

I. Introduction:

- A. I don't know if you have heard, but there is a virus ramping up around the country.
1. There have been about 2.5 million Americans infected and 125,000 deaths, according to one website.
 2. Not only is there controversy about those numbers, there are debates about how the virus spreads.
 3. Bro. Steve Roberts sends me material from time to time, one of which recently dealt with the question of how this virus passes from one person to another.
- B. Apparently catching COVID-19 by touching a door-knob after someone with the virus is possible – but unlikely.
1. If we wash our hands regularly & use sanitizers the possibility of catching coronavirus by contact is small.
 2. And being infected by walking past someone on the street who has the virus is almost impossible.
 3. Some experts are saying 15 minutes of constant exposure is necessary – but that is part of the debate.
 4. Infected people coughing, sneezing, breathing, singing & spitting creates droplets with the virus in them.
 - a. Enough of those droplets have to reach you, and enter you, to infect you.
 - b. And to be specific, those droplets have to contact your eyes, mouth or nose.
 - c. The virus then has to reach your respiratory tract and use the receptors in your body to enter your cells and start replicating.
 - d. But generally speaking those droplets from other people fall to the floor or ground and dissipate, which is why the 6 foot rule is encouraged.
 5. No one knows for sure how much virus it takes for someone to become infected.
 - a. In a study published in the journal *"Nature,"* researchers were unable to culture live coronavirus if a patient's throat swab contained less than one million copies of the virus.
 6. But when large groups of people join in singing together, the virus can be spread – assuming it is present in the first place.
 - a. When we sing, not only are we expelling CO2 from deep within our lungs, but we are often drawing air into ourselves more deeply than ordinary, making the transfer more effective.
 - b. But again, with proper distancing the possibility of the spread is limited.
 7. One study suggested that nation-wide, only 10% of infected people are responsible for 80% of virus spread
 8. So that makes the spread even more minimal here in North Idaho.
 9. And one observer has noted *"For every superspreading event you have a lot of times when nobody gets infected."*
- C. And now for the application.
1. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem with a heart filled with a spiritual virus.
 2. It involved love – a love for Jerusalem, for the Lord's people, but more particularly for the Lord & His glory.
 3. He had been running a fever for perhaps more than a year, ever since Hanani had infected him – and Hanani may have been a-symptomatic.
 4. Now that Nehemiah has arrived in the holy city, he **wants to infect** others – he **intends** to infect others.
 5. How can he do that?
 6. How does he share the testimony and excitement which the Lord has permitted him to contract?
- D. Our theme for this evening is sharing our vision – our testimony, our witness.
1. In this morning's scripture Paul said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."*
 2. But Nehemiah wasn't a preacher or missionary; does Paul's statement apply to him? Does it apply to us?
 3. Nehemiah wasn't a priest or Old Testament prophet; he was a **bureaucrat** – a government cup bearer.
 4. But at some point, he did become the *"Tirshatha"* of Judah or at least Jerusalem – the governor for Persia.
 - a. I don't know if he traveled from Shushan with that authority, but it might have been granted later.
 - b. The word is not used until **chapter 7** and it's not until **chapter 8** we are told that Nehemiah was that Tirshatha.

5. I may be entirely mistaken, but it appears that Jerusalem had initially been under the rule of Sanballat.
6. However then he *“hears”* that the Jews were rebuilding, as if he was not actually present in the city.
7. But this is beyond my point.

- E. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem with a burden, and after four or five days he began to share it.
1. He began to tell people of the Lord’s past blessings, and what he saw to be the Lord’s future will.
 2. He began where all God’s people should begin – *“I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me.”*

