

From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Nehemiah) ch.1 & 2

by Zac Poonen

The book of Nehemiah teaches us the importance of building the walls of separation and maintaining spiritual authority and discipline in the church to preserve its purity.

Duration: 59:26

Scripture: Nehemiah 1:9, Isaiah 60:14, Revelation 21:9-10

Topics: "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not being consumed by earthly things that can make us gloomy. He uses the example of Jeremiah, who was saddened by the desolation of Jerusalem rather than personal losses. The speaker also highlights the need to have a mindset focused on God's sovereignty and the building of His church. The sermon references the Book of Revelation, specifically Revelation 21, to illustrate the future glory of the Holy City, Jerusalem. Additionally, the sermon mentions Nehemiah's use of his influence with the king to contribute to the rebuilding of God's city.

Transcript

Welcome to the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah and Chapter 1. We started our study of these Old Testament books with Daniel, and we saw that there was a movement that started with Daniel that was intended to bring God's people back from Babylon to Jerusalem. We saw in our study of Revelation that the book of Revelation ends with Babylon and Jerusalem, that is, the false church and the true one, the harlot and the bride. It's not popular to speak about a false church or about the harlot, because everybody speaks about love, and there is a false love which we are to beware of.

The Bible speaks very clearly of the bride and the harlot of Babylon and Jerusalem, and Revelation 18.4 says, my people. And it is in the light of this that we study the Old Testament. Just like people have carefully studied the movement of God's people from Egypt to Canaan, we need to study carefully the movement of God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The movement from Egypt to Canaan speaks of the personal life coming into a life of victory. The movement from Babylon to Jerusalem speaks of the church life, where we come together to be the body of Christ as part of the New Covenant. And we saw that Daniel was the man who started the ball rolling with his fasting and praying and seeking God, and living right through the seventy years of captivity, and

praying that God would take his people back to Jerusalem.

And as a result of that, we found in the book of Ezra that people moved out and came back. And then through the prophecy, prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, they began to build, and they completed the temple, a picture of building the body of Christ. We saw there that they laid the foundations for many years, and they hadn't completed the superstructure until God raised up two prophets to stir them up, to press on to perfection symbolically.

We studied that in the books of Haggai and Zechariah, and also in the book of Ezra. We saw in the second part of it how a second generation moved out of Babylon into Jerusalem, led by Ezra. And so that's how far we have come.

Now the people of God have come back to Jerusalem, they've built the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices have been restored, and yet we see that one important thing is still not being completed. And that is the walls of Jerusalem are still broken down, and the gates were burnt up, and this is what the book of Nehemiah is all about. And so it leads us on to one stage further.

Again, we find opposition in the book of Nehemiah, but we need to understand the spiritual principles here. In the movement back from Babylon to Jerusalem, there is that burden that began with people praying, fasting, and then the building of the body, and as the body is built, the need for the walls of separation. And here is where we need great wisdom.

We need the wisdom and the zeal of a Nehemiah to build those walls. And the difficult thing is to build the walls of separation around the body of Christ without becoming Pharisees. It's very easy to build the walls and become Pharisees inside the walls, and that's a sad thing.

But to build the walls without becoming Pharisees, that is wisdom. So keeping that in mind, we turn to the book of Nehemiah, chapter one, the words of Nehemiah, the son of Hekeliah. It happened in the month Kislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa, the capital.

And when we studied Ezra, in the latter part of Ezra, chapter seven, we see that Ezra had moved to Jerusalem in the seventh year of the king. So this is something that happens thirteen years after Ezra has moved into Jerusalem. You turn back to Ezra, chapter seven, you see that Ezra, and chapter seven, we see here verse eight.

He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which is in the seventh year of the king. Thirteen years later, we read in the book of Nehemiah, in the twentieth year of the king, Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah, came to Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire. There were people who came from Jerusalem to visit Susa for some purpose, and Nehemiah was a man who held a very responsible position in the king's palace.

We read in the last verse of chapter one that he was the cupbearer to the king. Now that sounds like just an ordinary butler who hands out the cup to the king, but it was much more important than that, because we know that the king was always afraid of being poisoned by somebody, and so he would only appoint as a cupbearer somebody who was thoroughly reliable, and somebody who he had great confidence in, one who could be really trusted, and therefore one with great influence with the king. The cupbearer of the king was a man of great influence, for the king's life virtually depended on him.

And so Nehemiah's position was one of great influence. But even though he's there in a position of great influence in the Persian Empire, his heart was burdened for God's people and for Jerusalem. And so he asked Hanani concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

He had a concern for the name of God, for the testimony of God in Jerusalem, and when we see that Jerusalem is a picture of the bride, the pure church, we see the burden that he had. And these people, Hanani and the others told him, the remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach. Now there is a reproach which we will always have, that is the reproach of the cross.

But the reproach spoken of here was not that reproach, it was the reproach of compromise, because the walls were not built. And he says here, the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire. It's quite an amazing thing that after the temple was built through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, that no one had a burden for building the walls.

