiah was a lot like people today. Do you know people in your life who know how to put on a good facade? I mean, everything in their life could be going wrong, but they could still smile when they go out in public. They could just kind of push those bad things down and just make it seem like they're okay to everyone else. That's what we find Nehemiah doing here. We find Nehemiah even as he's having to go into the king's presence every day from Chislev to Nisan, those four months, every single day as he's the right-hand man of the king, the cupbearer, he goes into his presence, he's been sobbing at home, he's weeping at home, he comes into the king's presence, it's as if he washes his face, puts on a mask, takes off his mourning clothes, puts on his court clothes, and walks into the King's presence. Because he's never been sad in the king's presence before. He's really good at keeping up his show. He knows that he needs to make it seem like everything's okay when in his soul, nothing is okay.

I'm guessing you felt that before. I'm guessing you've felt that in your life before. Times in your own life and not, not everything was okay. Where, actually, if you were honest, it seemed like your world is falling apart. And yet you went to work. You went around your friends. You came to church, and just kind of pushed it down. Everything's okay. But eventually that dam breaks. Eventually, that dyke will spring a leak. Eventually, that facade will crack. And Nehemiah finds it out the next verse, verse two. Look with me at verse two. So he had never been sat in the presence of the king before. But then he goes in the king, and he can't hide this anymore. Verse two, “Therefore, the king said to me, Why is your face sad? Since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.” See he goes into the king's presence and the king is able to, it's almost like Artaxerxes the king, is able to look straight into his soul. And the Hebrew is literally, “Why's your face bad? Why do you have a bad face?” See he had never come into the presence of the king like this before. He couldn't hide it anymore, and the king is able to notice it. And he asked him, “What's wrong? You're not sick. Something else is going on here.”

Again, this is really similar to our own day and age. We live in a culture, in a society, of social media where we are surrounded by people who put on a fake internet presence. Where they curate how other people are going to see their lives. Right? They only show when they're going out to Disneyland and everything is great, and they've made the trip that they've always wanted to go, and look at these beautiful mountains on this vacation we have, and our Children are dressed so perfectly. All the while, they're drowning and loneliness and credit card debt. This this is the reality of the world we live in that couple that seem like they have everything together like they have a great marriage. All the while, they fight behind closed doors constantly, because of the husband's unfaithfulness. We live in a society that's no different than back then, where people want to just, “pushed down the bad things. Just don't talk about it.” Right? “Those are things we deal with that home.” That's not real life, and the king sees right through it with Nehemiah.

What's Nehemiah's response? He doesn't just spill his guts. Look with me in the last part of verse two, “And the king said, ‘Why is your face sad Since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.’ So I became dreadfully afraid.” Why would Nehemiah be afraid? See, one of the things that's going on here that the Persian Kings at that time would do. They would have

these big, huge, lavish parties. I mean, they were just wine-o parties. Wine would roll for months and months for the King's people. And let's face it, does anybody really want a sorrowful, depressed person to come to their party? I remember when Olivia and I used to photograph weddings. When we would bring on interns, before we could drive to the wedding, we would tell them one thing, you have to smile. Nobody wants a sourpuss at their wedding and you're helping us photographs or video. You're not allowed to go in there. "meh". All right, this is their day. It's even more so when it comes to the Persian King. When it comes to Artaxerxes, if the cupbearer is coming in and he's a head official, and he's up in front of all these people, this is, "blcck" it'd cost him his neck. Nehemiah says he was not just afraid, he wasn't just scared, he was very much greatly afraid. This is like, Oh, no, I'm about to die. What's going to happen, type afraid.

And so there's a moment of truth that happens. Nehemiah has a moment of truth here. What does he do? There's two roads before Nehemiah. He can either suppress it and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I just had a bad morning. You know, the kids were acting up king. They wouldn't get dressed right. And I'm sorry. Here's your cup, Let's have a party." You could just suppress it and just keep going. Or, the other road is, you can actually open up his soul and you could tell the king why his heart is so distressed. We find he takes that latter option. He opens up to the king. Look with me at verse three.

