The Joy of the Lord A Study in the Book of Nehemiah #2 The All-Important Pause

Introduction

The King that Nehemiah served was Artaxerxes I, nicknamed Longimanus (the long handed one). Apparently, His right hand was longer than his left. He was known as a gentle and noble King, but he ruled at the center of all kinds of discord and violence.

- -His father was assassinated in his bedroom
- -Artaxerxes avenged his father by killing his brother
- -He defeated his other brother, Hystaspes in war
- -For 10 years he battled a major revolt in Egypt
- -And at some point, his palace burned down

This was a man of action, a powerful leader. He was not someone to be trifled with.

The Situation

The Jewish Calendar

Corresponding Civil Month	Jewish Month		
September	Tishrei		
October	Cheshvan Kislev		
November December January February March			
	Shevat		
	Adar		
	Adar-1*		
	Adar-2*		
	Andi	Nissan	
April May	lyar		
	Sivan		
June			
July	Tammuz		
August	Av Elul		
September			

*in leap year

There was a delay of about 4 months until Nehemiah felt prepared to broach the subject with the King.

2:2 Nehemiah is "sore afraid" to speak with Artaxerxes about the need to return to Jerusalem and lead the efforts to rebuild the wall.

Remember: Artaxerxes had previously stopped the Jewish efforts at rebuilding the wall...see Ezra 4:17-23.

- 2:3. After the king notices that something is amiss in Nehemiah's eyes, Nehemiah outlines a city that has suffered the desecration of its ancestral tombs. (Note that he does not name the city.)
- 2:4. Before Nehemiah answers the King, he offers up a quick prayer to the Lord. He knows he is standing before TWO SOVEREIGNS.

Nehemiah is a man of prayer. See 4:4, 4:9, 5:19, 6:9, 6:14, 13:14

Nehemiah is practicing the presence of God. Using BREATH PRAYERS, he can be intimate with the Lord during the regular daily rhythms of life.

The principle: "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He wishes." (Provers 21:1)

- 2:5-8 Nehemiah explains the need in great detail. He has a plan and he boldly makes his requests. He asks for two kinds of letters:
 - 1. For the Governors along the way to provide safe passage
 - 2. For Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest for supplies
- 2:8 Nehemiah recognizes the kindness of the king, but also the "good hand of God." See Eph. 3:20-21
- 2;10 Not everyone is pleased to hear the news that "a man was coming to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."

So What?

Some principles for handling a difficult situation (or confrontation):

Don't be in a hurry. Mull it over! Waiting is essential. Timing is everything.
 "Give up your homemade solutions and run the risk of letting God take charge."

The Living Bible gives us some insight. "One day in April, 4 months later..." (verse 1)

Standstill: Consider the message from Ex. 14:13. Cease striving: Ps. 46:10 "Cease striving and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth."

2. In the meantime, watch your attitude!

Don't display irritation, a pious attitude or anger. Don't show evidence of sadness. When we do anything "for show" we have the wrong attitude. See Matt. 6:16-18

3. Pray, even in the midst of a conversation.

Breath Prayers:

Repeating a familiar prayer of 9-10 syllables or less that have great meaning. "It is a quiet groaning of the heart that becomes more meaningful as we use them."

"The process of inward prayer does not grow more complex, but simpler...when we begin with simple whispered words."

-Formulate them spontaneously:

"Thine only. Thine Only"

-Seize upon a fragment of one of the psalms:

"So, my soul panteth after thee O God"

-Other examples"

Into your hands...Lord have mercy...Now I believe...You will keep, keep and keep

Matin Luther knew that these phrases could become valuable tools to help God's Word reverberate within our inner lives. He wrote, "The sigh of a true Christ is a prayer."

4. State the Issue very Clearly. It is ok to have a plan. God may honor your plan (see Prov. 16:9). Nehemiah had a definite timetable (see 2:6). His requests were specific.

Ask your question. State your concern with respect and honor for the Lord but be clear about your need.

5. Despite any opposition that may come your way, know that the results come from the Lord. You expect that God will work on your behalf. But you accept that whatever He chooses will come to pass.

There seems to be four ways God answers prayer (when we pray in His will-I John 5:14):

No, not yet

No, I love you too much

Yes, I thought you would never ask

Yes, and here's more

So, as we pause, pray and lay out our plan before the Lord, consider Psalm 37: Fret not (vs. 1), Trust Him (verse 3), Delight in Him (verse 4), Commit to Him (verse 5), Rest / be still before Him (verse 7).

Discussion Questions

1.	Outline your normal "action plan" when you are faced with major adversity? How do you react? Does it look like Nehemiah's reaction?
2.	Why do we usually want to act rather than wait?
3.	When we REACT, who is usually in control?
4.	Do you have some BREATH PRAYERS that are helpful for your life? Take some time as a group to identify some brief prayers that we could have ready for the next difficult situation we face.
5.	What kind of personal discipline does it take to be able to pray even in the midst of your conversations?

Pers

sor	nal Reflections
1.	Take some time to review the last major confrontation or difficult conversation you had with a friend or loved one. In what ways did it mirror the behavior of Nehemiah? In what ways was it different?
2.	When was the last time you were able to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord? (Ex. 14). Why don't we live more in that mindset? What stops you from "pausing in prayer?"
3.	Do you have some personal "Breath Payers?" If so, list them here. If not, take some time to identify a few.
4.	Does your prayer life expect things from God? Do you also accept His will when it doesn't match yours?
5.	Think about the last few months and your prayer requests from the Lordhow did He answer them? 1. No, not yet 2. No, I love you too much 3. Yes, I thought you'd never ask 4. Yes, and here's more