

How to Build a Church?

Nehemiah 2

Plan

11.07.2004

Last week we started to look at the book of Nehemiah. We heard that someone had travelled to Susa from Jerusalem to tell Nehemiah the bad news. Nehemiah found out that the walls were badly broken, and the gates were burnt. That meant that their enemies could attack and take what they wanted, when they wanted.

Nehemiah wept, fasted and prayed at the sad news.

Chapter 2 opens 4 months later. And it is in this long chapter that we find Nehemiah is not only a man who prays, but he also plans.

He made plans to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, because he was convinced that that was what God had wanted him to do. His plans were very detailed, and covered the many areas needed in preparing to build the wall. He planned how to talk to the king, how to cut away the expected opposition, and how to build the wall.

Finding the right way to talk to the world's most powerful king is always a daunting task, even for the king's trusted cupbearer. It was even more difficult if opponents knew that under a previous king in Ezra chapter 4, there had been a decree which stated that the city of Jerusalem should not be rebuilt until further notice because of the evil of the people who used to live there. That further notice had been given, but it is so easy to lose certain documents in a massive archival chamber of the huge kingdom of Persia.

So Nehemiah planned carefully how to bring the topic up. He thought that the best way was to show sadness to the king. But that was very dangerous.

The Persian king had a standing rule, that people around him had to be happy.

"No worries, Be Happy!" That is what he wanted. The penalty for sadness was death.

Nehemiah took the risk and let his true feelings show as he served the royal couple at a banquet. The king wanted to know what was wrong. (God was certainly preparing the way for Nehemiah).

So in fear, he told the king that he was sad because the walls and gates of his ancestors' city had been destroyed.

Then, in God's providence, the king asked what he could do.

With one of those very quick prayers for help (maybe to be cool enough to remember what he had planned), Nehemiah began to lay out his plans. Within a few short minutes, he had:

[1] permission to go to Jerusalem

[2] an official letter saying that he was special and had to be protected

[3] another official letter to the local timber yard requesting supplies of wood, and

[4] enough armed guards to protect him all the way to Jerusalem.

In that brief moment, he was given all the things that the king could give him, because he had asked God to help him, and because he had planned for that moment, should it ever occur.

Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, confident that God wanted him to rebuild the walls.

But simply going there was not good enough. He had to convince the Jews that THEY should rebuild the walls, and that they WOULD do it.

To do this, he had a plan, which he had also been praying through for a long time.

In Jerusalem, he did not blab out what he had come for.

They simply knew that he was a trusted high official of the king, who also happened to be Jewish. They were in the dark.

Late at night, on the third night he was there, he mounted his horse, and took some guards on foot. He went out one of the burnt gates and surveyed the ruined walls by moonlight.

Like a smash repairer examining a car, he was looking at the wall to see what needed doing, and how much time and effort would be involved.

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In the morning, he told the people of Jerusalem why he was there, and encouraged them to rebuild the wall.

Most people were excited to think that God may possibly be doing something to help them again. After all, here was a godly man with the backing of the Persian king, eager to get them rebuilding. His prayerful planning was getting a good response.

It should not surprise us that faithful Nehemiah made plans. Sometimes I am encouraged to forget planning and simply let God's Spirit move me. Yet at the same time, I see in the Bible that God is a God who plans, and he encourages us to do the same.

The coming of Jesus was planned to perfection. Ephesians 1 says God planned for Jesus to come to save people and build them into his church by dying for them. And those plans were made even before time began.

God the Father chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, according to his pleasure and will.

Does that excite you? It excites me! To think that our all-powerful God should care for you and me, and that part of why the world is here at all is because he wants us to belong to his family thru trusting in Christ. It is wonderful!! It is amazing!! It is almost too good to be true!

God has planned for us to be in his family. But not only for us, for he is building his church. There are more yet to join.

And that is also exciting, for who are they?

They are the people who live around us, near us, across the city, interstate, overseas. But how does he build them into his family?

He plans to share this joyful task of bringing others into his family with you and me. We are to pray and to plan to bring others into God's family, to build his church. **How do we do that?**

[1] It is vital that we pray for them, and for our planning.

[2] We need to get to know them and see what needs they have, including their spiritual needs.

[3] We need to plan to address their spiritual needs, to plan to tell them about Jesus, or to bring them to someone who will.

[4] And because we want people not scalps, we need to plan to address their other needs.

The trouble is, many of us do not plan to pray or plan to find out, or plan to address needs. **How can we start?**

Take some time to choose three of your friends or family who are not in God's family yet. When you come to church each week, pray for them, and pray that God will help you plan to address their needs, especially their spiritual need.

Then take the time to be with them, to get to know them better, looking for ways that you can help them and share the good news with them. Work out their areas of need through which you can share the good news of Jesus. That is, apply God's truth to their lives.

So, choose three, pray and plan.