

Commencing the Work

Text: Nehemiah 2:11-20

Introduction:

1. Brief review of previous lesson
2. Nehemiah teaches us many lessons about Christian service
3. Outline of Chapter 2
 - I. The Providential Opening of the Work (1-4)
 - II. The Provisions for the Work (5-8)
 - III. The Provokers of the Work (9-10)
 - IV. The Planning of the Work (11-16)
 - V. The Promoting of the Work (17-18)
 - VI. The Persisting in the Work (19-20)

I. The Planning of the Work (Vs. 11-16)

A. The Secrecy of his preparation (Vs. 11-12, 16)

1. Principle of Timing:
 - a. Nehemiah did not unveil his heart burden straight away. Nehemiah exemplifies for us the important principle of discerning the right timing for key steps in the will of God
 - b. The presence of enemies would have influenced this decision (Vs. 10). Sanballat and Tobiah at this stage were only aware that a high ranking official of the Persian Empire had come with a heart of concern for the people of God. We need to be careful not to give the enemy advanced notice of what plan to do for God.
2. Principle of Trust
 - a. It appears that Nehemiah had several close associates he could trust who went to share the burden with him
 - b. Illustration: When Saul was made king, the Lord provided a “band of men, whose hearts God had touched.” (1 Samuel 10:26)
 - c. Illustration: Onesiphorus – 2 Timothy 1:16-17 *“The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.”*

B. The Surveying of the destruction (Vs. 13-15)

1. Wiersbe: “Leaders are often awake when others are asleep, and working when others are resting.”
2. If we are going to be rebuilders for God, we have to be humble and real about the state of affairs. We must view the wreckage honestly.

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3. Nehemiah now verifies the report that he had heard from Hanani in Chapter 1
4. Chapter 3 reveals that Nehemiah approached the broken down walls with a clear, structured plan. Nehemiah was a master planner.

II. The Promoting of the Work (Vs. 17-18)

Nehemiah was not a one man band. He understood the principle of teamwork. A leader can have a God given vision for the work of God, but he cannot accomplish it alone.

A. Explanation (17a)

1. Nehemiah uses the personal pronoun 'we'. He identifies with the people and the situation.
2. Nehemiah is crystal clear about the task at hand. He does not soften the blow or talk around it.

B. Exhortation (17b)

1. Nehemiah now seeks to rouse God's people to action. In essence, he says, here is the situation, now let's do something about it.
2. Application: As a church, we need to be moved to action in the service of the Lord
3. What are you doing in response to the needs? Are you a participator or a spectator? So often believers treat the work of God like a sports match. They sit and watch while a small minority play the game.

C. Encouragement (Vs. 18)

1. Nehemiah shares a word of testimony concerning how God had moved in answer to prayer. Nehemiah's work from start to finish was God centered and God focused.
2. The people respond positively and get behind Nehemiah's vision
3. Personal Testimony: God's calling to Adelaide and NBC

III. The Persisting in the Work (Vs. 19-20)

We need to be in the work of God for the long haul. There are many starters but few finishers. Determination, persistence and hard work in the face of opposition are necessary character qualities for Christian service.

A. The Opposition of the enemy (Vs. 19)

1 Corinthians 16:9 *"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."*

1. They scorned
2. They slandered
 - a. They questioned their motives, a common weapon used in a word war

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- b. A question can have slanderous overtones; it can have an accusation embedded into it (e.g. Satan's question to Eve in the garden). This question had strong political overtones. But the implied accusation was completely wrong!
 - c. Their opposition did take on a violent dimension later on, but on the whole, the enemies of God waged a war of words.
 - d. Words are powerful tools for good or evil. "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue...*" (Prov. 18:21)
 - e. Proverbs 25:18 "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword and a sharp arrow." 'maul' = a wooden hammer used in battle
3. The underlying motive: To cause the work to cease (4:11)

B. The Resolution of Nehemiah (Vs. 20)

1. He ignored the accusation: We do not have to chase after every rumor and distraction that comes our way as we serve the Lord. If we do, the work will suffer. Nehemiah did not even address the slanderous accusation.
2. He invoked God's authority: When the work is of God, we need not fear the opposition. We are going to have to learn the art of combining spiritual service with spiritual warfare. We are need to be both workers and warriors
3. He insisted on a line of separation: The enemies of God had no legal rights or claim to Jerusalem

Conclusion:

1. What are you doing for the cause of Christ?
2. How are you responding to opposition? Are you getting distracted?