

READING

Nehemiah 2:11-20

Planning the Project (Nehemiah 2:11-20)

Imagine you have been on a long journey – say about four hours. What is the first thing that you do when you come home? Most of us will sit down and have a cuppa, and a rest. Well, Nehemiah was no different. He had been travelling not for four hours, or for four days, but for four months. He had not travelled on nice roads, but he and his group had been travelling through inhospitable territory at the rate of about nine or ten miles a day. Seems a short mileage, but at present there is a programme called

Ben Fogle's Extreme Dreams

And this week the group with Ben Fogle having been trekking in the Himalayas and making about 8 miles a day and often arriving late at their daily arrival point. So Nehemiah's nine or ten is not so bad when you think that every night they had to erect tents, cook a meal, and then in the morning they had to break camp, pack everything away before they began that day's journey.

Rested

So when Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he had a cuppa and put his feet up which lasted for three days. He rested. This was exactly the same thing as Ezra had done before him, when he had arrived at Jerusalem. As Ezra says

“On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. So we arrived in Jerusalem, where we rested three days.”

(Ezra 8:31-32 NIV)

It is important to have times of rest and relaxation. One is never as good tired as when one is rested. I have found that over the years if I am doing a job, especially a DIY job, and I begin to get tired that I begin to make mistakes, my judgement goes awry and so the job takes longer and longer because I am having to undo previous actions because I have done it wrong. I then find it far better to leave the job, sit down, have a cuppa and rest. But it is not a time to switch off completely because I continue to think about the job in hand and wonder if I am doing it the easiest way.

We all need times of rest and relaxation. For some that is sitting in a chair, for others it is gardening or going for a walk. Whatever rests you, you need to do. God designed us so that we have one day of rest in seven, so we can work the other six in the week – we do not work for six to earn a day's rest.

For Nehemiah, he was resting and replenishing himself, but I've no doubt that he was also listening to people around him. He would have had those who came with him, but he would probably be meeting those who were there before him, or some who had never left, had always been there and Nehemiah was important and people would be speaking to him and he would be taking it all in.

Reccied

Then Nehemiah needs to find out the problem, so he goes for a Reccy. And notices he does this with a very small group and at under cover of darkness. Also, apart from himself, every one else is on foot. This would mean a quieter group. And notice what Nehemiah said about himself, verse 12

“I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.” (Nehemiah 2:12 NIV)

I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. At times it is right to keep one's counsel. To see a problem and then to work out one or more possible solutions. For Nehemiah he wanted to see for himself what the problem, what God had asked him to do, what God had put on his heart to do. For Ezra before him, his priority was the Temple, for Nehemiah he went outside the city to look at the walls from the outside.

The walls were the defence of the city and also they gave image. In Deuteronomy we read a report of the spies sent out to look at the Promised Land, the designation of the people and they said talking of the places they had seen

“...‘The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky...’” (Deuteronomy 1:28 NIV)

The walls were a statement of the defence of the city. So Nehemiah goes out and sees for himself. He does go round the whole wall, only the southern tip from the Valley Gate, round to the Fountain Gate and King's Pool and then back.

What a problem! The walls broken down, the gates all burnt, some places were impassable because of the rubbish. We are told that in verse 13 to 15

“By night I went out through the Valley Gate towards the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on towards the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and re-entered through the Valley Gate.” (Nehemiah 2:13-15 NIV)

This must have seemed like an overwhelming task. To me today we have an overwhelming task. We are told by Jesus to

“... go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19 NIV)

How can we do that? How can we help the Kingdom of God grow? Yes, I know it is God's work, but we are called by God to work alongside him in this venture. As we shall learn shortly, Nehemiah was not alone in the situation in Jerusalem, we too have each other, we too are working alongside God, having been called of God to do this. It seems daunting, especially as we live in a society where Christianity is on the decline, but where spirituality is on the increase. We can buck national trends here at ADBC, but we need to spread the gospel, by talking to friends, to relatives, to neighbours.

Again with this building – we know it needs a lot of work spent on it, but do we sit and say it is too much, or do we allow a building to appear to be in disrepair – what image does that give of God? What image did the broken walls and burnt gates of Jerusalem give about the God that he inhabitants of Jerusalem had followed?

