

The Commission of the Cupbearer #3

Nehemiah 2: 1-10

Chapter one opened with an introduction to Nehemiah as he received the desperate news from Jerusalem. He was far from the despair and need of the devastated city and yet he was consumed with a burden for the homeland and the people of God. The devastating news caused Nehemiah to offer a humbling, heartfelt prayer unto the Lord.

In our text this evening some time has passed, but Nehemiah cannot forget the news he had received. The burden for Jerusalem has grown stronger and he is determined to do what he can to help in their time of need. The prayer that he prayed unto the Lord had not fallen on deaf ears or gone unheeded. God was about to present Nehemiah with the opportunity to return to Jerusalem and carry out the work that He had placed within his heart.

The walls of the great city had been torn down for some 150 years. During that time God had not forgotten the covenant with His people. The time had come for the walls to be rebuilt and God had His man. Nehemiah was about to receive the commission he needed to carry out the enormous task of rebuilding the walls.

As we think of the plight of God's people and the burden of Nehemiah, we see many similarities to the world in which we live. We are not so much concerned with physical walls, but the spiritual walls of our great land that are in a terrible state of disrepair and there seems to be little interest in reconstruction. I can assure you that this is not pleasing unto the Lord. He is looking for those who will rise to the occasion and seek to rebuild that which has been torn down. Who will accept the call and seek to restore the foundations?

There is great truth in the passage we have read this evening. I want to consider the [realities of service](#) as we think on: [The Commission of the Cupbearer](#).

I. The Countenance of Nehemiah (1-3) – These verses reveal much about the heart and commitment of Nehemiah. Notice as we consider his countenance:

A. The Season Described (1a) – [And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him:](#) On the surface that may seem insignificant, but when we look more closely we discover that four months had passed since Nehemiah first heard of the devastation in Jerusalem. It was then the month [Chisleu](#), [Chp. 1:1](#), or in our calendar December. It is now the month [Nisan](#) or our April. This reveals several things that we need to consider.

- First of all the passing of time had not changed the burden that Nehemiah had. In fact, as time passed the burden grew stronger. It is impossible to ignore the call and work of God, hoping that with the passing of time that it will fade away.
- Also we see that Nehemiah was patient and waited upon the Lord. He had a burden for Jerusalem, but he was determined to wait upon the Lord and allow Him to work it out in His time. Sometimes we just need to wait upon the Lord. If He has revealed a work for you to do and the door has not opened yet, wait patiently. Rest assured that God has not forgotten; He is likely orchestrating things so that your work will be more productive and according to His will.
- I also considered the goodness of God in all of this. The delay may have created some doubt and concern in the hearts of Nehemiah and his brethren, but God was working for their good. The delay kept Nehemiah from Jerusalem in the winter months and allowed him to travel and begin the work in spring. It also allowed him some time to plan and prepare for the work ahead. We need to be reminded that a delay is not necessarily a denial. God knows far better what we need than we do and we would do well to wait upon Him and follow His lead.

B. The Sadness Displayed (1b-2) – [Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. \[2\] Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid](#), As Nehemiah continued to serve as the royal cupbearer these four months, his physical countenance began to change. The king observed a difference in Nehemiah and perceived that it was nothing but sorrow of heart.

- Now, this had the potential to be devastating for the average servant of a king. They were expected to be happy in the presence of royalty. A sad countenance was considered a negative reflection toward the king and was often punished by demotion or even death. Nehemiah had a great position; he was cared for by the king, and as far as we can tell, had all that a man could desire.
- The striking point here is the fact that a man cannot be happy unless he is doing what he knows the Lord desires of him. Nehemiah had received a burden for Jerusalem and even though all of his needs were met in Persia, only being in Jerusalem would satisfy the longing in his heart. We may have all that one could desire as far as the world is concerned, but if we are not where God would have us be, doing the work He has called us to do, happiness will elude us. I know those who have tried to cover up the call of God with material possessions and even activities or other means, but they are miserable because they have ignored God's call.

C. The Supplication Disclosed (3) – [And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?](#)

Nehemiah did not try to hide the truth from Artaxerxes. He was a man of courage and integrity. He had no way of knowing how the king would respond, but he could no longer be happy dwelling in the lap of luxury while the city of God lay in ruin and his brethren were in need. He reveals that his true heart's desire is to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

- We need those with a heart like Nehemiah's in our day. So many among us are aware of the great needs of our day. They see the devastation and despair, but few really feel for those who stand in need or have a desire to make a difference. I pray that God would so move among us that we could no longer live lives of ease and plenty while the world around us continues to move closer to an endless eternity without God. How can we receive the abundance that He has given and not desire to share that with others?

