

The Hand Of Our God Is Good - Week 3

Nehemiah 1-2

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Report from Jerusalem

¹ The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, ² that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

You may recall that in Ezra 4, fearing social disorder and loss of control, King Artaxerxes had stopped construction in Jerusalem by force - Jerusalem was described as being laid waste...

Nehemiah's Prayer

⁴ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸ Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹ O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

I want to point out a few things — Look at Nehemiah's response:

- Upon hearing the news that those who had survived the exile – and that Jerusalem is in great trouble and shame, he wept and mourned, he fasted and he prayed. This response indicates in word and deed, a genuine burden and brokenness before God.
- When Nehemiah prays – it's clear – he knows God's word – he prays what he knows to be true of God and true of Israel's history.
 - “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments...
 - He calls on God and confesses corporately and personally
 - We have sinned and I have sinned.

- He remembers the promises God has already made and calls on God's word - "Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹ O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Moses prophesied this in Deuteronomy

²⁷ And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. ²⁸ And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. ²⁹ But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. ³¹ For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

(Dt 4:27-31)

Similarly the Lord speaks this in Leviticus

⁴⁰ "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, ⁴¹ so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, ⁴² then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. ⁴³ But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules and their soul abhorred my statutes. ⁴⁴ Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. ⁴⁵ But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord."

(Le 26:40-45)

So – we know that Nehemiah was a man in a place of high proximity to a king – but he wasn't a priest. He was a servant of King Artaxerxes. His role was that of a cupbearer to the king; a blend of butler, bodyguard and sommelier whose role was to choose the king's wine and taste it before the king ensuring it was not poisoned. This civil servant was a man who loved God and served a king.

Nehemiah Sent to Judah

2 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ² And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” ⁴ Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” ⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. ⁷ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, **for the good hand of my God was upon me.**

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem’s Walls

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” **So they strengthened their hands for the good work.** ¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” ²⁰ Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”

(Ne 1:1–2:20)

We have a man - who knows the word of God and who knows God - and this man serves a Persian king named Artaxerxes. We know from Ezra – that God had moved in the hearts of three Persian kings to bring about His purposes. Nehemiah is a civil servant – in a position of proximity to the king - and Nehemiah learns of the brokenness of Jerusalem and those who have returned from the exile. When he learns about bad it is – he weeps, mourns, fasts and prays. He takes time to resolve in his soul – what is needed to do. He recalls the truth of God’s character, the promises God has made – and then makes the decision to ask this Persian king for favor and freedom to rebuild broken places in Jerusalem. He goes to Jerusalem – and quietly takes a survey of just how bad it is. He’s writing this – recalling **“the king has granted me what I asked - for the good hand of my God was on me.”**

The Hand of our God IS Good. Nehemiah saw God's favor and power in his life... Do you?

What has God done for you?

- The Gospel. New life. New identity. New freedom. New purpose. New way of living.

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

(Col 1:9–14)

How does God's word shape your life?

- What shapes you more – culture or Scripture?

When you pray – how do you pray?

- Do you see the connection between knowing God’s Word and how that helps you to see God more clearly and pray with greater faith and expectancy of what He can do ?

Where are you in life?

- Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king. Yet he resolved with conviction to do something with his life. He was afraid, but prayed. He believed. He made a choice. He moved forward in faith. He strengthened his hands for the good work before him.

When you see broken places and people in light of the Gospel – what do you do?

- What is your response? What do you think? Then, what do you actually do? How will you see the good hand of God on your life? I can look back and see His hand (college ministry, Asia, adoption, church planting, foster care) Burden + Vision + Opportunity + Decision + Commitment.
- ¹Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.“ 1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV

The way we see the good hand of God – is when our hands are empty – and open before Him.

I can't, but You can. I don't know how, but You do. I can't heal this, fix this, change this, but You can.

My life is in YOUR GOOD HANDS because I KNOW YOU ARE GOOD.