Because there is a sense in which the opposition to building the walls is greater than the opposition to building the temple. When you build a temple, people say, alright, that's a religious place of worship, okay. But when you build a wall and try to draw a distinction between those who are on the other side of the wall and those who are inside the wall, the people on the outside of the wall get a bit disturbed by that.

And so in order to remain popular, people leave the walls broken down, and that is exactly what we see in Christendom today. We find believers holding hands with all types of compromisers. You have born-again believers preaching with Catholic bishops sitting on the platform, and saying, we've all got to love one another, and all this garbage that's going on in the name of Jesus Christ.

And there are no walls. It's popular when you talk about love and hold hands with everybody. The walls are broken down.

If anybody tries to erect a wall there, he is accused of being harsh and hard and so therefore the Nehemiahs are few, understandably, because most believers, I would say 90% of believers or more, love their own honor and want popularity, and therefore they do not want to stand up for that which they may know to be true, but which will cause offense. And therefore we find the same condition today, even among people who have come out of the dead denominations and started separate groups, but then there are still, there are no walls, there are no walls separating them from those dead denominations. They say, we are all one in Christ, and that's the scriptural phrase which the devil has used to deceive many people.

And so, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, we can understand the message of the book of Nehemiah for a particular time. The walls are broken down, its gates are burned with fire. Now it's a very interesting thing that when you turn to the book of Revelation, I want to point out something to you which we considered before, but good to remind ourselves of again.

In Revelation chapter 21, we read here, Revelation 21, where one of the angels calls John and says, Come, verse 9, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Verse 10, He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal clear jasper.

And then he begins to describe the city, the bride of the Lamb. And notice the very first thing that he describes is the wall. He doesn't describe the gates or the foundation or the superstructure or any such thing.

He begins with the wall. And he says, The first thing I want you to notice, the angel tells John, is about the bride, is that there's a great and a high wall around it. We know that Jerusalem is holy and Babylon is great, but there's one thing great about Jerusalem, it's got a great and a high wall.

That's it. It's a great high wall to preserve its purity. Turn to the book of Ezekiel, in chapter 42, where there's a description of that heavenly Jerusalem again.

In the Old Testament, Ezekiel 42. And there again, in verse 20, he says, He measured it on the four sides, there's a description of the temple, and it had a wall all around, the length 500 and the width 500. And the purpose of this wall was to divide between the holy and the profane.

God said, Let there be light, and then He separated the light from the darkness. That's in the first page of the Bible. We can paraphrase it like this, He put a wall between the light and the darkness.

And in Jerusalem, we saw in Revelation 21, the light of Jerusalem is like a shining jasper, and the next thing you read about it is that light is separated from the darkness by a great and a high wall. Now the same thing we see here, there's a division made between the holy and the profane. Now it is that division, that separation from that which is contrary to scripture, that separation from people who are not interested in the whole counsel of God, that the wall speaks of.

You see, it is very easy to hold hands with people and say we are interested in evangelism, we won't talk about water baptism because that will offend some people. Okay, these are the people who don't believe in a wall. The walls are broken down.

Or we will not talk about anything that causes offense. It may be found in scripture, Jesus may have preached it and the apostles may have preached it, but we won't preach it because there are certain believers who don't agree with those doctrines. I say we couldn't care less if they don't agree with those doctrines.

They can be outside the wall, but we're going to build a wall quite high, and the wall consists of what? It consists of all the commandments of Jesus. And when you preach all the commandments of Jesus, I tell you there are many, many courses of bricks on that wall, and it becomes a pretty great and a high wall. And that is the wall which the devil is trying to break down by saying certain commandments are not important, and certain things can be ignored, and certain things can be left out, and gradually the wall gets reduced in size and broken down, and you have multitudes of believers now with only one course of brick around their so-called Jerusalem, and that is, you must be born again.

That's all. All the other commandments of Jesus have been wiped out. I'm talking about today's Christianity.

And it is thus that corruption comes into Christianity, and what started out as Jerusalem ends up as Babylon. And if we want to preserve the purity of Jerusalem, we have to have the spirit of Nehemiah be willing to be unpopular and build the wall once again. And so Nehemiah was concerned when he heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, that wall that speaks of separation, that was broken down, and he was burdened about it.

And the second thing we read here was, the gates were burned with fire. Now what do the gates speak of? There are two things the Old Testament tells us about the gates of a city. First of all, in Proverbs 31, 23, it speaks about the elders of a city sitting in the gates of the city.

It's a place of judgment and authority. Whenever people had to be judged in a city, they took them out to the elders who sat in the gates of the city, and the elders exercised authority and judgment. But those gates were broken down.

Judgment and discipline in the church is no longer popular. We talk about love. We have to be gentle, brother.

We have to be loving. And that doesn't sound like the devil, but it can be the devil if we don't exercise discipline in the church. Yeah, be careful, because the devil can come with scriptural phrases and try to eliminate the gates of judgment, the gates of authority that there are to be in the church.

