

Nehemiah Sermon #6

Turn to Nehemiah 2

Four months had and gone since the bad news had reached Nehemiah.
Nehemiah's window of opportunity came four months after he began to pray.

Folks, we have never really prayed until we've learned to wait.
Praying and Waiting Go Hand in Hand.

While Nehemiah was praying, his burden for Jerusalem became greater and his vision
of what needed to be done became clearer.

That is what happens when we continue in prayer.

I've entitled today's message "God Answer to Nehemiah's Prayer"

Nehemiah 2:1-

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

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Let us pray

You may be seated

God's Answer to Nehemiah's Prayer

Since he received the bad news about the Jews in the land, he has been fasting, crying, and praying.

I think his eyes were red. He did not look his usual happy self.

Never before had he looked sad. Usually he was a bright, cheerful fellow.

But Nehemiah was rather sad when he served the royal couple that day and the king noticed that Nehemiah was not himself.

This tells me a couple of things:

#1 – Nehemiah's attitude at work was positive – that, my friend, is a rare person!

We need cheerful believers – too many Christian people/sad people and have no joy

#2 – and when your heart is somewhere else, it is really difficult to perform the task at hand with a happy spirit.

#3 – no matter how strong a person may be, sometimes the weight of things shows up in the countenance

In this case the inner feeling of Nehemiah was reflected in his outward appearance.

Artaxerxes sensed immediately that something was seriously wrong and with penetrating insight, he answered his own question—vs. 2

“This is nothing but sadness of heart.”

Notice Nehemiah's reaction – vs. 2e

The reason for this fear is not given.

But this was the first time he had ever looked dejected in the king's presence. . . .

When the king said that to Nehemiah, he got scared.

Rather than hiding that fact from us, Nehemiah admits it and writes it right here in Scripture for us – to see that he was human.

We are not going to be in God's work and not have anxiety or fear or intimidation – we experience all of them.

Now, Nehemiah had good reason to be frightened—and understandably so! It was against Persian law for a servant ever to show sadness in the king's presence. People in the presence of the king were usually killed for “raining on his parade.”

So Nehemiah was terrified, the Bible says.

At a time like this, it's easy to go blank and forget everything

Fear does amazing things to the brain.

Although Artaxerxes' comments frightened him, he was ready with his response (vs. 3) “Let the king live forever,” he answered, assuring Artaxerxes of his personal loyalty.

“May the king live forever” was the common way for addressing the king (Daniel 2:4).

“Why should my face not be sad when the *city*, the place of my *fathers' tombs*, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?”

Why shouldn't I be sad?

Such a description showed both Nehemiah's respect for his ancestors and also his sense of shame at the condition of his hometown.

Then Artaxerxes responded positively, “What would you request?” asked the king.

Nehemiah knew that a great door of opportunity had just been cracked open.

This is the first verse (vs. 4) in this book where the word “so” occurs, but it will occur thirty-two times.

Nehemiah uses this word as a shortcut to get around a lot of protocol and to shorten the story (vs. 11).

You will find that this man gets right to the point.

He does not beat around the bush.

He said, “So I prayed to the God of heaven”—right there in the presence of the king.

The king had said to Nehemiah, “What can I do for you?”

So Nehemiah shot up a prayer to the God of heaven – this was a spontaneous prayer.

It was a brief prayer and I think it was something like, “Oh Lord, help me say the right thing.” “This is a crucial opportunity – help me not to blow it.”

Nehemiah probably asked the Lord for wisdom in choosing words to express his desire to the king.

This is such a critical point.

The king asked him, “What is it you want?”

What an opportunity for Nehemiah!

All the power and wealth of the kingdom were wrapped up in that question!

While attempting to formulate an answer to Artaxerxes’ critical question, Nehemiah quickly and silently whispered a prayer to God for help.

Then Nehemiah spoke

Vs. 5

Nehemiah was bold in his request, but respectful in his asking, “If it pleases the king.”

I like the gracious way he starts – that should teach us something – about requesting things

Then Nehemiah gives his goal – his overall purpose!

I need to go to Judah and rebuild a whole city

This is not all that Nehemiah asked for and how did Nehemiah know what to ask for?

Not only had Nehemiah *prayed* for this opportunity, but he had also *planned* for it.

