

## Nehemiah Sermon #7

Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah – from chapter 1 through chapter 2, verse 10 – Nehemiah was the king's *cupbearer* – his right hand man.

But, beginning at verse 11 of chapter 2 to the end of chapter 6, Nehemiah changes hats. He is no longer the cupbearer; he was now the building contractor and overseer.

He became the chief bricklayer.

I've entitled today's message "The Excitement of Starting"

Nehemiah 2:9

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

Nehemiah 2:9-16

Let us pray

You may be seated

## The Excitement of Starting

One of the hardest things to do when you're excited is to keep your mouth shut. How many times have we been excited about something and talked about it and it never came to pass?

### **Vs. 9**

There was more than protection to be gained from the military escort. It meant an arrival in style, impressively reinforcing the presentation of credentials to the neighboring governors

Can you imagine the excitement that must have gripped Nehemiah's heart? He found himself in the middle of the king's escort headed for Jerusalem. In his hands were official letters signed and sealed by King Artaxerxes!

When the official caravan arrived, it was bound to attract attention

Nehemiah's arrival created immediate problems with the neighboring nations.

Now, Nehemiah was on the way toward his goal, but in verse 10 we learn he came face to face with tough characters, the same ones he will run across again and again.

**Vs. 10** – announces the key players in the Book of Nehemiah.

We will see these enemies over and over and over (vs. 10a).

When Nehemiah came with an entourage of soldiers, everybody in the country heard of it.

They wanted to know who in the world he was.

They were told . . . that he was coming to help the Jews.

When that word got around, the enemy was grieved.

Now the context of vs. 9 & 10 suggests that the letter and troops were to convince Sanballat and others that Nehemiah had the king's authority and support.

So, when Nehemiah reached his destination, there was already some opposition. Any time we begin a work for God, we can expect opposition, criticism; we can expect people not to like what we are doing.

Now many efforts for God that started with enthusiasm were put out before they even got off the ground or out of the starting blocks—because of opposition. Enthusiasm must be tempered with diligence.

There are three fellows we are going to meet:

There is Sanballat, Tobiah of vs. 10, and Geshem whom we will meet next Sunday.

These three men were the enemies of God and His people.

They had tried to stop the building of the temple, and now they want to resist the rebuilding of the wall.

These men will throw a long shadow over the story of Nehemiah.

Sanballat and Tobiah were men of influence and power, as can be seen in their official positions and their connections within Israel.

A document found from 407 BC . . . refers to Sanballat as “governor of Samaria.”

We see even in Jesus’ day the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans and the hatred between them.

John 4:9, *“Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, ‘How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.’”*

The Jews would walk miles out of the way to avoid the land of Samaria.

Sanballat's area of jurisdiction was just eighteen miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Now on top of this, Sanballat was a relative to Eliashib and Eliashib just happened to be the high priest of Israel (Nehemiah 13:28) – mixed marriage

Sanballat was Nehemiah's chief enemy, and the fact that he had some kind of official position in Samaria only made him that much more dangerous.

Vs. 10 – Tobiah, the servant, the Ammonite

The term "servant" is literally *official*.

"Servant" refers here to his position in the Persian Empire, namely, that of an official.

Reading the king's letters – the news traveled and within a short period of time the purpose of Nehemiah's mission was known. He had come to help the Jews.

Being an Ammonite, Tobiah was a sworn enemy of the Jews.

A major problem for Nehemiah was that Tobiah was related by marriage to some of Nehemiah's co-workers and he also had many friends among the Jews (Neh. 6:17-19).

To top this off, Tobiah was really tight with Eliashib, and Eliashib just happened to be what? The high priest of Israel. You got it! (13:4-7)

Nehemiah would soon discover that his biggest problem was not the enemy on the outside but the compromisers on the inside, a problem the church still faces today.

Acts 20:28-30 – Take heed of the flock of God – wolves will enter and scatter the flock – also of your own selves shall men arise not sparing the flock.

Tobiah was a Jewish name, not an Ammonite name, but the Tobiad family was to have influence in Ammon for a long time.

These Tobiads may have been descendants of the Tobiah who is listed in Ezra 2:59-60. They were rejected from the Jewish community because “they could not show that their families were descended from Israel.”

If that be so, which I believe it is, their long-standing enmity against the Jewish community may have begun at that time.

If Sanballat was in charge of the army, Tobiah was director of the intelligence division of their operation.