The elders symbolize spiritual authority in the city, and there must be spiritual authority in the church that is exercised. Discipline. The elders speak of discipline in the city.

And a church, if it is to be kept pure, must be disciplined. You just got to read 1 Corinthians chapter 5 to see the type of discipline that Paul believed in. There was a man who was living in sin in Corinth, and he said, put that man out of your assembly.

In my spirit, I've judged him already. I've handed him over to the devil so that the devil can attack his body and really harass him till he repents. Paul believed in gates that were strong, that would keep Jerusalem pure.

But that's not popular. 1 Corinthians 5 is not the type of thing that you'll find in most churches today, that type of discipline of a person who is living in sin. That's what the gates speak of.

Authority, spiritual authority and discipline. And that's broken down. It's burnt.

It's burnt with fire. People don't believe in all that. It's burnt with a false fire of the devil which says we've got to be gentle, we've got to be loving and merciful.

Oh yes, the devil's got all the right verses and uses them at the wrong time. The other thing that the gates speak of, we read in Isaiah chapter 60, where we are given a description of that Jerusalem that's going to be built. He says in Isaiah 60 verse 14 about Zion, the city of the Lord.

And he says there in Isaiah chapter 60 verse 18, the last part, your walls will be called salvation, or separation, and your gates will be called praise. I will enter your gates with thanksgiving in my heart. I will enter your courts with praise.

The gates speak of praise, the spirit of praise. Now we do not mean the empty bubble of Sunday morning charismatic praise. No.

We're not talking about a gate that's erected suddenly on Sunday morning and that is burnt down and destroyed the other six days of the week. We're talking about a gate of praise that there is seven days of the week where there is no grumbling, no murmuring, but only praise and thanksgiving that comes up from our spirit and doesn't make a difference whether it's Sunday morning or Tuesday evening or Wednesday afternoon. It makes no difference.

The gates are just the same. All the time, the spirit of thanksgiving and praise that's burnt down. And Nehemiah was concerned to build up those walls of separation, to build up those gates of authority and discipline, and to build up those gates through which people could come with true thanksgiving and praise to God in all circumstances.

So that is the main subject of the book of Nehemiah, the building of the walls of separation and the gates of authority, discipline and thanksgiving. And it's a question that we can ask ourselves, why is it that Ezra, who was such a God-fearing man when we studied the book of Ezra, we saw that, and he went back to Jerusalem thirteen years before, and how is it he didn't have a burden to build the walls? How is it he could see all the walls and the gates and do nothing about it? Well, there we have the, we don't judge Ezra, we believe he was a God-fearing man, but the only thing we could perhaps say was that he didn't have that calling. He didn't have that calling.

Nehemiah had that calling, and you'll see that as you come to the end of Nehemiah, that Nehemiah was a different type of man. It's a very interesting contrast. In Ezra, you read that when Ezra heard that the Israelites married heathen women, he just wept and he prayed.

When Nehemiah heard that these Israelites married foreign women, he just pulled them up and slapped some of them, and he was quite a different type of person, quite a different type of ministry. You find that very often in the body of Christ. You need the Ezras, sure, they're good, you need the gentle ones, and always there to wipe the tears, and we need them, but we also need the Nehemiahs who pull out the hairs from the beard and say, come on, we're not going to allow this type of thing, and when an Ezra and a Nehemiah can work together, it's wonderful, and that's the wonderful thing we see here, that God brought two completely dissimilar people together, and joined them together to build the body of Christ, with two different types of ministries, and Nehemiah was the one, this radical man who was very thankful that he had an Ezra who had that gentle ministry, but he was not that type himself, and he came along and he built the wall.

There is a calling that God gives to different ones in the body of Christ, and each one of us can only fulfill the calling God has given to us, we cannot imitate somebody else, but there is certainly, I see, a great lack of Nehemiahs, more popular to be an Ezra than it is to be a Nehemiah, but Nehemiah was the one who built the wall. We don't despise the calling of Ezra. The wonderful thing is when there are Ezras and Nehemiahs working together, and we see here in verse 4, it came about that when I heard these words, I sat down and wept.

You see, Nehemiah could also weep, he wasn't just pulling hairs out of people's face all the time, he was concerned, he was burdened, he fasted, he wept, he prayed. You see, this is what we see in Jesus Christ, in Jesus there was a balance, he saw Jerusalem, and we read he wept over the city, and then we read he went into Jerusalem and took a whip, and chased out all the money changers, and turned over their tables. There in Jesus you see the balance, and that's how it was with Ezra and Nehemiah together, and that's how it must be in the body of Christ today.

There is the weeping, and there is the whipping, also, that has to go on together for a balanced, Christ-like ministry in the body of Christ. The unfortunate thing is, very often, because of our perverted idea of what Christ-likeness is, we think that Christ-likeness is only the weeping over the city, and we can't see Christ-likeness as the whipping of the money changers as well. Christ-likeness is weeping and whipping at the right time.

