

Often God works patience and trust in the hearts of His servants by throwing us into really tough situations. Maybe when you have to face sickness and death, false accusations (指控) and rumours (谣言), or maybe when you have to repent and turn away from a sin in your life. Scripture gives the comparison of this to how gold is refined (被炼净). It has to pass through the heat of the fires to emerge without stain (玷污) or impurity.

In Nehemiah 2 God is working patience and trust in the heart of His servant. Nehemiah has appealed to God's mercy and love in chapter 1, but he wasn't able to start rebuilding in the ruins of Jerusalem right away. There was no sudden change, but perseverance (坚韧, 坚持不懈) over months. He waits for the Lord's timing to enter this situation at the right time and with a clear mind. Psalm 130:5 reflects this abiding trust: "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope." Nehemiah is a man of trust, but he is also does not sit on his hands. He doesn't always have the answers. But he gets out of bed in the morning, and takes one step at a time in faith. He prays. But he also comes before the king, he enters the ruins, and he calls the people to serve with him. There is an old saying that John Calvin quoted from the Benedictine Monks: pray and work. In Nehemiah 2, we see Nehemiah's prayer and work.

Before we begin, remember what faith is. As defined in Lord's Day 7: it is a sure knowledge and a firm confidence. Hebrews 11:1-2 defines: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony (见证)." By faith, Nehemiah obtained a good testimony. This means that he is a reminder to you and me of the goodness of God even in the face of hardship and trouble. By faith, he saw what was not seen, and boldly pursued the rebuilding of the city of God. By faith, Nehemiah foresaw the coming Christ, and lived by the promises of God although he could not yet see them.

This morning I declare the Word of God to you in Nehemiah 2: The Lord's servant trusts that the Lord will prosper the work of His people! We see this faith come out in action in three ways:

1. He is bold in coming before the king (vs. 1-8)
2. He is wise when he surveys the ruins (vs. 9-15)
3. He is humble (谦卑的) when he works with God's people (vs. 16-20)

1. He is bold in coming before the king (1-8)

Nehemiah concludes chapter 1 by referring to himself as a cupbearer to the king. His task was to make sure that the king's wine was not poisoned. While he was a servant, this was also a powerful position. It was a position where Artaxerxes also trusted Nehemiah not to poison him. One aspect of his duties was that he was supposed to put on a good face at all times, because it was forbidden to bring bad news and sorrow into the presence of the king. The book of Esther enlightens us to this, because when Mordecai puts on sackcloth (麻衣) in chapter 4:2, he only goes as far as the gate. No one was even allowed to enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

Some people are good at masking their emotions, but Nehemiah had a very hard time not bringing a long face into the court of the king. Remember that he is very sad. He has been waiting patiently for the Lord's timing, and it is wearing him down. About three to five months have passed. But he lives out the words Isaiah 28:16 "Whoever believes will not act hastily." Nehemiah is very sad, but he still believes in God and places His hope and trust in God.

His sad face is bad news in the court of the king. But God's providing care works through human means. God uses Nehemiah's long face to bring Artaxerxes to inquire into Nehemiah's sorrow. The king knows that Nehemiah is not sick and so he concludes that Nehemiah is sad. When the king comes to this conclusion, Nehemiah is terrified, and recounts (复述) to the king what he heard from Hanani in chapter 1. Nehemiah tells the king that this is the place of his fathers tombs, he has a very close connection to the city, it lies very close to his heart. The

king would probably understand this quite intimately, because the kings of Persia also placed a very high importance on taking care of the tombs of their fathers. So far it seems that the king is OK, because he simply asks what Nehemiah's request is. The Lord is preparing the heart of Artaxerxes to open up the way for his servant to rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah says a quick prayer to the Lord whom he knows is working behind the scenes. He has waited for the Lord and his opportunity is here whether he is scared out of his mind or not. Will the king see his request as traitorous (叛国的) and as pure treachery (背叛)? Will the king think that he wants to start a rebellion? He has already disobeyed the law of the king by being gloomy (沮丧的) in the court of the king. But Nehemiah trusts the Lord, and so he stands up tall and asks boldly that he might return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city of his father's tombs. Remember that Nehemiah is asking this to the king of one of the fiercest (最残暴的) empires of the ancient world. This takes guts.

The king, with the royal queen beside him, offers Nehemiah permission. This is a stunning act. Proverbs 21:1 is true: "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *Like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." The Lord is directing this for the good of His servant Nehemiah, but also for the good of his people. It pleased the king to send him.

But Nehemiah is no coward, in fact he is quite courageous. He capitalizes on (利用) the good will of the king and uses godly wisdom to plan ahead for the opposition and attacks on the work. He uses the king's good will for protection. He asks for letters to bring to the governors of that region, but he goes even further to ask for building materials! He asks for a letter so that he can receive materials from the keeper of the forest. Nehemiah uses godly wisdom to use the wealth of the Persian empire for the glory of God! He will use this lumber for the gates, for the city wall, and for his home.

Notice that Nehemiah ends vs 8 by giving the glory to God. He recognizes that God's blessing is on him. This is not bragging (夸口), rather, this is the deepest form of humility. Nehemiah knows that the king could have seen this as treason (叛国) not only for his gloomy face but also for his request. But the Lord has chosen to bless this work, and to raise up a weak man to lead His people out of captivity (被掳). The good hand of God is on Nehemiah. He really is a good Father. He is a God of covenant love and mercy!

All you or I can do on this side of Heaven is to pray and work faithfully trusting that God is full of love and mercy. Sometimes we think we are alone, but once you look behind the scenes, you see God's mighty hand at work. When you seek reform in your life or in the Church, your patience might grow thin. But we see God's powerful hand working with Nehemiah for good. In Hebrews 6:10-12, we are reminded of our position in the glorious work that God is doing in the church. Here we receive a call to faith: "For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish (懒散的), but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Pray and work. Remember that these promises come to pass in Christ alone.