It was he who gathered the “inside information” from his Jewish friends and relatives and passed it along to Sanballat and Geshem.

Look back at Nehemiah 2, vs. 10 – it says Sanballat the Horonite, (Horon was a city of Moab) – that would make Sanballat a Moabite; and Tobiah was an Ammonite.

Moabites and Ammonites

Where did these people come from? (Gen. 19:30-38)

They had a blood relationship with Israel thru Lot – Remember – Lot was drunk and with his 2 daughters – incest – 2 children born.

—Moab – Father of the Moabites

—Ben-Ammi (Ah me) – Father of the Ammonites

These two countries were east of the Dead Sea – Ammon on top; Moab on the bottom

The Moabites and the Ammonites were Israel’s traditional enemies (Deut. 23:3-4).

At every turn they opposed the people of God.

An enemy is at work in our day.

The enemy is always at work, and we must be always ready for spiritual conflict.

The Bible gives us the heart feelings of these enemies of God. Nehemiah 2:10 –

Grieved exceedingly – that Hebrew word gives the sense of grieved to action.

They are going to do something about it.

It was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of Israel (v. 10).

When you walk by faith, you will invariably collide with the “Sanballats” and the “Tobiahs” of the world.

We have certain organizations that are in defiance of God, Christianity, and the Bible Organizations like the ACLU, NOW, Girl Scouts, NEA – Kennedy .

There is a sustained effort against our state board on the Creation issue.

Hutchinson newspaper

Opposition is to be expected when God’s people try to do the will of God. It is unusual if there is not at least one person who opposes you in your work for God.

Experiencing criticism and opposition doesn’t necessarily mean you are outside God’s will.

Rather, it may reinforce the fact that you are in the very center of His plan.

Keep in mind that for the leader, opposition is inevitable.

This is where the rubber of leadership meets the road of reality—the whole issue of stimulating and motivating others to roll up their sleeves and get the job done in the midst of distraction and discouragement is often the work of God’s leader today.

It’s easy to get people excited; it’s difficult to get people to finish.

In verse 11 we note the word **so** again. . . .

Mark it down every time he uses the word so.

Nehemiah is cutting down on a great many words.

Nehemiah made a two-month journey with that one word “so.”

“So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.”

Rest is an important part of the schedule of a servant of God. Even Jesus rested. Jesus said to his disciples, “Come aside into a desert place, a quiet place and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31).

Rest is important, but too many of God’s people have sat down to rest and have not gotten back up to work.

### **Vs. 12a**

Someone once said that there are three kinds of people in the world:

Those who don’t know what is happening,

Those who watch what’s happening, and

Those who make things happen!

Nehemiah *made* things happen! . . . it was not only because of his human ingenuity and his hard work. Nehemiah was to prove himself to be a hard worker.

But hard work alone will not ensure success – that’s one side of it.

Praying and trusting God does not mean that research is not necessary.

Nehemiah wanted to assess the situation before presenting his project to the officials and the people.

So we see God’s blessing blended with diligence.

Even though Nehemiah knew he wasn’t welcome, he remained undaunted.

He knew God had brought him to this moment in Israel’s history.

At the same time, he knew he was about to tackle a gigantic project that others before him had been unable to complete.

Even though his two-month journey must have been terribly exhausting, it wouldn't take long to verify that the report he had received six months earlier was true.

Morale was at an all-time low. Discouragement permeated the ranks of Israel.

Nehemiah, having reached his destination, would be driven by an inner burning (determination) as any leader would to get started on the wall—*fast!*

But, he didn't do that.

As a matter of fact, *he didn't do anything*. . . . "I was there three days."

Why didn't he immediately go to work?

*Investigating* . . . A good leader doesn't rush into his work but patiently gathers the facts firsthand and then plans his strategy

### **Vs. 12b**

Part of the plan was to take a few men that he could trust into his confidence and take a secret survey of the work ahead.

Any work of God that will endure will be taken on by more than one good person.

You're going to have to have confidence in others and they in you.

So, he went out at night under the cover of darkness to make his inspection and see what the real condition was.

Nehemiah went out to see for himself the work that needed to be done.

### **Vs. 12-13**

Leaders are often awake when others are asleep.

Folks, it is this side of leadership that the uninvolved observer or even the workers never see.

That is a side of ministry that most people never see.