Nehemiah knew how to weep, and he was burdened, he was concerned, and he says when he heard this, he wept, and he fasted, and he prayed. His own life was all right, he was quite comfortable, he had a high position. There he was respected by the greatest king of that day.

Imagine, it's like something like being very close to the President of the United States, or something like that, a very powerful person, Nehemiah, and there he was concerned about this dilapidated old city called Jerusalem. He was concerned about God's people, something like Moses. Even though he was brought up in the palace of Pharaoh, he was concerned, he wanted to be identified with God's people.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and to suffer affliction with the people of God as a more important thing than all that he could have in Egypt. Nehemiah had the same thing, and he fasted and he prayed. It's very interesting to see in our study through these books how fasting and praying comes regularly in Daniel, in Ezra, and in Nehemiah.

Very significant in that movement from Babylon back to Jerusalem. There was the fasting and praying, fasting and praying, fasting and praying of these men. They were concerned, they were burdened, and they were concerned about the glory of God's name.

I beseech thee, he said, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who preserves the covenant and loving kindness for those who love him and keep his commandments. How much, how very much different is the way Jesus taught us to pray when we come to God, saying, Our Father. But Nehemiah didn't know God as Father, yet there are many things we can learn from him.

The way he comes to God was fear and reverence, and he says, Let your ear now be attentive, your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant which I am praying before you now day and night on behalf of the sons of Israel, your servants. Notice what he's praying for. He's praying not that he'll get a promotion in his job.

He's praying for Jerusalem. He's concerned that the walls of Jerusalem are not built. He's burdened about that.

Think to be like that, brothers and sisters, like Jesus taught us to pray. He said, When you pray, say, Our Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Now, we have reacted against the parrot-like repetition that there is in the denominations of those prayers. And you know the danger of reaction is you fall over the cliff the other side. And the end result is we never pray that prayer, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

What do we pray? We say, Lord, I'd like a promotion in my job. I'd like healing for my sicknesses and these other needs in my family. And we have gone right over the cliff the other side.

And that's why we have to be careful that Jesus said that all our praying must be patterned after that prayer, where we are concerned about God's name being hallowed, God's kingdom coming, and God's will being done on earth as it is done in heaven. Nehemiah never knew that prayer, but he had that burden in his heart. God's name was dishonored, because there was all this compromise going on, no walls there, and the heathen were coming in, and the believers and the heathen had all got mixed up, because there were no walls of separation.

There was no authority there, no gates for the elders to sit in. And he was burdened. Lord, look at the condition of your people.

Look at the condition of those who call themselves the body of Christ in that locality. And he was burdened about that. And that's a good thing for us to ask ourselves whether we have that burden.

We have so much more in the New Covenant, and when we examine the content of most of our prayers, you know, it's often my experience that many, many places people come and ask me to pray for them. But what are they interested in me praying for them? Invariably, it is some earthly, material thing. Their whole life is occupied with earthly things, material things, to something here, something there, some earthly thing, and they don't realize their life is such a low spiritual level.

They never seem to realize about this problem, and that material thing, and this other material thing, this other physical problem. Now, Nehemiah wasn't thinking about all that. He wasn't weeping and praying because somebody had spoken evil about him or anything like that.

He was concerned about Jerusalem. He was not concerned about himself. He didn't want any promotion.

He wasn't looking for an increment. He wasn't thinking about God blessing his family in some way. He was concerned about Jerusalem.

And I tell you this, that is the meaning of seeking the kingdom of God first, and finding all the other things added to us. God wants to raise up a people who, if you open up their hearts, their greatest burden inside is not their family, not their job, not their comfort, but, Lord, we want your church to be built pure, preserve the church in purity. And I tell you, it's easy to understand a whole lot of doctrines, and to talk a whole lot of wonderful things when we come together.

And yet, deep down, the deepest burden of our heart may be my job, my family, my money, my this, that, and the other. Everything around that. Then we don't understand Nehemiah at all.

Then we can talk about a movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, and understand it all in theory, and never experience the reality of it in our own life. But we see here, he prayed on behalf of the sons of Israel. And he says, we have sinned against thee, the last part of verse 6. I and my father's house have sinned.

We have acted very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances, without its command thy servant Moses. Notice, he is burdened, he is concerned. And he says, Lord, we haven't kept your commandments.

Notice this right through all these verses, in verse 6 and 7. Notice this one thing that comes again and again. He is not, in verse 6 and 7, saying they are like this. But he says, Lord, I and my father's house have sinned.

We have acted corruptly. We have not kept your commandments. We have not kept your statutes or ordinances.

That's what I mean by building the walls and not becoming a Pharisee. We can build the walls and become Pharisees when we say they, not me, Lord. I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like other men.

You see, that's so easy. And this is where we have to be careful, that when we build the walls, we have the spirit of Nehemiah in building the walls, not the spirit of a Pharisee who looks down on others and

says, Oh God, I thank you that I'm not like all these religious humbugs who have sinned against you and have not kept the commandments. If Nehemiah had prayed like that, God could never have used him to build a wall.