II. The good Word of God is not very often spread without direct contact.

- A. How can the coronavirus be spread from one person to another?
1. I suppose that someone might get it by picking up a gospel tract with the virus upon it, but that would be very unlikely.
 2. And similarly, no one is going to evangelize his neighbor with simple friendliness over the back fence.
 3. Gospel tracts left in rest rooms, rocks painted with Bible verses, crosses on the lawn may not be sinful or harmful, but they will rarely – if ever – lead people to the Lord.
 4. Similarly, walking down the street with a heavenly smile on your face is never going to infect anyone else with the gospel. What exactly is a *“heavenly smile”*?
 5. There is something to say about living with a Christian attitude, and providing a living culture for the propagation for the truth, but *“life-style evangelism”* isn’t all that’s necessary to bring others to Christ.
- B. Let’s change the illustration **from a virus** to a **good idea** or a **Bible doctrine**.
1. Simply being infected with a truth yourself is not going to bring another person to that truth.
 2. There is no such thing as evangelistic osmosis – the seeping of spiritual nutrition through our cells into the cells of others.
 3. This morning’s text said something about *“faith to faith.”*
 - a. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*
 - b. *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.*
 - c. *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.”*
 4. Admittedly there is debate among the scholars about this *“faith to faith”* business.
 5. **John Gill**, in his usual style, lists several interpretations of this phrase.
 - a. Fore example he referred to the **faith of God** to the faith of **men**.
 - b. Then there was the faith of the **Old Testament** to the faith of the **New Testament**.
 - c. From **one degree** of faith to a **greater degree** of faith.
 - d. From the **faith of the preacher** to the faith of the **hearer**.
 6. **Robert Haldane** says, *“the literal rendering is ... ‘BY faith to faith.’*
 - a. *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed by faith to faith.”*
 - b. *“The same words in the original are thus translated in the same verse; ‘the just shall live BY faith.’”*
 - c. In other words, the righteousness of God is revealed *“from”* or *“by”* the faith of one person to the faith of another person.
- C. So Nehemiah rode into Jerusalem burning with a spiritual fever. At first he **self-isolated**.
1. Then donning the **mask of darkness**, he assessed the degree of the disease by riding around the southern end of the city.
 2. No one knew about his purpose, and no one checked his temperature.
 3. *“The rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.”*
 - a. I wonder about the division of classes mentioned in this verse, but I guess it’s not too important.
 - b. But I will point out that apparently there were still some people working on the city in some way.

4. *“Then SAID I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, & the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.*
5. *Then I TOLD them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me.”*

- D. Might we learn from all this that there is a time to speak up for God and there are times when silence is more appropriate?
1. Without doubt when Nehemiah arrived with royal Persian troops & troops of his own friends & escorts – eye-brows must have arisen.
 2. But perhaps government officials periodically visited to collect taxes and issue orders. Maybe this wasn’t all that unusual.
 3. And as I suggested the other day perhaps 3 days rest before getting to business was the usual protocol.
 4. With whatever cause, for a few days he said nothing.
- E. There is far too much political correctness infecting the work place today, suggesting that Christians cannot behave like Christians.
1. For example, in some places we cannot speak of Christ for fear of offending the non-Christian.
 2. We can scream about politics, and race relations, and we can debate the importance of masks, but we can’t speak of Christ.
 3. Admittedly there are times when we have work to do, and we should concentrate on the reason we’ve been employed.
 4. But isn’t this taken too far when we can’t testify to our faith in the break-room or walking out the door?
 5. There comes the time when it is time to speak up.
- F. Now I admit that Nehemiah wasn’t speaking to the King or even to Sanballat.
1. But he apparently was standing before Jews whom he did not know.
 2. And there were obviously people there who were deserving of respect – priests, nobles and rulers.
 3. He was speaking to God’s people, but they may not have been members of the choir.

III. And what was it he said?

- A. *“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me.”*
1. This is what the **world needs to hear** – this is what the world **longs to hear**.
 2. I know that as mature Christians we can get excited about some of the details of God’s Word – perhaps things you’ve recently learned.
 3. And you are thrilled that God in His sovereign grace chose to love you and to save you.
 4. But the lost man won’t stand long enough to hear much of that, and not even the average Christian agrees.
 5. And yes, I believe there are very few genuine churches of Christ in this world, but the neighbor who attends the Real Life Ministry won’t give you two minutes to talk about the scriptural church versus his church.
 6. There are dozens of important Bible doctrines which the lost – and even weak Christians – need to hear.
 7. But the truth is they will generally not listen.
- B. Rather, *“then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me.”*
1. Here was the bridge between the infected man and the men he wanted to infect.
 2. Nehemiah gave those people his testimony.
 3. He probably started with how God put him into the position of cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes.
 4. Then he explained how he heard about the condition of his beloved home-town.
 5. *“One day I went to work with a broken heart, and my heart spilled out onto my face.*
 6. *The king saw my expression and began to worry that I was up to no good.*
 7. *But when I explained my love and concern for you, my brethren, and for Jerusalem, my city, the hand of God instantly softened his heart, and he asked me to explain.*

