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Nehemiah Part 3
Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem
Arrival and Opposition / Nehemiah 2:9-16

Review:

Jerusalem is attacked and destroyed by the Babylonians 141 years earlier.

The Jewish people are **killed or sent into exile** as slaves.

The **Persian's conquer the Babylonians** and take back Jerusalem.

Ezra the scribe has been in Jerusalem for 13 years **re-establishing Jewish tradition and Mosaic law**.

Nehemiah, a Jewish slave, is **1000 miles away** in Susa working as the **Cupbearer to King Artaxerxes**.

Nehemiah is **troubled by the news** of Jerusalem and the suffering of his people.

He mourns and laments and **prays for 4 months**. **Praying and planning** as to how he can help his people.

At the right moment he asks King Artaxerxes for favor, men, materials and time off work to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall and fortify the gates of the city.

Artaxerxes gives him everything he asks including a military escort and letters of passage through the kingdom to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:9-11 *Then I came to the governors of the province **Beyond the River** and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me **officers of the army and horsemen**. But when **Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant** heard this, **it displeased them greatly** that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.*

***So I went to Jerusalem** and was there three days.*

So I Went: This is another example of Nehemiah's **godly leadership**. He actually **went**. Nehemiah traveled the nearly 1000 miles from Susa to Jerusalem to **do the work** of **rebuilding the walls** and the **people**.

Many of us **have a heart** that is **touched** like Nehemiah's. We may also have the **heart for prayer**, the wisdom, the vision, the plan and the faith of someone like Nehemiah. But many times we **stop short** of actually going out and **doing** what **needs to be done** for that **goal to become a reality**.

Sometimes we **substitute talking about** something for **actually doing it**. It is one thing to stand around with other believers and **talk about** sharing your faith. **Praying** about it, **planning** it, **talking about** it. It is another thing to **actually do something about it**. God is in the **doing** of the thing. Our prayer and planning **mean nothing** if we don't eventually **take action**.

Our **spiritual enemies** don't really pay us any attention, as long as **all** we do is plan and pray and talk. But when God's people **start doing something**, these spiritual enemies take notice. It's in these **times of opposition** that we need to remember where the plan came from and who is behind it. Was it our **own made up selfish idea** or was it consecrated through prayer and God's wisdom? And how can you tell?

Here is how you can know. Whether you are sure about the spiritual foundation of your plan or not...PRAY! God will make it known to you. Use scripture and the aid of **trusted believers** to confirm the worthiness of the plan. And then pray.

Notice I said trusted believers. We all have friends that may be believers but don't necessarily have the gifting to be helpful in this process. Be wise in who you choose to share your plan.

The key is to **always be in prayer** about each and **every step of the plan**. Usually our human **version of God's leading** is not spot on. God will **help us along the way to correct the plan** so that it **fulfills His purpose**. Many times we can pray and plan and begin the **process of action** and throughout that course we may be **re-directed by God's leading**. Sometimes we won't know the final destination of a plan given by God until we actually **get there**. And it is always better...sweeter than what our original plan was in the first place.

What does it mean when the plan doesn't work out? Amway: separated me from my dope smoking friends, Subway: Humbled me so God could begin a new work in me.

And here is a practical tip: It's hard to steer a bicycle that is not moving. We've got to **get moving** and continually **submit ourselves in humility** before our Lord and He will lead us (**steer the bicycle**) and He will **bring the increase according to His perfect will**.

Beyond the River

This means "**beyond the Euphrates River**," an important landmark that separated one region from another. Once a traveler crossed the river, they were on the road to the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem. At this point Nehemiah spoke to the **governors** of this region who ruled under the Persians.

Gave them the king's letters: Nehemiah came prepared. He had letters showing he was truly sent by the king. He had **captains of the army and horsemen** with him. He also had **substantial supplies of lumber from the king's forest**. The king of Persia had responded to Nehemiah's invitation to **become a partner** in the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

God will use many different kinds of people to fulfill His will. They may be followers of Christ or not. Be aware of how God can use those around you to complete the plan he has put in your heart. But don't beat down doors or people. Let God bring you favor and when he does, act on it.

Sanballat the Horonite . . . Tobiah the Ammonite: At the governor's station, Nehemiah met these two enemies of Jerusalem and others who cared for the welfare of the city. **They were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.**

These two cared nothing as long as Jerusalem was **weak and vulnerable**. Some think that Sanballat and Tobiah held some kind of political interest in the city and were threatened by the prospect of Israel's rebuilding of the city and its strength. They didn't even mind that the temple was there, and worship conducted...there really was no problem. God's people could pray and plan as much as they wanted... as long as they **didn't take any action**.

Notice when this opposition came: not at the **heart stage**, not at the **vision stage**, not at the **prayer stage**, not at the **planning stage**, but when they started to **do something** about it.

Many believers **fear** stepping out in response to God's leading because they know **opposition will come against them**. They somehow think their **life will be better or easier** if they stay in their **mediocre state before God**. What deception! A better life from holding back from Jesus Christ? **Tough times are going to come anyway**. But when we are growing and **moving forward in Christ**, we are far **better equipped** to deal with the **people and circumstances** that come **against us**.

Psalm 37:1-9 Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!

[2] For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

[3] Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.

[4] Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

[5] Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.

[6] He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

[7] Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

[8] Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

[9] For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

I used to think that if God made the plan then there would be **smooth sailing ahead**. God made the plan and so it must be perfect in every way and no opposition will come against it. God made the plan so all the ducks will be lined up and ready to shoot. God made the plan so all I have to do is put my pants on in the morning and things will go according to.... God's plan.