He would have been a Pharisee. But he didn't pray like that. He was a man who built the wall high, but he was not a Pharisee.

And that's the balance. Not to be a Pharisee and yet to build the wall. There are two extremes here.

One is you don't have any walls and you're not Pharisees. The other extreme is you're a Pharisee and you build the wall. But Nehemiah didn't fall over either of these cliffs.

So I trust we understand what that means in practical terms. And this also is another thing which, if you remember, we saw in Daniel chapter 9, Ezra chapter 9, that in this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, you find there's a tremendous absence of Pharisees. Daniel was not a Pharisee.

He said, Oh God, we have failed. Ezra was not a Pharisee. He said, Oh God, we have failed.

And Nehemiah, exactly the same thing. God could never use Pharisees to build Jerusalem or the wall. Lord, we have come short.

They saw themselves as one body. If a man sees his brother's sin let him pray and God will give him life. That's what Nehemiah did.

And then he reminds God of his promises. He says, Lord, you have said that if we are unfaithful, verse 8, and we return to you and keep your commandments, that even if we are scattered to the remotest parts of heaven, you'll gather us and bring us back. And that's a wonderful thing to do when we come to God in prayer.

Lord, you have said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Why do we see the gates of hell prevailing here? Lord, do something about it. To be concerned and to be burdened.

Because God has promised something. Lord, you have said sin shall not have dominion over you. Why is it having dominion then? To plead the promises of God.

Say, Lord, didn't you say that you'll never leave us nor forsake us? Didn't you say that you'll always lead us in triumph in Christ? Why is it not fulfilled? That's how Nehemiah prayed. And then he says in verse 9, you said that you would bring them back, the last part of verse 9, to the place where you have chosen to cause your name to dwell. And we saw that in an earlier study, the place where God has chosen to place his name.

And that is the church. Those who are gathered in the name of Jesus Christ. Not in the name of some denomination, but in the name of Jesus Christ, where he has caused his name to dwell.

Those who are gathered together by the Holy Spirit unto his name. And they are thy servants. Notice something that comes five times in verse 10.

Thy and thou. Thy servants, thy people, thou didst redeem, thy great power, thy strong hand. He puts the responsibility all upon God and says, Lord, this is all concerning your kingdom, your name, and your will.

So you've got to do something about it. It's not my work, it's your work. And, O Lord, I beseech you, may your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and make your servant successful today, and grant him compassion before this man.

Notice what he calls the greatest king of the earth at that time. What does he call him? This man. Yeah, when he went before the king, he respected him as the king.

But when he prayed to the king of kings, he knew that this greatest king on earth was just another man before God. And that's another thing that we have seen in our study of this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. The emphasis in all these books, Daniel, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Ammihah, on the sovereignty of God.

And that's something that we need to bear in mind. You know, these things that come again and again and again in these books. The emphasis on the sovereignty of God.

God is ruler over all the kings and nations and people of the earth. This man is not such a great king in God's eyes. He's just another man.

And he says, Lord, I ask you to make your servant successful. In what I'm going to ask this man. He had faith that this man was the most powerful ruler of the world.

That the king's heart was in the hand of the Lord. God could turn it any way he wanted. And that's a faith that we need to have in the days in which we live.

When we deal with government authorities and all types of people. That God is sovereign. He rules over all people.

And that no one is so great that he's anything more than just another man before God. And we can pray like Nehemiah, Lord, grant me favor in the eyes of this man. The difference, of course, is that when most people think of that, they're usually thinking about some favor for themselves.

Ah, that's a good thing. I can go and ask God to move this man to do some favor for me. Usually for some earthly thing.

To get me some job or position or something like that. Nehemiah was not concerned for that. He was concerned about the sovereignty of God being exercised for the building of the church.

Quite a different thing. And that's where we need to have our mind. Lord, I want to see your sovereignty working for the building of your church.

And then it says here, it came about in the month Nisan, which is four months later. What we read of in chapter one. Verse one was in the month Kislu, which is four months earlier according to the Jewish calendar.

And so we see here that Nehemiah prayed and fasted. And this went on for a period of about four months. And he was burdened during those four months, concerned, waiting for the right opportunity when God would sovereignly open up a door for him to stand before the king.

Now we may think that's a very small thing, but if you have ever read the book of Esther, you see that even the queen could not easily come before the king. That if the queen walked in before the king, when

the king hadn't sent for her, she could even die. These Persian monarchs were pretty ruthless dictators, so that to get a favor from them really had to be a supernatural miracle of God.

And there had to be a sovereign moving of God, and Nehemiah had faith. Though he was only a cupbearer, not a queen or anything. And God would move.

And we see here, four months later, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. And here's a wonderful testimony that Nehemiah had. I had not been sad in his presence before.