"And I said to the king, May the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies in waste and its gates re burned with fire?" There's something that's been weighing on Nehemiah's heart for months. The city of Jerusalem that the city that his father's own tombs are in, is laid in ruin. Imagine if there was a great fire and it wiped out all of Morning Sun and wiped out all of Mediapolis, and you were on your You're way, you were on a trip, you were in Arizona or something, and you got this news that the entire city had been leveled and all your friends farms were burned to the ground. All the crops have failed. Everybody's reduced to poverty. How would you feel? The fire even dried out the limestone and all the grave markers have disintegrated. How would you feel? What would you think? How could you not be in sorrow? This place that you love that that your ancestors are from is gone.

But just because Nehemiah tells the king this, it doesn't mean the King is going to give two hoots about it. What's the king care about some backwater little city? And let's face it, Jerusalem was a strategic point on the map. But it was not the greatest city of the Persian empire. Jerusalem had nothing on Susa. Jerusalem had nothing on many of the great cities of the ancient near East. How would the king respond to this type of openness about a city, especially a city where he has said some specific things in the past about.

We find an interaction in the next few verses, versus four through six between Nehemiah and the King. And as Nehemiah and the King interact, we find some, some favor that's seeming to be shown. But it's a dangerous type of thing that Nehemiah steps into. Look with me at versus four through six. "Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of Heaven, 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 father's tombs, that I'm a 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 steps into a dangerous place here. When the king asks, "What do you want me to do?" This is the same king

that told the Jews in Ezra chapter four to stop building the walls of Jerusalem. If you turned over in your bibles, to Ezra chapter four, you would find out that the governors of Samaria sent word to the king and told him, Hey, this town, this city was full of rebellious kings. Go, search the records and you'll find nothing good from kingdom ever came out of this city. And in Ezra Chapter four versus eighteen and following, the King says, I searched the records and you're right. Ezra chapter four verse eighteen and following says, You're right. Stop the building of the wall.

So why would it be dangerous for Nehemiah now to ask to build that wall? Why would it be dangerous for someone to ask to go build the wall of a city, a five-month journey, at the at one of the furthest reaches of the empire. Well at this time, in 449B.C., there was a rebellion that had just happened in Egypt and around Palestine by a General, under Artaxerxes, called Megabyzus and he rose up, he had defeated the uprising in Egypt, and after he defeated the uprising in Egypt, he got too big for his own breeches, and he started his own uprising against Artaxerxes. And it was in that distant area that Nehemiah is now asking. Hey, King, can you send me to that land? You know, to that city of rebellious kings? To that place that has just been subdued from another rebellion against you. Can you send me there so I can build up the walls of my fathers? Can you imagine? What if Artaxerxes thinks that he's a traitor? What if he thinks he's got daggers behind this request? Nehemiah is asking to build up a stronghold within the king's territory. If he doesn't answer kindly to this request, it's either "Yes, go" or "No, go to the death." It is one of those two options. The king isn't going to go, "Eh, no, I don't think so. You stay depressed here in the court." Nehemiah knows that he has to ask the King this. But it's interesting what he does. Where does he find the courage? Where does he find the ability to ask the King for this request? Look again with me at verse four. "Then the king said to me, What do you request? So I prayed to the God of heaven." Did you catch that little part in there? In the midst of this turmoil, in the midst of this life or death situation. Nehemiah has to stop, take a breath, appeal to the King of Kings that he might let Artaxerxes be used to redeem God's people.

What do you do when that moment comes? When you have to take that courageous step? Where do you run to, to be able to do the thing you know has to be done? When that moment of truth happens in your life and you know there's a right road and a wrong road; how will you have the way, or the power, to be able to actually do what's set before you? You must go to the King of Kings. Go to the Lord, and that's what Nehemiah does here. Nehemiah goes to the king of redemption, so the king in front of him will actually do what needs to happen. See God's promised redemption for his people. God has promised that he was going to redeem his people. And Nehemiah sees it right in front of him. It's gonna be king Artaxerxes who brings about this redemption. But it's only the God of heaven who can turn his heart to do it.

