

Nehemiah Sermon #5

Nehemiah 1

Today we want to look at the conclusion of this opening prayer in the Book of Nehemiah

Do you remember why this prayer came about?

I've entitled today's message "Servants of the Lord."

Nehemiah 1:10

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 1:10-11

Let us pray

You may be seated

Servants of the Lord

It is only now, at the end of his prayer, that Nehemiah comes to petition.

As he prayed, he grounded his prayer in the fact of redemption. (vs. 10)

“These are Your people whom You have redeemed.”

Redemption ground is the place to stand when we come before God in prayer.

We come to God as children – as people who have been redeemed

It was by “His own blood” that we entered in.

Nehemiah makes a declarative statement

Vs. 10 – Nehemiah reminds God

He is appealing to God about His people (flock)

Nehemiah says, “We are Your people – owned by You” – This distinguishes them from all other people.

That does not mean they are better than anyone else

But, this should encourage us – with all of our sinfulness – yet still we are God’s people!

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture

Vs. 11a, b

Group of people/remnant who have personal zeal for things of God

Zeal for the honor and glory of God - “who delight (who desire, who purpose) in revering God’s name”

Such zeal is rare today.

Too many Christians are like the lukewarm Laodiceans, drifting along very cheerfully, feeling confident that everything is all right.

Are we clear what zeal is?

It is not fanaticism

it is not wildness

it is not irresponsible enthusiasm

It is, rather, a humble, reverent, single-minded commitment to the hallowing of God's name and the doing of his will.

They only see one thing, they care for one thing, they live for one thing, they are swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God.

That's what a local church should be – zealous for the things of God – zealous for souls, the Word, in prayer

So, Nehemiah comes to the end of his prayer and makes his request before God (vs. 11c).

It is a general request.

Nehemiah asked God to cause the king to grant him mercy – He asked God for favor – favor in the king's eyes.

Now, let me show you how Nehemiah expresses his request

Notice in vs. 11, the persons given in this verse: we have the Lord, Nehemiah, other servants, and the king.

This is a request that properly positions all the parties that are in this picture

Nehemiah shows where his faith is and who he believes is really in control of this human situation

Vs. 11 – the first is the Lord

God is the preeminent One – He is in the primary position

#2 – Nehemiah – notice how he sees himself, his position

Servant to the Lord – tool in the Lord's hands

Ready vessel to do the Lord's work

#3 – Other servants

All in submission to God

#4 – what is really interesting is how Nehemiah refers to the king – this man

Nehemiah is under both the Lord and this man, but obviously, the Lord and this man are not at the same level

Where would you place them?

Lord is on top – the king is under the Lord and Nehemiah is under both

Nehemiah is praying to the One that is superior to the king

“The man” he was referring to was King Artaxerxes.

Artaxerxes was the most powerful man in all the world – He had been on the throne 20 years.

He was completely in control and over half the world is at his beck and call

He was a powerful man.

The way Nehemiah speaks of this king is quite appropriate.

He is just a man

His heart is in the Lord's hand

Nehemiah's request shows his faith in God

Nehemiah asked God: Would You be pleased to stir in the king's heart that he may grant me mercy?

This is an appropriate way to look at human authority

Nehemiah sees things rightly in dealing with human authority

Everyone is accountable to someone

Subject to someone – parents, husband

Boss/superior

Civil government

Pastors/leaders

Do you understand Nehemiah's thinking – "O Lord, I beseech Thee"

Pilate told Jesus – "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

Do you remember Jesus' response? "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above."

John 19:10-11

Nehemiah understood that – knew that – believed that

This should be a tremendous assurance and encouragement to us – that our God is on the throne and He can move things however He wills.

Do we have enough faith to make God our resource?

Do we believe that God is our court of appeal?

It is disastrous not to have this kind of faith – people wrong us

Numerous examples of people who took things into their own hands and manipulated situations – it was disastrous

Look at Abraham and Sarah

Israel is still suffering today

I suppose the most tragic – God gave Rebekah the news (twins) – the elder would serve the younger and how Isaac was going to give the blessing to Esau.

So Rebekah took matters into her own hands – what was the result?

