**Walking & Working by Faith**

***Nehemiah 2:1-9***

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Introduction. Consider the truth of Proverbs 21:1, *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water He turneth it whithersoever He will.”* This verse “demonstrates the means of which God turns the hearts of kings & works through ordinary men to accomplish His will” (Thurman Wisdom). Here in Nehemiah 2 we see the Lord moving in the heart of a king (:1-9) & the Lord moving in the hearts of the people (:10-20). God’s providence evidenced in this chapter begins with the Lord’s working in the heart of Nehemiah, followed by the Lord moving in the heart of the king.

 I. The providential circumstances in verses 1-3 >

 [“Providence” – “divine guidance or care.”]

 A. The specific time (:1a) –

 1. *“In the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king.”*

 2. *“Nisan”* correlates to our March-April, the first month in the Hebrew religious year.

 3. The first month designated the birth of the nation (Ex. 12:2; 13:4; & Deut. 16:1).

 4. The significance of this “anniversary” would have spoken to the heart of Nehemiah.

 5. This would cause to remind Nehemiah that 4 months have now passed since the word of

 Jerusalem’s plight reported by Hanani (Nehemiah’s brother).

 6. Nehemiah cannot hide his grief, even in the presence of the king.

 B. The suspicious “take” (:1b-2) –

 1. Nehemiah admits that he had not previously been sad in the king’s presence.

 2. The king recognizes Nehemiah’s sadness as *“sorrow of heart.”*

 3. Nehemiah realizes he has reason for concern; *“Then I was very sore afraid.”*

 4. “To the Persians, the king was a veritable god; & mourning in his presence was a very serious

 offence (cf. Esther 4:2).”

 C. The seeming term of disrespect (:3) –

 1. *“Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchers,*

 *lieth waste, & the gates thereof are consumed with fire?*

 2. To us, as Americans, this sounds disrespectful & sarcastic.

 3. “But to the ancient Semite, the question was the most emphatic means of respectful appeal. In

 essence, Nehemiah’s statement was, ‘O king, show me how to remove the weighty burdens

 that are causing me to mourn!’ “(Wisdom).

 4. Recall also the earlier term given by Nehemiah: *”Let the king live for ever”* & compare it to

 the expression, “Love live the king!”

 II. The prayerful supplication in verses 4-5 >

 A. The surprising request of the king (:4a) – *“For what doest thou make request?”*

 B. The silent response of Nehemiah (:4b) – *“So I prayed to the God of heaven.”*

 1. “He had time only to ‘breathe’ a prayer (cf. Lam. 3:56, *‘Thou hast heard my voice: hide not*

 *thine ear at my breathing, at my cry’*) but the answer was ready & waiting before he needed it”

 (Wisdom).

 2. The word for prayer here is literally “to cause another to intervene or arbitrate in one’s case.”

 The word could be translated ‘judge’ or ‘intreat.’ “Nehemiah, as he stood before the earthly

 king, appealed to the heavenly King to arbitrate in his behalf” (Wisdom).

 3. “This is another evidence that prayers do not have to be lengthy in order to be ‘effectual’ &

 ‘fervent’ (James 5:16).” (Luck).

 C. The specific requests by Nehemiah (:5) –

 1. Note his humble attitude (spirit) – *“If it please the king”* & *“If thy servant have found favor.”*

 2. Note also the bold “asks” – That Nehemiah be sent to Jerusalem & that he be successful at

 Jerusalem (*“build it”*).

III. The purposeful intervention in verses 6-9 >

 A. Providence in the past & present (:6) –

 1. The previous Queen’s presence – see events recorded in Esther 2-10.

 a. Esther was appointed queen in 479 B.C.; thirty-four years before Nehemiah 1 & 2.

 b. Mordecai served as “Prime Minister” of the Persian Empire (cf. Esth. 9:2-4, where we read

 the fear of the Jews & the fear of Mordecai *“fell upon all people.”*

 c. It is suggested that Mordecai’s influence might still have been felt in this day.

 2. The present Queen’s presence, (*“the queen also sitting by him.”*)

 a. “It indicates that the full royal court was present when this decision of momentous

 historical significance was made” (Wisdom). ??

 b. Or consider: “History indicates that the queens of Persia did not take part in state councils

 with their husbands…but (that this was) rather during a meal” (Luck). ??

 c. We don’t know for certain the specific place, but it is mentioned by Nehemiah.

 B. Prospect for the future (:7-9) –

 1. The king’s permission.

 2. Nehemiah’s projections (A projection here is defined as “an estimate or forecast of a future

 situation or trend based on a study of present ones”).

Conclusion: Our emphasis this evening is upon Nehemiah’s prayer. Wiersbe wrote: “Not only had Nehemiah *prayed* for the opportunity, but he had also *planned* for it & had his answer ready. During those 4 months of waiting, he had thought the matter through & knew exactly how he would approach the project. His reply to the king can be summarized in 2 requests: *‘Sent me!’* (2:4-6) & *‘Give me!’* (2:7-10).” We considered last week that Nehemiah’s original request might have been only for help for the remnant & that his request was in only general terms. “But the months of prayer have crystalized his plans & when he hears the king’s question he is ready with a very specific - & bold – request” (Wisdom). Should not our “emergency prayers” by presented by frequent & fervent prayer in order to be ready for those “emergency prayers”? How about you & me?