

Andrew Street

Evening Sermon - 17 July 2022

Nehemiah: man of prayer, man of faith, man of action
(Nehemiah chapters 1-4)

Nehemiah was an outstanding servant-leader of God. During the twelve years of his administration of the province of Judah, Nehemiah combined a steady life of prayer and a deep trust in the Lord with unusually careful planning, good organisational skills, and energetic action. He is an excellent example to us as we work with the Lord in building His church.

Man of Prayer (Nehemiah 1)

The events recorded by Nehemiah took place around 445 BC. Ezra had returned to Jerusalem 13 years before, to revive the temple worship. The efforts to rebuild the walls had been stopped, and now Hanani reports to Nehemiah that the walls are broken down and the gates burned. This news brings Nehemiah great distress, and he turns to the Lord in prayer (Nehemiah 1:1-11). What can we learn from Nehemiah's prayer?

His prayer shows awareness of the character of God: the great, awesome and powerful God who keeps His covenant of mercy. Nehemiah does not rush into God's presence, but prepares himself by fasting. As children of the New Covenant we have access to the Father, but does this make us casual and lacking in respect, so that we just whisk into God's presence? Do we just deliver a shopping list of requests, and forget that we are talking to the all-powerful, awesome God? Do we approach Him with adoration, mentioning in our prayers His attributes of justice, goodness and mercy?

Nehemiah confesses the sin of the people, including himself: the state of the walls is a visual reminder of the state of their hearts. Are our confessions superficial, or do we acknowledge the deep-down corruption that is always evident?

Nehemiah places Himself at God's service, ready to do whatever God's will may be. He prays that he may prosper in being God's servant. We should pray that we will prosper not in the riches of this world, but in the riches of Christ.

Do we make impassioned pleas for the lost, as Nehemiah pleaded for Jerusalem? Is there a fervency in our prayers, or are they rather mechanical, just another duty to perform?

Man of Faith (Nehemiah 2:1-10)

'Prosper' is very much a word of faith for Nehemiah: he has no idea how God will use him, but trusts that God will bring about a good outcome. Because Nehemiah had faith that God would prosper him, he is ready with a plan when the opportunity comes.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, the Jews could have regarded him with suspicion as he was not yet Governor. But the hand of God was upon him. His response to the initial challenge from Sanballat and Tobiah also reveals his faith. Nehemiah had faith that the covenant-keeping God would respond to his prayers. It was God's desire to build His holy city. The broken walls were a reproach to His character and a subject of scorn by pagan kings. Nehemiah would have been familiar with the promises given to Daniel and Ezekiel such as Ezekiel 36:3, "On this day I will cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities and the ruins shall be rebuilt".

Man of Action (Nehemiah chapters 3-4)

The hand of God is upon Nehemiah, so he gets down to the practicalities of organising the building work. All kinds of people take part: there is no retirement age in the kingdom of God! The enemies of God are enraged as they see the power and strength of God demonstrated through the toils of His people.

Refusing to listen to the opposition

When the workers start to get discouraged, Nehemiah reminds them of their great and awesome God. The builders had started to look to themselves and not to God. This kind of unbelief can affect us: we live in a culture which doesn't believe in God and sees the church as a quaint anachronism.

Sanballat, Tobiah and their cronies are a type of Satan who sees the building of the walls as an incursion into his territory. Satan can similarly voice opposition to the restoring of God's work at Crich Baptist Church. What are those feeble

Christians doing, repairing an old church when only a small number of people go there? Do they really see themselves as a viable witness? Satan wants the people of Crich to remain spiritually dead. We can believe Satan's jibes, but we see the evidence of God's work: a repaired roof and upper hall, our ministries resuming, new outreaches such as Crich fete and, God willing, door to door work. Do we think for one moment that we could have done this on our own?

And why would God restore this church for no reason? The village population is growing and they need the Gospel. Don't lose sight of what God has achieved for us and will achieve for us, building a viable Gospel church in a growing community. Now is the time for Crich Baptist Church! "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it".