This is definitely **flawed thinking**. All through scripture we see that God uses situations and circumstances to teach us, humble us and refine our character so that all glory will be given to our most holy God.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Here is something else: **Opposition** to our obedience is not always **overt and obvious**. In fact many times opposition comes in the **very subtle ways**. Here are a few to watch for:

Physical fatigue: Physical fatigue can keep you from taking action or following through.

Mental fatigue: When we allow our mind to continual spin on situations and circumstances.

Emotional fatigue: When we are continually overwhelmed by our feelings.

It's our responsibility to do the best we can to take care of our body and mind so that we are ready to fulfill the work we are called to. Everyone has a different energy level. Energy levels change with age, health, stage of life. But it is our duty, no matter our energy level or available time, to appropriate our efforts so that our service for Christ continues to take a priority in our lives.

Some of us might say "**but I just don't have a desire to serve**". In that case, we need to get on our knees and **ask God, why?** Ask Him to show us the **sinful obstacle** that stands in the way of our heart being responsive to God's calling. **Yes I said sinful**. Think about it: if you don't have a desire to serve Christ where do you think the disconnection is coming from? Do you think it comes from Jesus? Do you think Jesus is saying "It's all good... you don't have to serve me. You work hard and you're tired... that's cool"? "I didn't really mean all that stuff I said in scripture. That was for everyone else, you're special, and have special circumstances... take a break... you deserve it". Or do you think it comes from you and your sinful nature?

Fatigue can lead to depression and a lack of desire to do the work of God. It also leads to the perceived need of "time away" or "time off". I'm not talking about a regular Sabbath and times of vacation and rest. I'm talking about a daily life attitude that calls for repeated events of personal pleasure. Always looking to the next day off, social event, shopping, fishing trip, camping, Hawaii, Mexico, boating, snowmobiling, skiing, travel, snowboarding. Even just hanging with friends can become an idol that is exalted above the knowledge and work of God.

These things are not bad in and of themselves and we all need to take a Sabbath weekly as well as vacations and time away from the regular day to day. But when you weigh the events on your calendar against one another, which events take priority? When you put your personal comfort against serving our Lord, which choice usually wins? When Jesus says take up your cross... he doesn't mean it's vacation time.

Here is a fact of life: We always have time for the things we **want** to do.

Four and a half years ago I did not like the idea of loving the city of Everett. I just plain didn't have the desire. Even two years ago I continued to struggle. But I was encouraged by Mike Rydman and other leaders and mentors in my life to pray that God would give me the desire to do and be what He wanted from me. It has taken time and effort and a seeking after God that has been more intense than any time in my life. And you know what God did? He gave me the desire. He gave me His thoughts about the city. His thoughts about the lost. His heart for this city.

Nehemiah makes a secret tour of Jerusalem and her walls.

Nehemiah 1:11-16 *So I went to Jerusalem and was **there three days**. Then **I arose in the night**, I and a **few men with me**. And I **told no one** what my God had put into my heart to **do for Jerusalem**. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the **Valley Gate** to the Dragon Spring and to the **Dung Gate**, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were **broken down** and its **gates that had been destroyed by fire**. Then I went on to the **Fountain Gate** and to the **King's Pool**, but there was **no room for the animal that was under me to pass**. Then I went up in the night by the valley and **inspected the wall**, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. **And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing**, and I **had not yet told** the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.*

So I went to Jerusalem: After being in Jerusalem **three days**, Nehemiah still did not tell anyone why he is there and what God has put on his heart. *And I **told no one** what my God had put into my heart to **do for Jerusalem**.*

When Nehemiah entered Jerusalem with a **military escort** and **lumber** from the king of Persia's forest, people would notice him - but he **didn't say anything** about his mission until the time was right. Mature believers have an understanding of God's timing.

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, full of heart, full of prayer, full of faith, full of wisdom, full of a big vision, full of support from the king, and finally gets to his destination - and he did nothing for three days.

It was obviously a long trip, several months. Maybe he rested and prayed and recovered from the journey. But to take 3 days off right at the beginning seems odd, unless you are sure of yourself and your mission. He seemed to have confidence in the plan God had given him and the resources He had provided. He was not fanatical or in a big hurry. He was consistent and persistent. He stayed the course and kept moving forward.

I told no one:

"You will often find it best not to commit your plans to others. If you want to serve God, go and do it, and then let other people find it out afterwards. You have no need to tell what you are going to do, and, I may add, there is no need for you retelling what you have done, for very, very frequently God withdraws himself when we boast of what is being done."
Charles Spurgeon

Here is the beauty of the story of Nehemiah. It's the story of the Gospel.

We were lost in desolation and sin. Separated from God with no defense against our enemy the devil. Our gates were broken down and burned and our walls were destroyed and non-existent.

We were wallowing in years of thinking: This is the way it has been and the way it always will be. We saw no hope and just had to accept life as it was. In sin, despair and eventually death.

Nehemiah loved his people and their holy city. Jesus loves us and his bride the church.

God sent Nehemiah to help save the holy city of Jerusalem and revive His people.

God sent his son Jesus to save us for sin and death.

1 John 2:1 Advocate
Heb 2:10 Author of Salvation
1 Tim 6:15 Blessed and only Ruler
John 6:35 Bread of life
Eph 2:20 Chief Cornerstone
Rom 11:26 Deliverer
John 10:9 Gate
Heb 4:14 Great High Priest
1 Tim 1:1 Hope
John 1:49 King of Israel
Rev 5:5 Lion of the tribe of Judah
1 Peter 2:4 Living Stone
Isaiah 9:6 Mighty God
Rev 22:16 Offspring of David
2 Thess 3:3 Our Protection
1 Cor 11:2 Our Redemption
1 Cor 10:4 Our Rock
Heb 5:9 Source of eternal salvation for all who obey

Psalm 31:3-5 *For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*

2 Samuel 22:2-4 *"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.*

Thank God for Jesus.