

The Big Picture of Life

Nehemiah 2:1-10

January 24, 2016

Robert met Werner at a conference in Berlin, **a year after the wall came down**. Werner revealed that he was Jewish and born in Berlin, moved to New Jersey at age 6. **Robert asked if it were good to be home**. Werner responded that it was awful. **Robert felt bad**, he apologized and said that he didn't mean to pry.

Werner went on to explain, in 1934, **Berlin was a dangerous place for Jewish people**. They would disappear. His parents sent him with a cousin to the United States, **planning to join him later**. They never did. He heard from other family members **His father disappeared**, his two sisters, finally his mother. **No one was sure what happened to them**.

So **Robert**, trying to redeem himself, **said** "So it brings back painful memories of your family. Werner's response, **"not really that."** "I walk down the street in Berlin, I see someone older than myself, and **I wonder...** Did they know what was happening, **and do nothing? Did they stand by** and let it happen? Did they see my father or mother or sisters, **taken**, and just turn the other way?"

Could they have made a difference?

How does a person's life make a difference?

Does yours?

Nehemiah's life made a real difference. Will see many components of that.

It's safe to conclude that **Nehemiah had a pretty good life**. His story begins in the palace of King Artaxerxes, **ruler of the known world**. Nehemiah lived in luxury. He was a servant, **not a slave**. He was taken care of, educated, clothed in the best, **had regular access to the King**, probably he could have anything that he wished for.

Into this cushy world, bad news arrives. **"The conditions in Jerusalem are terrible."** It is likely that he spent his life in Persia. **Probably never been to Jerusalem.**

But there is a connection, to Israel and Jerusalem. These are his people, this is his homeland, his roots. **And it is God's chosen people, His holy city**. So there was great emotional attachment. These conditions really bothered Nehemiah. **And we see how he responds**. We can learn from this.

Last week we saw **Nehemiah Cared, & he prayed**. What happened after Nehemiah prayed? NOTHING! At least for a time!

We see additional qualities of a life that makes a difference.

Quality 1 – We see that Nehemiah had patience

Chapter 1 – Kislev – December

Chapter 2 – Nisan – April (vs.1)

Four Months

That demonstrates patience / **Waiting is an example of faith.**

We are not good at waiting. Fast food, instant cash, micro waves. When you get stopped at a red light, how do you feel? In a hurry to get going, red means stop, green means go, yellow? **Means speed up.**

Our tendency is to pray, then what?

Either – very quickly get anxious, angry with God **“Come on God, when are you going to do something?”** Or – Pray, then start doing what we want to do, **whatever it is that makes sense to us.**

Psalms 46 describes much natural and human activity. In the midst of that, **vs. 10 “Be still, and know that I am God.”** We need to be willing to wait and to seek God.

Patience, one of the fruit of the Spirit, and a quality that we are encouraged to develop in Scripture

Warren Wiersbe “Be Determined” – “True faith in God brings a calmness to the heart that keeps us from rushing about and trying to do in our own strength what only God can do. We must know not only how to weep and pray, but also how to wait and pray.” **Let us learn and apply that truth!**

Characteristic #2 – He had courage

“I had not been sad in the King’s presence.” (vs1) Don’t bring your personal problems to your job. **This is even more with the King.** The goal of the court, advisors etc. is to protect the king. In the ancient world, you could be put to death if you displeased the King, **for any reason!** **For 4 months,** Nehemiah hid his burden, did his job the best he could. Finally, **his opportunity arrived.**

Vs. 2 – “I was very much afraid.” Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the ability to face our fears. **It took courage to be honest** Don’t we often lie, “Nothing’s wrong...I’m fine.”

We need to have the courage of our convictions, and speak up when we have the opportunity.

He told the king, the most powerful man in the world **What was on his mind...** He had patience, He had courage

Characteristic 3 – He had a plan

Nehemiah faced his fear, explained his burden. **I am hurting because my people are hurting.** He explains the circumstances to the King.

King (4) “What is it that you want?” “I want to go and help, I want to do something, I want my life to make a difference! The king had questions, “How long will it take, when will you come back?” **Nehemiah had a plan.**

Nehemiah couldn’t know that the King would ask, He may have expected that God would open a door, that God would make a way, **Nehemiah wanted to be prepared, when it happened.**

Send me to the city **To oversee the rebuilding** Provide letters to speed my travel Provide the materials **See the courage in these requests, he wasn’t shy** “If you fail to plan you will plan to fail.”

He trusted God, **he prayed,** He waited for God’s timing to open the door. **During this time, he developed a plan.** He didn’t just trust that God would provide the details.

He knew how it could be done, **if God opened the doors.** He knew what he would need **That is the character of the godly man or woman,** Who wants their lives to make a difference. **They don't just sit on the sideline,** They look for a way to get into the action.

This passage ends with an interesting cliff hanger

¹⁰ 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.

There will be trouble, there likely will be opposition

When you seek to follow God,
When you want your life to make a difference.

Remember these guys, we will see more of them in a couple of weeks.

We had a missions fair at a church in which I served. **One of ministries present was ELIC** The English Language Institute of China. The government of China, recruited Teachers to teach English in state universities in China.

China so anxious for their students to speak English, **They pay Christians to come to China, to teach English and to share their lives, which includes their Christian testimony.** They actually do this throughout Asia, **and still do today.**

A couple in our church, Byron and Anita were teachers. They thought it sounded like a great thing, but didn't really think more about it, that day. Some weeks went by, as they tell the story, **each one of them, individually, couldn't stop thinking about China.** There came a point when Anita said to Byron, **"Do you remember that group that teaches English in China?"**

And I bet you see where this is going. Less than a year later, they were on their way to China, and spent two years, teaching English, **The Bible was one of their main text books for learning to read English,** and sharing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Can you identify with Nehemiah?

Has God developed these qualities in your life?

Has God laid a burden on your heart?

Is there an opportunity for your life to make a difference?

There is a famous quote from the 18th century "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Edmund Burke

As individuals, as church leaders, and as a church...

We need to wait on God! Pray & trust for days, weeks, months, maybe years!

To stop and wait until God directs or opens the door!

Commit our time, our resources, our selves

To our love relationship with God, and to His service.

We need to have courage!

Be bold in our testimony, commitment to God and in our actions.

We need to have a plan!

To know that God has a plan for your life.

And that He has a plan for the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji. **As a church, we too can follow this pattern.**

God can make a way, where there seems to be no way.

Are we ready and willing to hear God?

Will we step out in faith to face the challenge?

Will we enthusiastically pursue God's agenda?