That's a wonderful thing, when that can be said about us. Nehemiah's consistent testimony was that he was a man of joy. In fact, it's in the book of Nehemiah, chapter 8, verse 10, that that verse comes, that joy of the Lord is your strength.

He says, I was not sad in the presence of the king ever before. Maybe he had many problems, but that never made him sad, and how much more us in the new covenant. But now, he was sad.

And the king, God, and his sovereignty allowed the king to notice that, and he said, why is your face sad, though you are sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart, and I was very much afraid. And what was he sad about? And that's a good question for us to ask ourselves, that when our face is sad, why are we usually sad? Supposing Nehemiah had to say, well, oh king, somebody's told some false stories about me behind my back, and it's not true. Or my wife yelled at me this morning, and I'm feeling very sad.

Or somebody cheated me the other day of fifty rupees, and that's why I'm sad. Or my wife's cooking is not good, or some stupid garbage like that, being feeling sad. No, praise God that he didn't have to give any useless answer like that.

He said, I'm concerned because the walls of Jerusalem are not built. We can talk a hundred and one things, brothers and sisters, about the new covenant. We're not under the old covenant.

We are all far superior to Nehemiah and Elijah and Elisha. See, we're in the new covenant, and we can live in a delusion when we see that this man was never sad, except when it concerned the walls of Jerusalem not being built. I tell you, if that doesn't put us to shame for all the useless rotten things that we feel sad about, and just talk about new covenant in language, brothers and sisters, we should hang our heads in shame and mourn that sadness comes into our hearts for earthly things.

When Nehemiah, he said he was never sad. Don't you think he had any problems? You think he was a man who lived on the earth without any earthly problems? But he was never sad. He was concerned only because Jerusalem's walls were not built.

There's nothing else he had to weep about. No problem. He says, why shouldn't my face be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs lies desolate, and its gates have been consumed by fire? He wasn't bothered if somebody cheated him of money.

That's not what made him sad. The number of earthly things, brothers and sisters, that make us gloomy is a pretty good revelation of how much our heart is drunk with earthly things. Really.

Loss of money, something not according to my likes or dislikes, and likes there, and some comfort that I have lost, and there my heart is drunk with earthly things while I'm talking about the new covenant. That's

so easy. And we need to let a word of God like this rebuke us, and say, oh God, why in the world am I sad? And let me ask myself, if the king were to ask me, why is your face looking sad today? The next time we are sad we can think of King Artaxerxes standing in front of us and asking us, why are you looking so sad this morning? And we can ask ourselves whether our reply to the king will be the same as the reply of Nehemiah.

Lord, the church is not being built. And I tell you very often, that's not the reason. That's not the reason.

These people, we can say they were under the old covenant, but they had a fantastic life under the old covenant, I tell you that. A concern for the name of God. And that's the thing that constantly puts me to shame, as I study these Old Testament characters.

I say, Lord, how we can live in a world of delusion, talking new covenant theory, when these people had a life, a concern for the name of God. A man who was never sad for anything else, and now he's sad because the walls of Jerusalem are not built. What a man he was, Nehemiah.

No wonder God could use him. And though he's a high official in the palace of the greatest king of that time, he still identifies himself with that despised crowd out there in Jerusalem. He says, my people are over there, just like Moses, who chose rather to be identified with God's people than all this pomp and show in Egypt.

And Nehemiah identifies himself with them. Never be ashamed, brothers and sisters, of being known as one of God's people. And some of God's people, as we look around, are not very clever, not very smart, but they are our brothers and sisters.

And never be ashamed to be known as intimate friends with these down-and-out people on the earth whom God has picked up to be His. We don't want the sophisticated society of worldly Christianity. We want to be identified with God's people, which is a motley crowd of people who are barbarians and Scythians and crude in so many ways, but who've got a heart that fears God.

Never be ashamed to be identified with God's people. And then the king said to me, what would you request? And as soon as the king asked him, look at this man's dependence on God, it says he quickly shot up a prayer to God and said, oh God, just work now. The thing I've prayed for for four months, now is the time.

Give me the answer. A quick prayer, and he replied to the king, no confidence in himself. If it please the king, and if your servant has found favour before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my father's tombs, that I may rebuild it.

You see, this is the wonderful thing about Nehemiah. He didn't just sit there and criticize all those people out there saying they're doing nothing about it. One of those fellows has been sitting there for so many years, they haven't built a wall.

It's very easy to criticize. You know what he said? He said, send me. Just like Isaiah, chapter 6, we read when Isaiah saw the vision of God, and God said, whom shall I send? Isaiah said, Lord, here am I, send me.

I'm ready to go. It's inconvenient, I've got to change a lot of my plans, but I want to go. Wonderful.

That was the attitude that Nehemiah had. Send me, Lord. And he told the king, I'll go.

Now I tell you, to go from Susa, the capital, to Jerusalem, was like going from some posh, top class city in the western world, or something, to some jungle out in the middle of Africa, or something like that. It was something like that. To go to some primitive condition, and to go there just for the sake of the Lord.