8. *I not only explained, but asked him for authority to come to Jerusalem to help you all.*
9. *And miracle of miracles, our God stepped in and moved the heart of Artaxerxes to help us."*

- C. As I say, very few people want to hear about your theology, and they aren't interested in buckets of scriptures.
1. But everyone has time to listen to another story of the personal miracles of Christ.
 2. People need to know that Christians are simply people whom the good hand of God has touched.
 3. Make it your story, make sure its real and meaningful.
 - a. *"My father was a drinker; he died while drunk; and he taught me to drink.*
 - b. *I was drinking beer and wine, with his permission, about the time I started school.*
 - c. *But God rescued me from that, exchanging the exhilaration of alcohol with the joy of hope and peace."*
 4. What can you say about God's hand upon you – things which might be of interest to someone else?
 5. Think about it.
 - a. I guarantee that Nehemiah spent months thinking about & planning his first encounter with these Jews.
 - b. That was a long tedious trip which gave him lots of time to pray and plan.
- D. He not only spoke of **God's direct hand**, but also the **Lord's providential hand**.
1. *"Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; AS ALSO the king's words that he had spoken unto me."*
 2. *"Years ago, God saved my soul through the shed blood of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.*
 3. *And let me tell you how He did it. He steered me away from drugs and alcohol to toward music – and not the music to which most of the kids were listening.*
 4. *In the school band I met a Christian girl. That girl invited me to hear a gospel preacher.*
 5. *It was in that meeting that the Holy Spirit crushed my soul and brought me to my knees before God."*

IV. Consider some other points about Nehemiah's testimony.

- A. **Verse 17** – *"Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."*
1. Notice that he didn't make any accusations. He didn't point fingers at anyone.
 2. He simply stated the obvious.
 3. It is true that many people refuse to admit they have problems before God – spiritual problems.
 4. These folk can be infected for the Lord, but their social distancing generally keeps them six feet from what you are saying.
 5. But there are others who can see their problems – they are in distress and they know they lieth in waste.
 6. How will we ever know who they are if we don't come out with the truth – as kindly as possible?
- B. In **verse 18**, if I might make an application, Nehemiah stated the facts and then stepped back in order for God to work.
1. He didn't say, *"I am here to lead you to victory; to the restoration of our city's former glory."*
 2. It was simply, *"then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build."*
 3. Nehemiah was there to help; he was there to guide and to motivate; but he let the Lord do the heavy lifting.
- C. **Verse 20** – *"The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build."*
1. I see great faith in Nehemiah.
 2. *"The God of heaven, he WILL prosper us."*
 3. Isn't this a part of the problem in our evangelism – our self-consciousness, our embarrassment and our lack of faith?
 4. Nehemiah just let it rip, so to speak; he laid it out there and firmly declared, *"God will bless."*

- D. He exposed his feverish infection, and those whom the Lord prepared to catch it – did just that.
1. *“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build.”*
 2. As we will see in the chapters to come, it appears that nearly the entire city was swept with an epidemic of surrender to God and willingness to serve.
 3. *“And said, Let us rise up and build.”*
 4. *“And (**apparently, they all**) said, Let us rise up and build.”*
 5. Nehemiah had no control over the result of his testimony.
 6. He could have been extremely enthusiastic, or as cold as a fish, and it might not have made a difference.
 7. But God spoke to hearts.
 8. We can never know what **effect** our testimony will have, but we do have **some input** in **our output**.
- E. Obviously, not everyone was pleased with Nehemiah’s visit and purpose.
1. *“But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?”*
 2. *“When they heard it.”* How did they hear it? Apparently not from the infected lips of Nehemiah.
 3. They got the message second or third hand, or they saw the effects of the testimony in the busy hands of the people of the city.
 4. And they didn’t like it. But you know what? Their opposition stopped nothing.
- F. Again, the results of our testimony do not belong to us; they belong to the Lord.
1. Not everyone will be excited about the things which excite us, especially, if those things are spiritual.
 2. But that is not our responsibility.
 3. It’s just our job to open our hearts, and let our infectious faith spread to wherever the Lord directs.