

Building Broken People

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Series: Nehemiah

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It is the fourth of July weekend. We thank God for the freedom we have to worship God. It is not this way in most lands. This is a special privilege we have from God and we honor those who defend our freedom here and around the world. Let us give thanks that we can freely share with every creature about eternal freedom in Christ!

Introduction: Open your Bibles to **Nehemiah 2**. Today is "Serve the Lord Sunday". The title of our message is "Building Broken People". Nehemiah got a burden to build up the broken walls of Jerusalem, but it wasn't the walls that he was concerned about. It was the broken people. There are a lot of broken people in the world today. How can you be ready to minister to them?

Today we are looking at the big impact your faithful service for Christ makes. Often we feel our service for Christ is so insignificant. I want to encourage you. You have no idea how God is going to use you today. You may leave here feeling defeated, but God is working His larger plan behind the scenes. God loves to take common people and use them in extraordinary ways.

God doesn't need your ability or your talent, but just your faithfulness. Your faithful service to Christ is quite consequential for eternity. We are going to see that in the life of Nehemiah today.

Context: As we begin let's consider the timeframe just to remember what's happening in the book of Nehemiah. It's roughly 500BC. To put that in context, remember...

- you have Abraham around 2000BC,
- Moses at around 1500BC, and
- David at around 1000BC.

God had warned Israel that if they forsook God that He would scatter them to the nations, and that is exactly what has happened. Jerusalem has been utterly destroyed, and there is only a small group of poor destitute Jews there. The only hope the people have now is that the temple has recently been rebuilt, but it is unsafe because the walls lie in ruins. The northern ten tribes of the Jews were exiled to **Assyria** and the rest of the Jews were conquered and forced to be slaves and exiles in **Babylon**. In 539BC, **Persia** took over as the ruling power of the ancient world. The man at the head of this Persian Empire at the time of the writing of Nehemiah is King Artaxerxes, and Nehemiah is the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah is one of the closest servants to the king. He is a foreigner, a Jew who is burdened for his homeland of Israel. In chapter 1 of Nehemiah, he hears from Hanani, a fellow Jew, that the walls of Jerusalem were in shambles and the gates were burned, and he is utterly broken about it. He weeps, and he mourns, and he fasts and prays because he wants to see the walls of Jerusalem built and God's people gathered.

God put that plan in Nehemiah's heart. But God had greater plans than just rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem for the people. There was a very special person that would ride through those rebuilt gates. Nehemiah would be building the walls and gates of Jerusalem so that the **King of Glory** could enter in and save the world.

David wrote before the walls were destroyed in **Psalm 24:7-9**, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift *them* up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in". Messiah had not yet come. Who would rebuilt the walls?

Of course Nehemiah was not given the info that Christ would enter into the gates he would be building. He didn't know how it would happen. He was just burdened to build them, and to see God build a city within a city.

What about you? How can you be uncommonly used of God on a very common day?

How can we be useful servants of God in carrying out God's plan? This is where we come to chapter 2 of Nehemiah. How can we be uncommonly used of God? The first thing we learn is this...

I. How can you be ready build the lives of broken people?

A. **Wait** on God to carry out His sovereign plan in your life. There are always a specific group of people that God has you ministering to you. Look around you. Look at those people. They are real people for whom Christ died. This is who Christ called us to minister to.

Remember that God is absolutely sovereign in our lives. God had Nehemiah in Persia. It was NOT by mistake. And yet God was calling Nehemiah to go back to Jerusalem. But when? How? Neither Nehemiah nor you or I know God's sovereign plan for today or tomorrow. He holds it in His hand. I'm sure Nehemiah wanted answers, but he didn't have any answers yet. So what do you do when you don't have any answers? You have to WAIT!

Chapter 2 of Nehemiah begins with *waiting*. Look at **verse 1**, "And it came to pass in the month Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king..." This is exactly four months after Nehemiah began praying.¹ None of us like to wait. Waiting can sometimes be a grueling, trying process! Have you ever had a discouraging situation, and you immediately began to pray, "Lord, give me patience, and I want it NOW!" Yet God tells us throughout the Bible that we need to wait on Him.

Nehemiah wanted to get to this hurting situation in Jerusalem. He had a burden to build up those broken people. He wanted to see God gather them together to worship Him. But of course you know God would do it in His time! There's a reason when God says wait. There's a reason when you feel powerless to change a situation. God was preparing the walls and the people in the Jerusalem for His own dear Son. **Galatians 4:4-5**, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,

¹ **Nehemiah 1:1** tells us that it was back in the winter month of "**Chislev**" (November-December) that Nehemiah got the burden to rebuild Jerusalem. It is now Nisan, which is around March or April. This is a four month period of time.

made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law”.

Whenever God says “wait”, it is to glorify His Son. All things in history point to Jesus Christ. History is really “HIS” Story.

