

A Mind to Work

Nehemiah 1:1-4; 2:1-6; 4:6; Psalm 137:1-6; Acts 13:1-3

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July 17, 2022

The Classified Ad might have read: Position open for structural engineer to design and oversee construction of a protective wall, including sturdy gates that cannot be breached by intruders, around the city of Jerusalem.

Local laborers are available but will need to be trained since none of them have any experience in wall construction.

Materials for construction will include stone and timber. Stone is available locally, but timber will need to be imported and will need to be negotiated internationally.

Travel to the city is sometimes perilous and it will be necessary for whoever is chosen to make special arrangements for security while traveling.

It should be noted that this will be considered a hardship assignment since neighboring kings have been known to overrun the city and take away the crops and the animals, killing the inhabitants if need be. For this reason, the person chosen will be required to maintain security for the workers and their families.

The person chosen for this assignment must be able to work with the local Priest to promote the spiritual renewal of the citizen.

Working hours: Shift work 24/6

Compensation: Volunteer opportunity

Contact: Godcalling398BCE @heaven.com/HolySpirit

Nehemiah has done for us a great service by writing his memoirs of

- how he came to be surprised by God
- how he was used by God even in the most difficult of circumstances to bring about a renewal of not only a physical city and countryside but the spiritual care of a people.

The story of Nehemiah is far more than history. Nehemiah is a person much like any of us who is

- surprised by God with a task to be done
- challenged to do the work needed
- challenged to *be* and to *do* far more than he could have ever imagined.

The story begins some 2500 years ago, but it could be a current story in many ways. It is the story of God at work within the life of an individual.

Nehemiah had been born in Babylon and he remained in exile after Persia had conquered Babylon. He had a good life there. If you look at the world map today, you are looking at what is present-day Iran. Nehemiah had somehow found favor with King Artaxerxes, so much so that he was the cup bearer, the

food taster, for the king. It was a most honored position. The king actually trusted Nehemiah with his life. Nehemiah had settled into a routine of living well.

And then, one day, around the month on the Jewish calendar that we would call November or December, Nehemiah's brother, and a party of men from Judah somehow find him and deliver information to him that will create a turning point in his life. He will never be the same after their visit with him, for they will put into stark contrast for him the difference between

- The life that he is living and
- The situation of those who live in his homeland, and those who live in Jerusalem.

For example:

- Nehemiah lives in luxury in the king's court;
- The people of Judah live in a city that was attacked and demolished by the Babylonians.
- Nehemiah has more than enough of everything that he needs;
- The people of Judah are in great distress.

- Nehemiah has dignity and respect;
- They are a people who are mocked by nearby countries who continually brutalize them.

- Nehemiah has the protection of the king;
- The people of Judah are defenseless in their land.

- Nehemiah has it "all;"
- By comparison, the people of Judah have "nothing."

Now Nehemiah is in a dilemma. When he was uninformed of the situation in Judah, he needed not respond, but now he knows. What to do?

He

- is convicted in his soul,
- weeps for his kinspeople in Judah,
- fasts and prays for forgiveness for his sin and the sin of his people, and
- day and night he struggles with God about what he should do.

God uses the king to provide a very practical answer. Sometimes answers to our prayers come from the most unexpected places. The king cannot help but notice the change in the demeanor of Nehemiah. He is sad; he is not sleeping; something is wrong. The king obviously cares about this man and he has already allowed any Jew who wishes to return to Judah to do so. Now, he sends Nehemiah to Judah to help them. He places Nehemiah on loan.

Not only does the king send Nehemiah, he

- gives him a security escort back to Jerusalem;
- provides the timber that will be needed for the wall;
- provides a letter of the king's protection against all other countries as Nehemiah travels.

I'm fairly sure that Nehemiah had never built a wall before, but he was a man who could plan and administer and build a work team and also personally work.

As we as a church honor the past and embrace the future, we will be in the process of “building.” We will be building the kind of church that continues to honor God and minister to the world.

So here are some Nehemiah rules. You have them on the bulletin insert.

RULE #1

Make a commitment to do what is necessary to accomplish what is needed.

Even though Nehemiah had responded to his brother’s request, his commitment was to God. Only that kind of commitment gives one the motivation and the strength to follow through with the task. Giant tasks, sometimes even small tasks, require giant commitments. Horizontal commitments, those that we make because we are told by others that we “ought to,” do not last when the task gets hard to accomplish.

RULE #2

Take a realistic look at the situation before you begin your plan for the work.

That requires knowing what needs to be done. The first thing that Nehemiah did when he returned to Jerusalem was to ride around what was left of the city and decide what needed to be done. He was fiercely honest in his evaluation of the situation. He knew that the work would be physically and emotionally difficult.

He knew that detractors would mock the workers and threaten their lives and their work. He knew that the workers would grow weary and need encouragement to not quit before the work was completed. But Nehemiah knew something else; he knew that the God who had called him out to lead these people in the work had already provided everything that was needed to complete the building of the wall.

RULE #3

Recruit and equip and encourage the people who are going to participate with you in the task that needs to be accomplished.

Nehemiah records:

“I told them how the hand of God had been favorable to me, and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, Let us arise and build.”

There were detractors from neighboring countries who came to threaten and mock them. Building the wall and the city would protect the people of Jerusalem from their constant raids against them.

I can hear Nehemiah saying to the workers, “We can do this.” Nehemiah was in charge, but he became one with the workers. He

- worked with them,
- ate with them,
- slept at the work site with them,
- guarded the wall with them.

and amazingly, 52 days after the work began, about August or September, the work was completed. There must have been a great celebration!

When the people were physically safe, Ezra, the Priest, brought out the Scrolls of the words of God and read to the people from a pulpit in the town square. The people stood to listen and the Levites interpreted for them.

Nehemiah remained as a Governor in Judah for 12 years. During that time, he helped to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and, with Ezra, the Priest, establish religious practices that followed Yahweh. Honoring his promise to King Artaxerxes, he then returned to Persia.

The call of God to individuals has continued throughout those following 2500 years and it will continue as long as our Lord tarries in his return. The story that was read from the book of Acts this morning is just one such example. It was the young church that recognized the call of God upon those among its members and sent them out to share the Good News of Jesus with those who had not yet heard.

In every Church, in this Church, there are people who are equipped in many ways and who God can use in many kinds of ministries. As we embrace the future of this church each one of us will be called to participate in some way to make that future all that God intends it to be.

So...be listening!

That call may come through another person.

That call may come through something that you read in God's Word.

That call may come as you gather with others in worship.

Be responsive, as together we embrace the future.

Amen.