Jacob leaves home – for 20 years

Rebekah dies in the meantime so they never saw each other again

It caused great division between Jacob and Esau

Jacob ends up with four wives

Disastrous consequences

David could have killed Saul – twice – Once at Engedi and also in the valley

(I Samuel 26))

David felt that he should have left it to God

“As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him or his day shall come to die or he shall descend into battle and perish” I Samuel 26:8.

God does rule and when He is ready, He will turn the hearts of men

Nehemiah understood that principle

It's always a mistake to take things into our own hands – where is our faith/reliance?

Example – marriages – greatest difficulty – too aggressive, assertive with her husband

She is so distressed – coaxes him – berating him – riding him - lack of faith

Our final appeal is to God

God is sovereign in the affairs of men

Nehemiah has right perspective

Nehemiah's request reflects proper position of heart

He is praying the right way because he is looking at it the right way

This is the kind of prayer that God can answer.

Nehemiah's final comment, vs. 11e – "I was a cupbearer to the king"

When God wants to accomplish a work, He always prepares His workers and puts them in the right places at the right time.

God had already begun to move on Israel's behalf by placing Nehemiah in such a strategic position with access to the king.

This would have encouraged Nehemiah at the same time it terrified him (cf. Esther 4:12-14).

Mordecai asked Esther – "And who knoweth whether thou art come, to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

God put Nehemiah in Shushan just as He had put Esther there a generation before, and just as He had put Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon.

That Nehemiah, a Jew, held such an important position in the palace speaks well of his character and ability

Let me give you the

I. History – behind the position of cupbearer

It was an occupation/job

King Solomon used cupbearers.

Remember the story of Joseph when he was in jail? – chief butler, chief cook

Recent studies have shown the importance of this position.

For Nehemiah to have reached this position was an important achievement.

King Artaxerxes is the man to whom Nehemiah reported as cupbearer.

Being a cupbearer doesn't sound very impressive.

The position sounds comparable to the dishwasher, or at best to the butler or the table waiter.

But the cupbearer was far more important than that.

The cupbearer tasted the wine before the king drank it, and he tasted the food before the king ate it to make sure it was not poisoned.

And through the practice of this custom, an incredible intimacy developed between the taster and the partaker, between the cupbearer and the king.

It has been suggested by ancient historians that the cupbearer, like no one other than the king's wife, was in a position to influence the monarch.

To think of Nehemiah simply as a sort of butler to the king of Persia is to completely underestimate his station.

He was a man who had proved himself able to stand before the king.

He had now become the king's confidant. . . . he was the king's first minister. . . .

Nehemiah occupied a position of enormous trust and responsibility

He was the Condoleza Rice of his day.

Here is the second thing I want you to see

I want you to see the **sacrifice of Nehemiah**

Nehemiah knew what lay ahead of him

To leave the king's court and go to Jerusalem would mean giving up his choice position that provided him with incredible security and safety and comfort and all the rest that goes with being in the king's court

Cushy, cushy job

His luxury would be replaced by ruins.

He would leave behind the ease of the palace and take up the toils of encouraging a beaten people and finishing an almost impossible task.

This is the ultimate demonstration of love and unselfishness.

If we are going to serve God, it requires sacrifice

This is what Jesus Christ did centuries later – Jesus Christ *“laid down His life for us”*

III. Humble Servant

I am deeply impressed with the fact that though he was in a high-ranking position in the world, he had a heart that was very tender toward God.

You know, it's a tough combination – to find a person who holds a high position in the eyes of the world and yet who is tender before God.

Perhaps you are in a position of great importance -- It's a vulnerable place to live. Each promotion further endangers your spiritual life, your position threatens your walk with God.

There are accounts of people who were promoted from one level to the next and suffered from “promotion-erosion”—they slowly became lost in pride, in sin, in self-worth

Nehemiah was firmly rooted.

Before Nehemiah could leave, something had to be done in the heart of King Artaxerxes, an unbeliever.

When Nehemiah heard about the Jews and Jerusalem, he did not rush into the king's oval office.

Instead, he went before God in prayer and trusted Him to open the doors and change the heart of his boss.

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Let us stand for closing prayer!

Nehemiah has taught us a lot

About prayer

Trusting God

Being a servant

Being humble

About service

About realizing . . .

We need to know our place and position

We need to know where we stand with God

Are we a part of His flock?

Are we children of God

If you answered "yes," how do you know that?

You must be born into His family.