I. The Countenance of Nehemiah (1-3)

II. The Commitment of Nehemiah (4-6) – These verses reveal Nehemiah's commitment to the work of the Lord regardless of the cost or inconvenience. Let's consider some of the attributes of his commitment. Notice:

A. His Prayer (4) – *Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.* The king asked what Nehemiah had on his mind; what is it that you desire to do? Keep in mind the possibility of punishment for such a request. Nehemiah knew the burden he had for Jerusalem. He knew that God had burdened him for the work there. He knew that if he was to have the opportunity to return, God would have to make a way. He immediately prayed to the Lord before he responded to the king. Nehemiah was committed to the work and he depended upon the Lord.

- That is a simple truth that we need to take to heart. There is much activity today, but how much of it is earnestly bathed in prayer? We talk of our assurance in the Lord, but how often do we seek His guidance in our lives? We look at situations and assume there is no way, but we fail to ask God to make a way. If God has placed a burden on our hearts, He will make a way, but we need to be in continual prayer before Him.

B. His Plan (5-6) – *And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me;*

and I set him a time. We don't have the benefit of the details of this conversation, but it is apparent that Nehemiah had thought it out and had a plan. He set the king a time. He knew what needed to be done, how he wanted to approach it, and an idea of how long it would take.

- I fear that many of us are so accustomed to church work and its activities that we give little thought to what it is we are actually doing. Much of the work that is being done in the average church today is being done "off the cuff" or by the "seat of our pants" so to speak. We spend very little time praying unto the Lord about specific needs and ministries and we often jump into something with little thought or preparation. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing right! We need to take the time to pray and seek the Lord about everything we do and make plans to fulfill our calling to the best of our ability.

I. The Countenance of Nehemiah (1-3)

II. The Commitment of Nehemiah (4-6)

III. The Commission of Nehemiah (7-10) – Here we find that Artaxerxes agreed to Nehemiah's request and commissioned him for the work. There is a great parallel to the commission we have received and the power behind that commission. Consider:

A. His Authority (7) – Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; Nehemiah made a request for an official letter of commission from the king revealing his authority and approval for the work and that was granted. Nehemiah had the benefit of working with the authority of the king and the backing of the kingdom.

- The work we have been called to perform is not expected or carried out in and of ourselves. We have the authority of the Lord behind us and the backing of His kingdom. We have no reason to hang our heads or be timid about our work. We are carrying out the official business of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Eph.3:12 – In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Heb.10:19-22 – Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, [20] By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; [21] And having an high priest over the house of God; [22] Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

B. His Ability (8a) – [And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into.](#) Nehemiah was not sent out with only well wishes from the king. He was sent with a letter to the keeper of the king's forest to provide whatever he needed for the task at hand. God, through Artaxerxes, provided the materials he needed to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem.

- If I were depending upon my own ability and resources, the work of God would be discouraging, but I am resting in the abundance of my Lord. He has called me and He will equip me. He will always provide that which we need to serve Him. That isn't to say that we won't be asked to give of ourselves or sacrifice for the work, but God will make provision for His own. There is no task too great for the Lord to handle. He has all the resources we need.

C. His Liberty (8b) – [And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.](#) The king granted every request that Nehemiah made according to the good hand and working of the Lord. Everything that God had put in his heart to do was provided for. Nehemiah was not hindered for lack of resources or ability. He had liberty to carry out the work.

- We will face difficulty and hindrances as we labor for the Lord, but we have full liberty in Him. As long as we seek to serve the Lord, according to His will, we have the comfort and assurance of His leading and provision. God will make a way. He will open doors that no man can shut, and He will close doors that no man can open.

D. His Security (9) – [Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.](#) Nehemiah was not sent without the assurance of a safe journey. He went with the official commission of the king and he even enjoyed captains and soldiers to provide safe passage. He could rest assured that he would make it to Jerusalem.

- What comfort we have in the word of God. We too are secure in Him. God has called us to it and He will see us through it. The God we serve is more than able to keep us in the journey and provide safe passage! [Eph.4:30 – And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.](#) [Rom.8:31 – What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?](#) [1 Jn.4:4 – Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.](#)

E. His Adversity (10) – [When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the](#)

children of Israel. As we will discover, not everyone was pleased with the work Nehemiah desired to do. Even though he had the king's commission and a determination to complete the work, he was not shielded from opposition or adversity.

- We too will face adversity as we seek to live for the Lord and accomplish that which He has called us to do, but we must not let that deter us from fulfilling our obligations. As we study the life and work of Nehemiah we will find great encouragement and guidance for dealing with opposition. We are not the first to be opposed. The world and those who reject the Lord will not be pleased with our efforts, but we must continue on even when it gets tough!

I am sure that these verses have spoken to hearts this evening. I was greatly challenged as I studied this passage. As I consider the life of Nehemiah I see a man who was willing to stand for truth at all costs and willing to make the necessary sacrifices to serve the Lord. He was willing to roll up his sleeves and get busy doing what God had called him to do.

Are we doing what the Lord desires of us? Are we seeking His guidance and help as we serve Him? Are we resting in His ability or are we trying to make our own way and achieve the results we desire? I pray that we will submit our lives to the will of God and be willing to follow wherever He leads!