

SERMON: SEVEN LESSONS FROM A CUPBEARER

Nehemiah 6:1-4

(1) Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) (2) that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. (3) And I sent messengers unto them. Saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? (4) Yet they sent unto me four times after the same sort: and I answered them after the same manner.

Introduction

Nehemiah was born in exile, but grew up in the faith of Israel's God. He was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes who rules Persia from 464 to 423 B.C. A cupbearer was much more than our modern butler. It was a position of great responsibility. The cupbearer was the king's personal assistant. Everywhere the king went, he went. He tasted the king's food and drink to make sure it was not poisoned. He was trusted to carry the king's briefcase which housed important documents. A contemporary equivalent is the secret service employee who brings the president his food and guards the door to his bedroom. The position of menial tasks also afforded great privilege; the cupbearer saw firsthand the inner workings of the administration of the king and his high level officials. He was exposed to the military secrets and witnessed the negotiating of treaties.

One day, Nehemiah greeted his brother, Hanani, who had just returned from a trip to Judah. He inquired about the state of Jerusalem. The answer was not pretty. Jerusalem was in ruins and the people were feeble and unorganized. All efforts to rebuild had been unsuccessful. The news really broke Nehemiah's heart and his body language expressed it. Thereafter, while Nehemiah was performing his daily duties, the king noticed his sad demeanor and inquired about the cause. He relayed the reason for his downcast countenance. Nehemiah asked the king if he could take a leave of absence from his courtly duties to return to his ancestral homeland and start a project to rebuild the wall. The king consented and provided resources for the project and protection for the journey. Nehemiah sacrificed the comfort and security of the palace for the rigors and dangers of life in a ruined city. Palatial prestige was replaced by ridicule and slander. There was much fierce opposition from enemies, but under the leadership of Nehemiah the wall was completed in fifty-three days. Let's look at some of the lessons we can learn from the character and competence of Nehemiah.

Exposition

1. Some Things Ought To Bother You

(What Makes You Laugh or Weep Is an Indication of Character)

2. Discover Your God-Given Mission

(Your Calling Begins Where Your Pain and Your Passion Intersect)

3. Relationships Are Important

(Both Vertical and Horizontal)

(Servant Nehemiah had a great relationship with King Artaxerxes)

(Nehemiah had a great relation with the workers)

(They worked side-by-side)

4. Exposure Is Almost As Good As Experience

(Some Things Are Taught, Other Things Are Caught)

(Nehemiah Learned Much Just by Being in the Presence of the King)

5. Discernment Is Important- Ask God to Provide It

(Everybody With You Ain't For You)

(You Can't Put Everybody on Your Team)

(All Growth Is Not Good Growth)

6. Don't Be Lured From Your God-Ordained Mission

(Make Sure God Is In It)

(If God Is In It, You Stay In It)

(If God Ain't There, Go Elsewhere)

7. Stay On the Wall-It Ain't Time To Come Down

(A) The Wall of Christian Duty

(B) The Wall of Reason During the Pandemic

(C) The Wall of Civic Responsibility-Vote

(D) The Wall of Thanksgiving and Gratitude

(E) The Wall of Prayer and Supplication

(F) The Wall of Praise and Worship

Closing Thoughts

Nehemiah is in the Bible, not because he was a king, priest, or prophet. He is in the Bible because he, a layman, volunteered to go to Jerusalem to supervise the rebuilding of the wall. He didn't pray for God to send someone else; he accepted the call on his life and responded with positive action. His intentions were God-focused rather than self-focused. Nehemiah is a great example of someone whose desire is to please and glorify God. He started his mission; he completed his mission. I am sure we are doing the same. Give God Glory! Give God All the Glory!

End Notes

1. Please do not forget Nehemiah was a praying man. He combined hard work with constant fervent prayer. Twelve of his prayers are recorded in this book that bears his name. (1:4; 2:4; 4:4; 4:9; 5:19; 6:9; 6:14; 9:6-38; 13:14; 13:22; 13:29; 13:31)
2. The plain of Ono was about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. This was a day's journey one way. If Sanballat and Geshem could get Nehemiah to agree to meet them there, they could ambush him on the way and kill him. The Hebrew word King James translates as mischief is "rah." It is derived from the root word which means, "to beat with a hammer" or "to pulverize a stone." As you can tell from the context, it does not refer to juvenile misbehavior.
3. Please don't get "seasonal sensitivity" confused with "project perseverance." The third chapter of Ecclesiastes makes it clear that life flows into season after season. We have ordained missions within each season. We must complete the missions of that season before advancing to the next season. This is why we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We can stay in a season too long, or we can exit too quickly.

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