Do you pray like that? That's a legit question. Hold on. Stop. I need you to ask yourself, right? This is all good up here [points to head]. You need you need to make sure you got this down in here [points to hear], right? Do you actually pray believing that God can answer your prayers? Do you actually pray as if God IS the King of Kings and can turn even the most powerful king to your side? Do you actually believe what you pray for? If we don't, we should just stop praying. It's empty. We need to pray with faith. That's what James tells us in James chapter one.

But this interaction doesn't just stop here with the King. Nehemiah goes a little bit bolder. When the king says, "Okay, that's fine. You can go. You can go on your trip." We're going to find out later, that's a twelve-year long trip that Nehemiah leaves to go on. But he gets a little bit more bold. He's thought through, Okay, what do I need to do to actually build this city? And in verse seven and the first part of verse eight, he asked the king for exactly what he needs to see this redemption happen. Look, with me at verse seven. "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 the beams of the gates of the citadel, which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy". See, Nehemiah says, Okay, King, this is great. You're going to send me. You give me permission to do that. You need to actually let the governors in the area know that I may will pass through there, because if you don't give me letters to get through there, they're going to stop me at the gates. They're not going to let me go through their land. See, it's not like I-80 where you can just go between here and Illinois and just, "swoosh", keep going, right? When you go from one area to the next area, it's more like going from country to country where they're going to stop you and ask you. "Why are you going to Jerusalem? What are you doing there? Does the king know you're going back to Jerusalem?" And here he has a letter of authority straight from Artaxerxes to say, "Yeah, I'm going to Jerusalem and you must let me go." And when he gets there, he wants another letter. Because when he goes to Jerusalem, he needs the stuff to actually build. This is way too much for an individual to finance out of their own pocket. It's going to take the centralized Persian government to pay for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. So he asked for that. He says, "Hey, King, I need you to provide me with a letter for Asaph. You know, your guy in charge of your lumber yard. Probably up in Lebanon. Can you make sure that he gives me enough wood to actually be able to build the walls? To be able to build the gates back and to be able to..." This is, this is really nice. This is how audacious he is with the king, right? "And to build my own house?" Nehemiah knows that is he's going to accomplish this work of redemption that God is calling him, to, he has to do it with the right things. And he's already asked God to give him favor with the king, so he pushes this a step further.

But all of this, all of this, I mean... What's Nehemiah's confidence in all of this? Let's face it, if it were you and I and we were in that situation, we might be tempted to go, "Man, I made a really courageous decision when I was in front of that king. I was really scared, man. I was shaking in my boots, but I got the courage. You know, I picked myself up by my bootstraps. I went out there. I asked the king for what I wanted. He honored my courage and I got it!" Right? I mean, that's what Nehemiah I could do. Nehemiah could look at himself and say, "Oh, yeah, look at what I've done. You know, I worked really hard and I became the king's Cupbearer, and I earned the favor of that king." That's not what he does. Look at the last part of verse eight. Look at what he attributes, what he attributes his success, too. Verse eight, the very end, "And the King granted them to me. According to the good hand of my God upon me." Why was Nehemiah successful? What is he attribute his success to? It's not his courage. It's the God's hand upon him. The Lord gives us these beautiful pictures in the Old Testament of what redemption looks like. So that way we know what redemption is for us.

See the Lord, I'm going to back up for a second. Before he had this conversation with the king, how did he know that God was answering his prayer? I mean think about it, he was praying for

four months. Month number one...no answer. Month number two, praying, weeping, fasting...no answer. Month number three, praying, weeping, fasting...no answer. Finally, month number four, God answers his prayer. But how does God answer the prayer? Does a loud voice come from heaven? "Nehemiah! The king will listen to you now!" No, that's not what happens. But that's what we expect, isn't it? When we pray, we want a sign! When we pray, we want the heavens open and a voice to come out and say, "Yes! That's the job you need to take. Here's the sign that this is where you need to move." This is how Christians pray all the time. But that's not how we find God answering prayer here, is it? We find God answering prayer by saying, "Here's a situation, will you be faithful to me? Here's how I'm going to work out in my providence, I'm going to turn the heart of the most powerful king in your favor...Will you believe I'm going to do it? Do you think I can actually redeem my people? Do you think I can actually keep my word and gather my people back together?" When we pray for Morning Sun, for Mediapolis, for Southeast Iowa, for our Country! Do we actually believe that God could gather in his people? Do we actually believe it?

