

king's question, God opened the door for Nehemiah to unburden himself to him. When you study the passage you also see God gave Nehemiah great tact and diplomacy in speaking to the king. Nehemiah never once speaks directly about the broken down walls of the city of Jerusalem, he never even mentions the city's name once, yet all the while, both understand that is what is being spoken about. Can we not say too that the queen being present with the king, as verse 6 states, when Nehemiah makes his request may have been, by God's providence, a contributing factor in the king's favourable response to Nehemiah. We cannot be definite if she was an influence for Nehemiah's benefit, but the text surely suggests she may have been, otherwise why would it even be included here? Remember too what an influence for the good of God's people Queen Esther was on the King Ahasuerus many years prior to this time.

What is clear from this Scripture passage is that when you serve God for real as Nehemiah also did, you can expect that God will be there for real in His saving help and with His good hand of blessing. You could think of this passage as relating this encouraging news, "See God in His service for real for us even as we will live in His service for real to Him!" Is this not something so true in the full revelation of the gospel with Jesus Christ as the once crucified and now risen and ascended Saviour in glory? Jesus Christ is an everlasting Saviour and Lord, always mighty to save and wonderful in His help and care for as many as depend on Him and call to Him. Nehemiah so experienced God for real even as he lived to follow and serve Him for real. Are you one who with Nehemiah seeks and serves God from the heart with all your heart? For sure, as the book of Nehemiah proves, it is the only way of being truly blessed and of being a real blessing too. Amen.



#### LEARNING FROM NEHEMIAH IN LIVING TO GOD'S PRAISE

We continue our series on the book of Nehemiah, coming now to chapter 2. Our theme is 'Learning from Nehemiah in living for God's praise'. Nehemiah served God in a real way, in a resolute way, and in a radiant way. We can see this in chapter 2 where we find Nehemiah meeting with the king of Persia, King Artaxerxes, coming to Jerusalem and studying the situation, and then rallying the people behind the plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It is an exciting chapter! Let's read just the first 10 verses. "And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me. Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

There is so much to glean from this Scripture but for this time we will just show how Nehemiah surely served God in a real way, genuinely so from

*Hans Overduin, Radio Pastor*

*December 16, 2007*

Publication No.341

**BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST**

*Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America*

*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)*

his heart, you might say. This comes out when you just think about how Nehemiah had been in prayer for months after hearing about the sad situation in Jerusalem. He was asking God in mercy to intervene in some way. While in prayer about this, Nehemiah himself becomes convinced that God was calling him to give himself up to help build the broken down walls in Jerusalem, and he was ready to go, God helping him. Nehemiah was a godly man who would do this work for the glory of God as verse 17 suggests, *“that we be no more a reproach”* or a disgrace. Verse 10 states how the enemy saw to their dismay that *“there was come a man to seek the welfare [wellbeing] of the children of Israel.”* From chapter 2 we clearly learn Nehemiah was not out here for personal fame or gain, but he felt compelled for the glory of God and the good of His people to give himself in service to God’s praise as God would call and equip him to do so. Nehemiah was a genuine godly man, a believer whose faith in God was for real.

We saw last time from verse 11 of chapter 1 how Nehemiah was so strengthened in prayer gaining confidence in God and His ways, for through prayer he was given to see how even the great world ruler, King Artaxerxes, was just another man before the Lord. Our biggest challenges become so much smaller and made their true size when God is our help and confidence. Nehemiah could go forward in boldness when he realized one plus God is a majority, and who or what should he fear.

Why did Nehemiah have to fear this king at all, you might ask, since he had daily contact with him as his cupbearer? Well, Nehemiah was soon to ask the king for a leave of absence to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls there. And the reasons that could make him so nervous and afraid to ask the king this request is that, for one, he was just a Jewish servant and slave in Persia, but secondly the king, most likely this very same King Artaxerxes, had some years beforehand ordered that the walls of Jerusalem not be rebuilt until such time as he would say. You can read this in Ezra 4:21. So Nehemiah was about to ask the king for a request that he had formerly decided negatively upon, and who was Nehemiah to think that he could change one of the laws of the Medes and Persians, when the laws of those kings were considered to be set in stone as it were? Besides all this, Nehemiah’s request to leave and go to Jerusalem to work there would mean a leave of absence that would be for an extended period of time [chapter 5:14 mentions Nehemiah served 12 years with his first appointment in Jerusalem]. Can you understand then that this man of God wanted His favour and assurance for himself before he would step forward and ask the king to send him to Jerusalem? Do you live in such daily humble dependency on God as well? Have you learned as Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:5, *“Without Me, ye can do nothing”*?

Nehemiah showed real godliness too in that he was a person who did not only pray, but also planned and worked himself in God’s service.

There is with Nehemiah and his life story such a balance with him between realizing dependency on the Lord and His help, and realizing his own responsibilities. It is very striking how Nehemiah had done his homework before coming to the king to make request to leave. He had checked out what he had to do and the preparation needed for a trip to Jerusalem and for his taking up the work there. Nehemiah followed through in his prayer life asking for God’s blessing, with him doing his best also to be a blessing. People that are not genuine in the faith will say on the one hand, “It’s all up to God, what can I do about it?” or on the other hand, “It’s all up to me how things go. What does God have to do with anything?” But when you are a true believer and will live in God’s service for real, you know true blessing and being a blessing is all dependent on God, but at the same time we have to take seriously all our responsibilities as God gives us the opportunities to do what we can.

‘Learning from Nehemiah for living to God’s praise’. Nehemiah lived for God for real. Can you see that with me in the ways I pointed out from the text? What I also very much need to and want to point out here is how God is so out for our help when we seek to serve Him and His cause for real. No one seeks and follows the Lord in vain! Notice how this comes out in our text. The day came that Nehemiah would approach the king and make his request to go to Jerusalem. But with Nehemiah so absorbed with this matter, it showed on his face, and the king asked him what was wrong and why was his face sad, literally ‘bad looking’. The king could detect something was not right with Nehemiah and asks about it, maybe out of concern for Nehemiah but possibly also out of concern for himself, for if a cupbearer was not his normal self, was there perhaps some plot in the works, perhaps even on the king’s life?

We see Nehemiah being a follower of God so for real in that when the time came for his question to the king, he began to struggle and we are told with the king’s question to Nehemiah, he, *“became very afraid.”* How typical this can be of us. One moment you can have such confidence in God’s way and what you have to do, also perhaps in approaching someone, but when you actually go to do so, you begin to lose your confidence and become afraid and hesitant. Have you not had that same experience too, indeed, perhaps many times over? But then Scripture tells us Nehemiah’s solution in his fears, namely, he prayed to the Lord and through prayer regained his confidence and boldness. Indeed, as we shall see, did he ever!

What we need to notice now, however, is how the Lord guided events for Nehemiah, helping along in the whole plan he would follow. The fact is, the king’s question about Nehemiah’s sad-looking face allowed him to bring the matter on his heart before the king. Probably Nehemiah had thought long and hard how he would approach the king about the matter at hand, but the king’s question got on the table before he knew it. With the