★ This ought to be a powerful lesson for all of us.

Nehemiah had not only prayed and sought God's help but he used all of the human resources that were available—including his brain, his human experience, his accumulated wisdom, his role and position, and the people with whom he came in contact.

During those four months of waiting, he had thought the matter through and knew exactly how he would approach the project.

Nehemiah's reply to the king can be summarized in two requests:

"Send me!" (Neh. 2:4-6) and

"Give me!" (vv. 7-10).

Vs. 6

Evidently, Nehemiah was serving at a special banquet since the queen was at Artaxerxes' side.

The king's next question threw "the door wide open" . . . "How long will your journey be," the king asked, "and when will you return?" (v. 6).

Obviously the king liked Nehemiah, and he wanted him to come back.

This tells me what the king thought about Nehemiah.

The appointed time of Nehemiah's absence is not given here, but in 5:14 twelve years are mentioned.

Nehemiah asked the king to grant him a leave of absence and gave him a definite time
(vs. 6e)

Nehemiah had a plan.

You see, he had been doing more than praying for four months.

He had been planning.

Future problems need to be tackled!

What are the costs, the objectives, the possible pitfalls?"

Nehemiah had calculated all of this

Sometimes God is patient in answering our prayer because preparation needs to be
made in the heart of the person praying.

See, good leaders do their homework!

That's a practical mind at work. . . . Nehemiah was planning.

Many people in God's work are shortsighted.

King Artaxerxes' positive response is stated in verse :

"So it pleased the king to send me."

So far, God had wonderfully answered prayer.

But there was more to come.

By this time Nehemiah's fear (vs. 2) had given way to faith (vs. 5) and he was
emboldened.

He goes further and asks for letters of safekeeping – vs. 7

Nehemiah wants more. "If ye ask not, ye receive not."

I am impressed with Nehemiah's realism in these requests.

Vagueness, at this point, would have shown up the project as a mere dream or sudden
impulse; but Nehemiah had prayed long enough . . . and had faith enough, to
visualize the operation in some detail, even to the building technique he would be
using for the wall . . .

Nehemiah had planned carefully and knew his precise needs.

First he needed letters for safe travel.

We could call these, “Letters of Permission” – to allow him to pass through the various provinces.

He needed these letters to be able to reach Jerusalem without opposition.

Nehemiah knew that the only way he would be permitted to cross borders was to have these letters from the king.

Now let me show what the king did for Nehemiah – vs. 9

The king gave more than what Nehemiah requested.

Nehemiah then requested letters of authority that would provide the materials needed for the construction of buildings and walls (vs. 8).

Nehemiah is asking for the moon and what is so encouraging is that he gets it

Folks, there are four months of prayer behind these requests

The king was favorably disposed

What brought that about?

Obviously, it was Nehemiah’s prayer to his awesome God

Nehemiah was realistic, giving God the credit for causing the king to grant his requests (cf. Proverbs 21:1).

God’s work and our planning are not contradictory. “Prayer is where planning starts.” Nehemiah modeled good leadership; he prayed, planned, and acted in dependence on God.

Notice he asked for a letter of introduction to Asaph, the chief forester of the king, to provide him with timber for his building activities.

It is clear that Nehemiah had formed his plans well in advance.

Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning.

The timber was needed for three types of construction: for the gates of the citadel, for the wall and for Nehemiah's residence.

It wasn't a coincidence that Nehemiah knew that one of the king's forests was near Jerusalem, and that he actually knew the *name* of the man who was in charge.

Nehemiah knew where Lowe's was located and he knew the manager's name.

Nehemiah himself describes the "key" that opened this marvelous door of opportunity. After being granted positive answers to his bold requests, he said, "And the king granted them to me *because the good hand of my God was upon me*" (v. 8).

When all was said and done, he knew his success happened because of God's help.

God does "*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*" (Eph. 3:20)."

God starts by working in the one doing the praying!

He works in us and through us to help us see our prayers answered.

"God's Answer to Nehemiah's Prayer"

Let us stand for closing invitation

Every eye closed – no one looking around.

Have we lost patience in praying?

Are we ever sad because of the condition of God's people or His work?

Do we care enough to pray?

Do we care enough to volunteer?