Nehemiah's faith and patience leads him to survey the ruins in vs. 9-15

2. He is wise when he surveys the ruins (9-15)

Nehemiah even had an entourage (随行人员) of imperial (帝国的) troops to escort (护送) him. It is interesting that Ezra refused this escort on principle, whereas Nehemiah accepts them by godly wisdom. There is no reason in the text to say that this was sinful on Nehemiah's part, because God is using the empire of Persia to bless His servant all throughout these passages.

We are introduced here to Tobiah and Sanballat, as we will also be introduced to Geshem the Arab later on. We already see opposition amassing against the work of the Lord from the North, East, and South. Sanballat was likely a governor of Samaria to the North of Israel. His name is Babylonian (巴比伦人) in origin. Tobiah was most likely a governor of Amon to the east of Jerusalem. Geshem the Arab was a powerful leader in Arabia to the south who also received tribute (进贡) from Moab and Edom to the southeast of Judah. Tobiah and Sanballat are concerned that Nehemiah is seeking the well-being of Israel. They see this as a threat to their authority, and throughout the book will use this against Nehemiah's work. Whenever God's work begins among a people, others grow jealous and hate that work. Jesus warns His servants in John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation (苦难); but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Nehemiah presses forward in faith and trust. He wants to assess the situation before people find out what he is doing, and so he surveys Jerusalem in the secrecy (隐秘) of the night. Nehemiah and a few men leave without telling anyone. Through the night, they do a thorough review of the walls which were broken down and the gates that were burnt with fire. Wisdom leads Nehemiah to assess Jerusalem before he takes enemy fire. Luke 24: 18-30 describes this principle of wisdom: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?"

When I look at Nehemiah in this situation, I see myself as a coward (懦夫). He has stood before the king, he has prepared for the opposition of the surrounding governors, and he has surveyed the ruins. If you were with Nehemiah out in the rubble in the middle of the night, your response may have been to call him crazy, to laugh at him, or to walk right back to Persia and the home that you were living in there. But God does the impossible, and He continues to build His kingdom. Yes, Christians suffer set-backs and defeats, and we face what sometimes seems to be meaningless and unbearable suffering, and yet the kingdom of Christ *is* growing. The kingdom of Christ is growing in Scarborough as well. We can see Jesus building His church through the work of the leadership here and through the faithful service of this congregation. Like in the Book of Nehemiah, God is at work building His church here as well! By faith we look to the promises of God even when we can't always see them.

Lastly, we see that Nehemiah works with God's people

3. He is humble when he works with God's people (16-20)

Nehemiah is neither a lone ranger (独行侠) or a tyrant (专横的人), neither is he a glory seeker. He gets down in the trenches and calls on the people to work with him, not to work under him. He has the approval of the king, he has fully assessed the situation, and now he needs extra hands on deck. His mission is like a farmer who needs to get the crops out of the field before the rain hits. When the harvest is great, workers are needed. He calls the people to the task. He says: "Come and Let us build the wall of Jerusalem!"

Not many have known exactly what he was up to until this point. He hasn't told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others about where he had gone or what he had done. But now he is all in. He has been observing and assessing, but now he trusts God for a response. Nehemiah lays out his plan, and calls on the people to put their hands to the task so that they might no longer be a reproach.

When God calls, men and women must also respond to that call, and so Israel joins in the task. This also means that when God calls on the church, men and women must respond to that call. When they see that the good hand of God has been upon Nehemiah, working for the good of His people, the people say with one voice "Let us rise up and build." God's people don't just hear, they also act. Nehemiah prays and works, the people hear and do. They take God at His Word.

Immediately they take enemy fire when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem come from the north, east,

and south to jeer (讥笑) and mock at and laugh at God's work. It might remind you of what happens when Christians are bold and straightforward about their faith. They receive the scorn (嘲讽) of the world. But we are called to keep a clear head in these situations, especially if we are doing the work of the Lord and not our own work. Nehemiah and God's people hear the first round of accusations about being traitors and rebels. But Nehemiah keeps a clear head in the face of it all. Notice that he actually responds, but he holds the line, he sticks to the task in front of him. He calls on the God who will prosper him and the people. He speaks as one of the people, that they will arise and build. Finally, he tells these three enemies that they do not have a heritage or right to Jerusalem. He sticks to the task by trusting God.

Brothers and sisters, look at the mighty hand of God at work in the life of His servant and marvel (惊奇). God is the God of the impossible. You too, are called in Hebrews 6:10-12 to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Continue the work that God has set before you, allow God's Word to shape that work, and place your trust in Jesus. As Christians we are called to imitate Nehemiah because like him we are called to look to Christ. Nehemiah is in that cloud of witnesses cheering us on as we run the race that is set before us: **“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)**

Conclusion:

The call here is to put your trust and hope in God as you seek to serve Him in this world and as He builds His church, a community of believers in Scarborough. You have seen the trust that Nehemiah placed in God, and how by the help of God's mighty hand he overcame some colossal (巨大的) obstacles. We saw God's blessing and His almighty hand in this work. Nehemiah placed all his hope and trust in the mighty hand of God, and God blessed Him with abundant wisdom. Nehemiah simply confesses: “the good hand of my God was upon me.” The call for you today is to bank all your hope and trust in God who is sovereign (有主权的) and faithful, and to put your hand to the task before you. Work for the upbuilding of Christ's Church in Scarborough. Don't look down, look up! Don't look inside your heart, look out! Let us first and foremost look to Jesus, and follow His Leadership! He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Amen.