



NEHEMIAH WEEK 3: SANCTIFIED INITIATIVE

April 22, 2018
Pastor Randy Remington
Study Notes

INTRODUCTION

- Leadership is a spiritual gift (a “spiritual”, Romans 12:8).
- Good self, and/or corporate, leadership is important.
- Nehemiah is a go-to for a biblical study of leadership.
- He gets a report of the ruins of Jerusalem.
- No Jerusalem means...
 - No Temple
 - No worship
 - No provision for the covering of sin
 - No hope of the Messiah’s future throne and rule
- The covenant promises of God were tied to Jerusalem.
- It’s hard for us to understand the connection to, and need for the physical place, Jerusalem—how important it was to Israel, their relationship with God, and one another.

“In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” (Nehemiah 2:1-3)

- You could be executed for coming into the king’s presence with sadness, not joy. Nehemiah takes a significant risk sharing so transparently with Artaxerxes. He identifies with brokenness, sadness, and loss, despite the risk to his person.
 - Because of his response in this passage, the king becomes a picture, or type, of God.
 - He represents the one to whom we can go when our heart is burdened and we have significant need.
 - There’s favor in the Presence of the King of kings because of Jesus and his perfect sacrifice for us.
- Sanctified Initiative means...
 - Sanctified = holy, set apart
 - It’s not separation. It’s set-apartness, difference
 - Ambition/initiative can be set apart for God. This is holy ambition as distinct from selfish ambition.
 - Desire and ambition are not bad in themselves. They can be redeemed and set apart (made holy) by God.

SANCTIFIED INITIATIVE HAS CLARITY OF VISION

- If Jesus came to you and said, “What do you want?” What would you say?
- It’s good to have an answer when the King asks you that question.
- Sanctified initiative is born of continuous prayer (a minimum of 100 days for Nehemiah)
- The best way to stimulate sanctified initiative and vision is to do the will of God revealed in the Bible. See how often the Bible says, “This is God’s will for you...” Would you give yourself to that first? If you do, God graciously brings specific clarity to his specific plans for us.
- Nehemiah’s vision was the result of long obedience in the midst of a foreign power, along with specific prayer and fasting.

“The king said to me, “What is it you want?”

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me." (2:4-9)

- Vision = an interplay of prayer, preparation, and planning
- "What is it you want?" Nehemiah has a ready answer...
 - A leave of absence
 - Letters of transit/military escort (distinct from Ezra, but appropriate for Nehemiah, a royal official)
 - Funding/resources
- It's bold: he's asking the king to reverse a previous decision (Ezra 4:18-22)
- Nehemiah gives God the credit for the favor he receives (Proverbs 21:1).
- The number one question Jesus answered after he asked it was, "What do you want me to do for you?" When Jesus asks what we want/need, he's serious. Have an answer.

"In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him." (Proverbs 21:1)

SANCTIFIED INITIATIVE GUARDS THE VISIONS

- God put something in his heart that wasn't completely revealed yet.
- When God puts something in your heart, it's your job to steward it. Sometimes it's easy to pull the pie out of the oven before it's fully baked.
- Joseph kind of blows it when he blurts out his dreams in youthful exuberance.
- Nehemiah was not an outward, verbal processor. He was wise to keep his own counsel until the time was right.

"I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on." (2:11-12)

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." (Proverbs 4:23)

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." (Matthew 7:6)

SANCTIFIED INITIATIVE DEALS IN REALITY (2:13-18)

- This is when you face the facts. Faith is not in opposition to the facts.

• Inspect the situation

- Nehemiah verifies the facts with which he's been presented
- "Examine" in this passage is typically a medical term. It speaks of a diagnosis that leads to treatment.
- He wants to know the details of the wall's ruins
- Without his own inspection, he would be captive to others' observations and preconceptions
- Critique is not criticism; leadership involves critique
- The instinct of a leader is to challenge things
- Facts lead to realistic plans.

*"By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because **as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.**" (2:13-16)*

"Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire..." (2:17a)

• Establish Personal Credibility

- Nehemiah points to God's faithfulness, and his favor
- The number one question people respond with when asked what makes them want to follow a leader, or not is: What are they like as a person? What's their character?

"I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me." (2:18)

• Cast a Vision of a Preferable Future Reality

- It's possible to prefer mediocrity and brokenness
- "This isn't all that God has for you. He has more..."
- It's a shift of perception toward what's possible.
- Winston Churchill casting vision in the midst of England's war against Nazi tyranny: "You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be."
- The photo principle: You look at yourself when you first see a group photo in which you appear. People like a picture where they look good, and that can stifle progress.
- God gives us a picture of what we look like in Jesus; what we can be and do in his kingdom.
- We're not what we once were, but we're also not yet what we're going to be. Remember this is you feel stuck.

*"Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. **Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.**" (2:17)*

HOLY INITIATIVE EXPECTS OPPOSITION

- When we say yes to God, we also say yes to opposition.
- Moving towards God welcomes the opposition of the Enemy
- Jesus was ridiculed the entire three years of his ministry, as were the Apostles and Paul.
- "When you walk by faith and seek to lead, you will face opposition from those who walk by sight."
–Chuck Swindol
- Nehemiah answers by pointing to God's faithfulness ("a share, ...claim, and ...historic right")

"They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work." (2:18b)

"But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" (2:19)

"I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." (2:20)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How have you initiated major, even life-long pursuits to make changes in your life or circumstances?
2. How have you invited God into that?
3. What's been successful for you? What's been a struggle?
4. How do you balance a holy dissatisfaction with the status quo against change for change's sake?
5. What makes you want to change something? What's your motivation?

6. What do you notice as you see Nehemiah progress from clarity of vision through encountering opposition? What can you learn from his example that helps you?
7. What have you done when your initiative runs into reality and feels stuck? If what you've done has been helpful, how so? If not, why not?
8. Are you good at inspecting your "walls" and dealing with reality while pursuing a God-given initiative?
9. How do you determine what initiatives are sanctified and not arising from selfish desires?
10. Do you feel like you have clarity for your life and know what God's calling you to lead?
11. Do you know the favor you have as a child of the King?