

Nathan Clarke, 16 May 2021

(Sermon Summary)

Starting with Prayer: Nehemiah 1:1-11; 2:1-5

How do you respond to bad news? It may be

- the persecution of Christians around the world
- new legislation here in the UK which is hostile to the Gospel
- the Gospel making little impact.

Are you uninterested? Depressed and discouraged? Frantic with worry? Or perhaps nostalgic for better days? Nehemiah demonstrates a godly response to bad news.

Starting with prayer

Nehemiah had a passionate concern for God's people and the city of Jerusalem, even though it was 1000 miles away and he had probably never been there. Hanani reports to him of:

- a Remnant: only a small number of Jews were living in the city.
- a Ruin: Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the city 100 years ago. Ten or twenty years ago the Jews had started rebuilding, but had been forced to stop and their work may have been demolished.
- a Reproach: Jerusalem was the city where God had put his name, and its insecure condition was bringing His name into disrepute.

Nehemiah wept for Jerusalem, just as many years later Jesus would weep for the city. Are we passionate about God's kingdom and glory? A Salvation Army member once telegraphed General Booth in desperation - the General's answer was "try tears".

Persistent prayer

Nehemiah prayed for four months (the period between the months of Chisleu and Nisan) and fasted for many days. He prayed regularly, day and night (v6). Abraham Lincoln later described how he was driven to his knees when he knew that he was insufficient to the task before him. Christ instructs us to be persistent in prayer, for example in the parable of the unjust judge.

Confident faith

Nehemiah prays to the God of Heaven: the great and mighty God, not a small and feeble local deity. As he recalls God's character and stands in awe of Him, the city's problems are

soon dwarfed by an awesome sense of God's glory. Nehemiah remembers God's faithfulness and His actions in the past. Are we praying to this great and awesome God?

Humble confession

Nehemiah knew that God is faithful to those that love and obey Him - but we do not fall into that category. Because the Israelites had disobeyed God, He had done exactly as He had warned, and scattered them. Nehemiah confesses his own sin and that of his family, tribe and nation; he knows that he has nothing to bring to God.

In verse 8 Nehemiah returns to confident faith as he recalls the promise that God would bring the people back to their land.

A willingness to serve

As Nehemiah prays, his attitude becomes one of "Here I am, send me". Sometimes prayer involves God shaping us to fulfil His plan. Nehemiah knows that everything is in God's hands, and in comparison to the Lord God of Heaven, the mighty Emperor of the Medes and Persians is just "that man".

Waiting on the Lord

Nehemiah had to wait four months before he could put his plan into practice. Waiting can be perplexing but is a common experience for God's people. The disciples had to wait in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost; Paul was arrested; our activities have been paused over the last year. While Nehemiah waits on the Lord, he is spending time in prayer and thinking about what he might do.

We can learn from Nehemiah by starting with prayer, and seeking to discover how we can be used by the great God of Heaven.