It wasn't easy. It's easy to read that and not understand the situation. This man who was living such a posh life in the palace, to give up all that, and to go to that primitive place, and to go there to work with his hands, for the glory of God's name.

That really shows that he wasn't just sitting there in the easy chair, praying. He wanted to be there to do the work himself. Wonderful example.

And as I said, he didn't just criticize. He, as we read later on in the book, he went and built the wall. He had a burden in his heart, and he said, Lord, I'm available.

I'm willing to sacrifice my convenience, I'm willing to sacrifice my comfort, my ambitions in life. Maybe when I give up my job and go away for 10 or 12 years, or any period of time, even if it's a year, I lose my seniority, and somebody else will get promoted over me, and all these wretched, useless things that so many people think about. Nehemiah never thought about all that, about losing his seniority and not getting his increment on time.

If he went to Jerusalem for a year or two to build God's house, if he took leave of absence, and what his chances of promotion in the king's palace would be like, and all the things that go through the minds of so many people when it comes to the kingdom of God. It didn't occur to Nehemiah one bit. He wanted to honor God in his life, he couldn't care less about increment or seniority or promotion or any of that rotten garbage that so many people are bothered about.

He was concerned about God's house, and about the walls, that's all. Otherwise we'd never have heard of him. If he was the type of person like many believers are, who bother about their seniority and their increment, we'd never have heard of him.

That would mean somebody else's name here. And that's why God picks up somebody else instead of some believers who are not concerned about his kingdom first. Brothers and sisters, to seek his kingdom first means that in our mind, in our ambition, in our life, we're not concerned about these earthly things.

We're willing to sacrifice all of them, because we want to build God's house and his walls. They are first in our mind. And we don't just criticize, we do something about it.

That's a principle that we've got to bear in mind, that if we can't do something better than what somebody else has done, it's no use criticizing the other person. You see, it's very easy to criticize someone saying, well, they're not building the body of Christ there. Okay, maybe they are not.

The question is whether you are, whether you've built the body of Christ somewhere yourself. Otherwise, it's very easy to criticize. I've heard people who have never spoken in tongues even once in their whole life, lambasting all the Pentecostals and the Charismatics and say, these people who have all these counterfeit tongues and all, I say they don't have any understanding.

We have no right to criticize something which we haven't done better ourselves. Paul could correct the abuse of tongues in Corinth because he said, I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you. See, that's a principle we've got to bear in mind.

If I have done something in a better way, in a godly way, in a scriptural way, then I have the right to correct another person who is doing it in a wrong way. Otherwise, I'm just talking theory. We can criticize a lot of things which we are not doing ourselves in any better way.

Nehemiah was not like that. He didn't just criticize them. He said, let me go and build it.

Let me demonstrate rather than criticize. And he built. And that's what we need to do in a place.

We go to a place and if God raises up somebody in some place who is burdened about the lack of a pure testimony in his locality, it's no use just going around and criticizing all the other groups there. No, that's not the answer. The answer is, build something, brother.

Build something better so that there's a demonstration of the body of Christ rather than a criticism of all the other groups around. That's what we always need to say. And it's no use saying, oh, the Pentecostals, they just don't speak in tongues properly.

Well, if they don't, let's do it properly in our assembly and show how it should be done. That's the best way. Always that's the best way.

In every area. To do it the proper way, and if he can't do it the proper way, then just to keep quiet and say, well, that's a subject which I can't talk about because I've got no experience. Nehemiah built the wall.

He didn't just criticize. He said, send me. I'll go and build it.

I won't just sit here and criticize. And then the king said to me, and notice this phrase, the queen sitting beside him. That was God's sovereign ordering.

The moods of the king are in God's hands. God made sure the king was in a good mood that day, and even the queen could be there, and Nehemiah could get the answer that he wanted. I tell you, God is so sovereign, he controls the moods of the king.

The mood the senior officer is in at a particular time when you walk in. It's wonderful to believe that. And then the king asked him, how long will your journey be, and when will you return? He said, please the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time.

And then since Nehemiah had influence with the king, he decided to use his influence for the building of God's city. He said, all right, now I'm going to use my influence here with the king. And he said, if it pleases the king, let letters be given me for the governors beyond the river, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress, for the wall of the city.

And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was upon me. There was a man who was willing to use his position of influence for the glory of God. He said, yeah, God's put me in this place, I'm going to use this influence and position God has given me for the furthering of God's work.

That's a good example to follow. And then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the river and gave them the king's letters, and the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. And then, notice, as soon as this happens, the opposition begins.

Here's a man who has come to build the walls of Jerusalem, and as soon as Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem, everything was quiet and peaceful there. Everybody was talking about loving one another and being gentle and good and being merciful to one another and all this. And here, Nehemiah comes along, and he says, we're going to build the walls now.

And then that stirs up all these people. Sanballat, the Horonite, that is a Moabite, a town of Moab, from a town of Moab, a Moabite, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, heard about it. And it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.