Brothers and sisters, there are more Christians living now than there ever has been on the face of this planet! The Lord IS redeeming His people. And He redeems them by faith! Nehemiah had faith that God's word was true and that he would redeem his people! And based on that belief, he was willing to put his neck out on the line before the King of the Persians and the Medes. And the Lord is, we're going to find in the rest of the story, going to redeem his people.

But that doesn't mean redemption comes easy. Don't be fooled, if any charlatan tells you that after you're redeemed, life is going to be easy, tell him to shut their mouths and don't talk to you anymore! If you've been a Christian for longer than five minutes, you know that it's not easy to be a Christian. 2nd Timothy Chapter three tells us that all who desire to live godly will be persecuted. Jesus tells that to his disciples, he says, If they have persecuted me, they're going to persecute you also. That's exactly what we find in the last verse of Nehemiah, chapter two, Verse nine, "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." That's good. He's got some protection as he's going through. That's really, that's a plus. He didn't ask for that. The king was nice, and verse ten. "When Sandballat, 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. Here we find the introduction of Sandballat and Tobiah, and they're going to be a thorn in the side of Nehemiah for the rest of the book.

Redemption doesn't mean an easy, perfect life. It means a faith filled, righteous, given redeemed life. Trusting in his promises. It doesn't look like everything's going to be hunky-dory. For some of you, for some of you, life is going to get harder. For some of you, the pain is going to get worse. For some of you, your relatives might stop talking to you. Question is, do you cling to the promises...and did you weep, and do you fast, knowing that the God of Heaven hears you?

This is what Nehemiah gives us in chapter two. This is what it looks like. This is what redemption looks like when a drunkard wakes up and their family's surrounding them in the living room and tells them the time is done. Either you put down the bottle or you get out of our family and we have Jesus and we have help for you. But if you're not going accept it, you got to

go. Will that person have the courage, or will they turn away Christ? Will they believe? Will it change everything about them?

For some of you, for some of you that means you've lived your whole life. Imagine living your whole life in the church. Imagine living your entire life keeping the rules. For some of you, you have been raised in congregations where you have, you have kept every cultural thing imaginable, and you're not wrong. You know, when everyone looks at you, they go, "Oh, that's a good Christian girl. That's a good Christian guy." But you're relying on yourself, instead of the promises of God for redemption. This is not a, this is not an abstract story. Just recently, I had a congregant, or a conversation with a woman about this. Who it became a joy to her, after growing up in a reformed church her whole life, to realize it was nothing but Jesus' Grace. And it wasn't her accepting. It wasn't her keeping the rules. But it was Jesus Christ and His redemption alone. His promises that she could cling to. What do you clean, to for redemption? Is that Jesus Christ and Him alone? That's why we had to start with Roman's chapter three. It's Jesus Christ, His righteousness and God's promise of redemption that we cling to and nothing else.

This is what Nehemiah clings to, that the God of Heaven has promised redemption, and He will do it! And He's doing it today! Cling to that hope!

Let's pray,

God, what rich grace you pour out upon us. Lord, we don't deserve your favor. We don't deserve you buying us back. We don't deserve your redemption. Lord, you know our faults. You know that we're imperfect. And we thank you, Lord, for saving us, for redeeming us. We thank you for the promises that you've given us. God, please by your Holy Spirit, let us believe them and live them, in Jesus' name.

Thank you for listening to "God's word for you" A ministry of Sharon RP church in Morning Sun, Iowa. We pray that you would be blessed as you grow in your love for God, your love for His word, as well as your love for His people.

Until next week, God Bless You.