So after Nehemiah had rested and reccied, he then

Reported

This was the time for the wider populace to know. We are not told who the ‘them’ is in verse 17

“Then I said to them, ...” (Nehemiah 2:17 NIV)

Was this the group that went out with him? Were others added to that group? We do not know, but it seems as if others were added to the group and Nehemiah spells out the problem. Verse 17

“Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."” (Nehemiah 2:17 NIV)

Nehemiah spelt out the problem, gave the solution and the reason why the solution. Everyone could see the problem, and so often people can, but they cannot see past the problem – the problem overwhelms them and a sort of paralysis sets in. Solution was obvious, in a way, **“Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem”**. What could be simpler? But then I have no doubt that others thought that and dismissed it as being too big, too much, too expensive, unworkable. All the details that had to be overcome were too big, too many. But with God all things are possible. If the group that founded ADBC in 1929 had thought that way, then we would not be here, this morning, in this building.

Nehemiah also says two other things

1. Firstly he tells them why the walls have to be rebuilt. So that **we will no longer be in disgrace**. Not that he wanted the best for himself, but he realised that their disgrace brought disgrace upon God. When you were taken over by someone else, you were conquered by them, then their god was obviously greater and better than your god. That is how the mindset, the worldview at that time was. The broken walls and burnt gates were constant reminders of that thinking and also anyone at anytime could just walk into Jerusalem, further confirming that their god was more powerful than the god of the Hebrews.
2. And he also told them of how God had been with him. Verse 18

“I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me...” (Nehemiah 2:18 NIV)

Nehemiah relayed his story. The story we have read in the chapter 1 and the early part of chapter 2. Hopefully here this morning there are many, many stories of what God has done for you which encourages you to move forward.

In the last church we were in, the church needed to expand and build a new hall. The one already there was too small when we had outreach events. The cost of the project was some £45,000. We had just built some toilets and revamped the kitchen and so money was tight. As a membership we had discussed it, prayed about it, the last piece in the jigsaw, so to speak was how do we pay for it? Then, a non-member who had been with his firm when it was a workforce of six had been given some shares when they were worth 4p. Now his firm were doing something with the shares which had risen in value, along with the size of the company and the workforce, and the shares were now worth 147p, an increase of over 3,500 per cent. He got a windfall from the firm and gave that to the church – and the windfall was £45,000.

God does not always provide money in that way, but that gives me confidence for the future with God. The way God had brought Nehemiah to Jerusalem was also nothing short of a miracle, so he had confidence for the future.

Reacted

So we had that Nehemiah Rested, he Reccied, he Reported, and then came the people Reacted. Second half of verse 18

“... They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.”

(Nehemiah 2:18 NIV)

They had heard the report, they knew why they needed to start building, they heard how God had been with Nehemiah and so they vowed to begin. We too need to begin on all three of the fronts that we are building for the future

- The Building – the bricks and mortar
- The Kingdom – going out and talking to people
- The Personal – building up our own spiritual lives

We know that God is there and we know that God can do it, on all three fronts, but we do need to begin **this good work**.

But then we have the

Ridiculed

There is always someone to pour water on your parade. We have the trio, two of who we have met before in verse 10 where we read

“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.” (Nehemiah 2:10 NIV)

But now we have three of them, verse 19

“But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"” (Nehemiah 2:19 NIV)

It seems as if they all had something to lose.

- Sanballat’s objection were from a political standpoint because he was losing a territory to govern.
- Tobiah’s objections were from a religious sensibilities. It is thought by some that he should have been approached to rebuild the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, especially when you know that his name means *Yahweh is good*.
- And finally Geshem the Arab. His reasons were materialistic. It is thought that he had a lucrative trade in myrrh and frankincense and that rebuilding the walls would interfere with his trade.

Three people, all not wanting the walls rebuilt, so ridiculed the project and made false accusations. Whenever the church of God moves, there is ridicule, there is unfavourable spin, there may even be lies and threats. But then we need to do what Nehemiah did.

Refuted

He refuted. Verse 20

“I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.” (Nehemiah 2:20 NIV)

Any success is due to God, not us. It is right that he gives God the glory and the success but then he goes on to tell the trio that they have no part to play in the rebuilding. When our daughters were younger we went several times on holiday with some friends and their family to North Wales. We always went to the same church, it was an Anglican church which we found fed us all. One year I picked up a magazine and read an article written by the vicar. It was about the other church where he also was vicar. The article said that the church was closing because the building had fallen into disrepair and was dangerous to meet in. The article then went on to say that he had received many letters from people saying that it was a disgrace that the church was closing and why were not repairs carried out to the building to keep it open. The vicar reminded the people in the article that if all of those who had written had been in church every week, contributing to the offering, then the church would have remained open.

We need to listen to God, to think seriously about our buildings, the Kingdom of God and our own Personal spiritual lives. All of these need Building for the Future. We would like to think that we will not face opposition – but Satan at least will oppose us. But I know God is a God of miracles and Sue and I have seen it happen. God can overcome all and we shall see as we move through what someone has called the memoirs of Nehemiah how this is accomplished with God and his people working together.