With that in mind, we need to understand that God’s plans cannot be slowed down; neither can they be hurried. We want God to do something about our situation, and in our flesh we are never willing to wait on God’s timing. That’s why we should deny our flesh and listen to the Word of God which says in **Psalm 27:14**, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

We are able to wait as long as God wants us to wait because as Christians, we believe that God is in total control.

- **Ephesians 1:11** tells us that God “works all things after the counsel of His own will”.
- **Proverbs 3:5-6**, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”.

How does one exactly rest in God’s sovereignty?

- B. **Pray** without ceasing. Nehemiah didn’t know these people personally. He had no immediate way of helping them. When you find yourself in this situation, you ought to do what Nehemiah did. He was broken for them. He began to pray. He tells us in chapter **1:4**, “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain days*, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven”. Nehemiah learned to pray without ceasing during those four months.

You know that from the time Nehemiah got a burden to rebuild Jerusalem until he had an audience with the king, was four months. That was a long time to wait! What could Nehemiah do? During that four month period he was praying. Instead of fretting, we are commanded to pray!! **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, “Pray without ceasing”.

1. There is a **Relief** of prayer. God was preparing Nehemiah for a massive and impossible job ahead through this praying. Praying quiets our hearts because we pray to a God . who is in absolute control. Praying also reminds me that I have no strength of myself. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and totally trust worthy.
2. There is also a great **Burden** in prayer. When God has His hand on you to do something, you can’t think of anything else. James says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). The prayer of a deeply burdened heart always avails much!

For four months, Nehemiah was doing his job, but he was constantly praying about this new burden of rebuilding the walls. He was the Persian King Artaxerxes’ cupbearer. He tasted the food and drink to make sure it wasn’t poisoned. Nehemiah was busy doing His job for the king, but all the while He had a burden from God on his heart to do the work of the Lord, and he was praying about it.

It is so important that we let our hearts be burdened with what God is burdened with no matter what we are doing. Nehemiah's body was on earth, but his mind was in heaven.

Application: I want to encourage you to pray in everything you do. In prayer we find God's presence. It is as if we are living in the face of God. That is vital in times of waiting on God.

- C. Be **faithful** in the littlest things. God had given Nehemiah a job serving the king, and he took it seriously. Nehemiah says in **verse 1**, "I had not been beforetime sad in his presence". Nehemiah did not simply take off once he had a burden to rebuild Jerusalem. He stayed and served the king *joyfully*. Obviously God was stirring Nehemiah up for service. God was touching his heart, but he kept on faithfully serving King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah for this four month period of time did not let on anything of his burden to the king. But on one common day in the month of Nisan, for some reason, the king saw something different in his servant Nehemiah.

Explanation: Remember there is no way for a foreign servant to ask the king of the ancient world for anything. It was not lawful for Nehemiah to even approach the king. So the only thing he could do was wait on God, pray, and be faithful in what he was doing until God opened a door. Hudson Taylor, that great pioneer missionary to China: "It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone". Could a foreign servant get an audience with the King?

That brings us to our next point. The forth thing we see is that we need to...

- D. **Expect** God to open unexpected doors. God loves broken people more than you do. Remember this is God's plan. He has control of all things. He can make something that you think is impossible become possible.

As you are faithful, praying, waiting on God, God on a very common day will pour out His unexpected and surprising favor on you. We read in **verse 1**, "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".

Explanation: It was a normal day in the palace. It was a familiar scene. King Artaxerxes was dining with his queen. They had just finished eating. The aroma of delicious food was in the air. Nehemiah poured them some wine and brought it to them. Nehemiah says in **verse 1**, "I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king". And as he was serving the king his wine, Nehemiah got close enough for the king to notice his face. Nehemiah had been careful not to give any hint of a burden to the king for the last four months. He clearly says, "Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence" (**verse 1**). But now something totally unexpected is going to happen. The king and ruler of the entire ancient world was about to address Nehemiah. **Verse 2**, "Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart".

This response was so unexpected that Nehemiah confesses in **verse 2b**, "Then I was very sore afraid". Nehemiah had good reason to be afraid. If a person were overly sad in his presence the king could have them executed.

Yet Nehemiah, despite his fear, had enough faith in the Lord to communicate his burden to the most powerful man in the world at this time. Listen to what Nehemiah says in **verse 3**, "And [Nehemiah] said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: 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?"

Now why did Nehemiah have the confidence to give his burden to the king? I believe he recognized it as answered prayer. You may be in an impossible situation like Nehemiah. And it may very well be impossible with men. But remember all things are possible with God.

- **Genesis 18:13-14**, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"
- **Jeremiah 32:17**, "Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee".

Nehemiah waited on God. He was praying without ceasing. He was faithful in the little things. And I believe he was ready for God to do the unexpected. Then it happened!