People have the false idea that a leader lives an exciting life in the limelight, basking from one experience to the next experience.

Often, it's in silence that a person secures the respect of the public.

So, why did Nehemiah do his inspection secretly at night?

Well, some things are better not publicized before their time.

Nehemiah had already made plans, but he wanted to keep his thoughts to himself until he had inspected the position to see if his plans could be executed.

### **Vs. 13**

Dung Gate was at the city's southern or southeastern extremity, leading to the refuse-tip, the Valley of Hinnom (Fires were constantly burning in Gehenna—trash dump); potsherd.

As he surveyed, Nehemiah set out from the west side and turned left to the south and then up the eastern side, concentrating on the southern section of the city.

If you have ever been to Jerusalem, you will know that that is the roughest way to go.

### **Vs. 13e**

It was just as his brother had reported.

As he had encompassed the city, he could see for himself the waste; he was amazed at the debris.

Folks, it was all just one sad story of reproach; the city where the Lord had chosen to put His name now lay in ruins.

He went on down through the southern part of Jerusalem and back up the west side to the Fountain Gate.

### **Vs. 14a**

When Nehemiah came to the King's Pool, it was such a mess he couldn't even get by on his horse (vs. 14b)

He had to dismount. He got off and walked – inspecting the damage (vs. 13 & 15) – viewed.

The Hebrew word for “view” means “to look into something very carefully; to scrutinize.” It's a medical word for probing a wound to see the extent of the damage.

Nehemiah made a careful, conscious, probing examination of the wall for one reason:

As leader, it was his job to be aware of the details and to develop a plan of action.

He was developing a master plan.

So, Nehemiah proceeded on foot along the western ridge above the Kidron valley then turned back and re-entered the city at his starting-point.

### **Vs. 16**

For all his speed and drive, he does not rush into action (11) or into talk (12).

Nehemiah anticipates the obvious objections that a newcomer can have no idea of the work involved, so Nehemiah educates himself thoroughly and chooses his moment to show his hand (16).

He has not only kept his plans from the enemy: he has kept it from the leaders as well.

Those are the people he must convince and arouse. He did not inform the Jewish leaders of his intention.

He would have lost face if he had exposed half-formed ideas or a piecemealed plan.

This whole process of restoration began with prayer.

The first phase was evaluation.

Before his project was ever undertaken, Nehemiah was informed.

The second phase was reconstruction.

Reconstruction, frankly, is hard work.

The leader who brings us to rebuild the walls is the Holy Spirit, and it is He who continues the work of reconstruction inside us.

Some of us in this very room are living with the walls of our life – torn down and we are surrounded by ruin.

Selfishness and a lack of discipline and procrastination and immorality and no time for God, compromise, and rebellion have come and sowed their ugly seeds.

And they have begun to bear fruit for destruction.

Folks, we need to take serious inventory of our true condition.

If we let it lie. We are a reproach – vs. 17 – 2:17 – a shame.

The neglected heart, the neglected life with crumbled walls, will soon be overrun by the world and chaos will prevail.

Don't just repent. Rebuild!

I'm deeply concerned that we do not go on living without walls.

If our heart has grown cold toward Christ and His Church, let's deal with the problem now.

We also find ourselves in a parallel situation in much of Christianity today in the church—the building is built—but the walls are down—the gates are burned.

There is destruction all around. Who cares for the people of God and the things of God?

There are three key phrases of the Book of Nehemiah found in our passage today:

#1 – vs. 10 – the enemy's heart

#2 – vs. 10 – Nehemiah's heart – Nehemiah came to do the Lord's bidding.

#3 – vs. 12

Nehemiah's conviction was that this project was not his but God's.

It was from God and "for Jerusalem" (12)—not from Nehemiah nor for his prestige.

This is not my church, your church—this is God's church at Medora.

What has God put in your hearts to do for Him through His church at Medora?

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Eyes closed – no one looking around.

You ever start something for God – enthusiastically – only to have someone rain on it?  
You quit.

Opposition is a part of life – makes us dependent on God

Look at your life – seems to be a lot of destruction

Tear out the damaged areas – and rebuild

Rebuild that area – you can do it – through Christ

Maybe you're here this morning and you need to take the first step with God

That first step is salvation

Today is the day of salvation

Jesus is the Savior

He came to rescue drowning people – drowning in sin

Cross

Jesus came to help, heal, and **rescue**