They said, look at this troublemaker. Here we are sitting quietly and talking about loving one another and being merciful to one another and all that, and here this man comes along and talks about building a wall of separation, about being exclusive. Pharisees.

I'm sure they called Nehemiah by a few names like that. It didn't disturb Nehemiah one bit. He just went on.

But this is something which is so true to life, and it's very interesting that the people who oppose Nehemiah are called, they were a Moabite and an Ammonite. Now, it says in Nehemiah chapter 13, Nehemiah chapter 13, verse 1, that God had commanded that Ammonites, they read in the book of Moses, Nehemiah 13, verse 1, that there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. So Nehemiah was going to make sure that Sanballat and Tobiah wouldn't enter anywhere near the assembly of God according to God's law given by Moses, and there's a reason for that, and there's a spiritual lesson here.

Moab and Ammon were, if you read Genesis chapter 18 or 19, were the sons of Lot, the illegitimate sons of Lot that he had through his own daughters. And we could say that they were bastards, that means illegitimate sons. And they are a picture of nominal Christians.

Not real sons, but pretending to be sons. Illegitimate children. Do you know that the real bastards in the world are the nominal Christians? I'm not saying that to insult anyone, but that's the meaning of a bastard, an illegitimate child.

One who is not a legitimate son. Those are the Moabites and the Ammonites. They're the ones who get all worked up because we emphasize the fact that you've got to be born again.

You're finished with all this nominal Christianity just because you hang a cross around your neck and wear a purple dress doesn't make you a man of God. And then the Moabites and the Ammonites, the leaders among them, particularly the bishops who are unconverted, these represent these unconverted bishops. They get all worked up when we speak about all this and build the walls of separation.

And it's very relevant to our situation today. People who have never had an experience of being born again, born of the Holy Spirit, of putting out the old man and repentance, real repentance, they are nominal believers also these days. People who claim to be believers, never repented of their sins, never put out the old man even once in their life.

These are the Moabites and the Ammonites, illegitimate children, claiming to be real sons. The word of God says they have no place in God's assembly. Well, they were disturbed.

And we see later on that they began to oppose Nehemiah. He was not bothered. He came to Jerusalem.

He was there for three days, thinking. He didn't move hastily. You know Proverbs 29, verse 20 says the biggest fool in the world is the one who moves hastily.

Well, Nehemiah wasn't in that category. He came there and he waited three days. He arose in the night.

He took a few men. He didn't tell anyone, verse 12, what God was putting into his mind. And he just went around looking at Jerusalem.

It's very interesting what he says here. I did not tell anyone what God was put into my heart. Now, if Nehemiah was like a lot of Christian workers today, the first thing he would have done was cyclostyle or print out a few prayer letters to be sent to America about his burden for the walls of Jerusalem.

But Nehemiah wasn't that category of person. He wasn't sending his photographs and his prayer letters all around saying, I've got a burden, brothers, for the walls of Jerusalem. He says he didn't tell a single soul what God had laid in his heart.

And that's the mark of a man of God. He doesn't go around advertising reports about his burdens and his work. He just keeps it before God in silence and he does the job without anybody in America or anywhere else knowing about it, because he doesn't want their money.

This is how Christian work is corrupted and Babylon has come right into the midst of Christianity. But Nehemiah was not that type. He kept quiet.

He could keep quiet about it. God had laid a burden on his heart and he never told anybody about it. He just carried it as a burden before God.

And he surveyed Jerusalem, we read. He went out at night by the valley gate in the direction of the dragon's well and on to the refuse gate, verse 13, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates were consumed by fire. He wanted to see for himself.

He didn't want to just live by a report he heard. He wanted to see for himself and take that burden before God. And he passed on through the fountain gate, the king's pool.

There was no place for his animal to pass there. So he went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then he entered the valley gate again and returned.

And the officials did not know. He didn't send any reports of his work or his burden. Where he had gone or what he had done.

Nor had he told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who did the work. And once he surveyed the place and he sought to identify whom can I call to be co-workers. He knew that he can't call anybody and everybody.

And that's why he went about it slowly. There are so many people who are in such a hurry to do God's work. They gather the wrong people, set up an organization and build another Babylonian denomination.

But Nehemiah didn't do that. And then he called certain people who he knew would respond to his burden. And he told them, the situation is bad.

We are in. Not you are in. We are in.

He identifies himself with them and he says, the situation is bad. Jerusalem is desolate. Come, let us rebuild the wall.

You and I. Let's rebuild the wall. Let we no longer be a reproach. And he told them then, these few people whom he gathered together, about the burden he had and about how the kings had spoken graciously because of God's hand being upon, favorable to him.

He gives the glory to God. And he says, let's arise and build. So they put their hands to the good work.

But there were the people who opposed Sanballat, Tobiah. And they got one more person there to join them. They mocked us, despised us.

Said, what is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king? He didn't waste his time discussing with them. He just said, God is going to help us.

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