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The king approached Nehemiah with an amazing question. We read in **Nehemiah 2:4**, "Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request?" Wow! The most powerful man in the world was asking Nehemiah if he needed anything!

Remember, "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (**Proverbs 21:1**). King Artaxerxes is asking this foreign servant, basically a slave, "What do you want?" What is it that worth getting sad over?

Nehemiah's response in **verses 4b-5** show that Nehemiah was not only praying for the opportunity to build the walls, but that he was trusting God to open the king's heart. Nehemiah writes, "So I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 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."

This was an unexpected door, and Nehemiah was ready. He shared his burden with the king. I'm sure he couldn't believe it was happening. But when you are waiting on God, praying, and your being faithful in the little things, God is going to open unexpected doors!

- E. But then we need to be **Prepared** for to reach broken people. Are you prepared if God opens the door of service for you to go through? Nehemiah had a plan. He was praying, but he was also planning!
1. The **necessity** of preparation. Nehemiah thought things through. Look at how he prepared. He knew about how much time it would take to build the walls, to finish the job and return to Persia. **Verse 6**, "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." Can you

imagine how he must have thought things through so much so that he was able to give the king an immediate on the spot answer?

Planning and preparation are absolutely necessary for useful service for the Lord. Some people say, well we are going to do this "by faith". ***Faith is not a synonym for disorder or poor planning.*** I think that can be an excuse for laziness. I've known people to surrender to go to the mission field in a missions conference who had no idea that they needed to learn the language. Then they get to the field, they find out they have no aptitude or training in language and have to go home.

We see from **verses 7-8**, that Nehemiah had thoroughly thought through things. "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; 8 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."

Nehemiah knew that he had to have letters from the king in order to travel unhindered to Jerusalem. They were like his passport. But he also thought of the supplies he would need. Nehemiah got a blank check from Artaxerxes for lumber to not only build the walls of the city, but also to build him a house to live in.

Application: We also need to be prepared if we are going to reach broken people. We need to be reading the Bible and living it out. Broken people need to see Christ living in us. We need to be living a life of holiness that includes everything about us: our words, our attitudes, from the way we comport ourselves to the way we dress, we ought to be holy people. We ought not to look like the world, think like the world, speak like the world. It is the world that is breaking people. This is a serious thing. James says "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (**James 4:4**).

Nehemiah was ready for God to use him. He was a man that was walking with God, and for the last four months was in deep prayer for these broken people.

2. The **results** of preparation. And what was the result of that preparation? "...the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me" (**verse 8b**). This blessing Nehemiah experienced was certainly spiritual, but it was also tangible as we read in **verse 9**, "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." Nehemiah had all he needed. He had the signature of the king on his letters to send him through and he had the king's army! This is amazing considering this is a foreigner, a Jew, but he is so trusted by the king.
- II. Finally, let me say that we ought to **expect opposition** when you begin reaching people who happen to be in Satan's territory. If you are a person with an obedient heart in love with the Savior, then you should expect Satanic attack. You should be ready for distractions, detractors, and critics. We come to **verse 10**, "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".

Jesus said in **Mark 3:27**, "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house." We see that the strong man in this verse is Satan. His goods are the people of this world, and his house is the world. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. The "god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). All those without Christ walk "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (**Ephesians 2:2**).

Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

When a person is following God's will, it is unusual if there is no opposition. Paul said in **2 Timothy 3:12**, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

A Christian who is setting free those who are captives to Satan is going to face opposition!

Illustration: One day John Wesley was riding along a road when it dawned upon him that three whole days had passed in which he had suffered no persecution. Not a brick or an egg had been thrown at him for three days. Alarmed, he stopped his horse, and exclaimed, "Can it be that I have sinned and am backslidden?"

Slipping from his horse Wesley went down on his knees and began interceding with God to show him where, if any, there had been a fault.

A rough fellow, on the other side of the hedge, hearing the prayer, looked across and recognized the preacher. "I'll fix that Methodist preacher," he said taking a brick and tossing it over at him. It missed its mark and fell harmlessly beside John.

Whereupon Wesley leaped to his feet joyfully exclaiming, "Thank God, it's all right. I still have His presence."

What do you do when you are afraid? You've got to love Nehemiah.

When he didn't have words to say to the king, he asked the Lord for words to say. When he faced financial problems, he got the courage to ask the king for access to the timber of the royal forest. He was both a man of faith and great courage.

Conclusion: God has some specific people He has brought to your path. Broken down people are all around us. They live in broken down situations. How can we reach them? We want to change their situation, but we must:

- Trust in a sovereign God for His timing.
- Pray without ceasing.
- Be faithful where you are.
- Prepare ourselves to be the kind of people that God will use to mend broken people
- And finally expect opposition.

Are you prepared to reach broken people? Are you faithful, praying, trusting believer? Are you ready for Satanic attack? Don't fear. He'll never leave you nor forsake you!