

How to Build a Church?

Nehemiah 1

Pray

4.07.2004

It is great to catch up with old friends isn't it! Friends often share the news of what has happened. Some of the news may be very good, but some news can be very sad.

But one man only heard sad news when some friends came over 1,000 kilometres to visit him, in November 446BC. The man's name was Nehemiah, and his friends had come all the way from Jerusalem to Susa.

Susa was an important city. The great king of Persia, who ruled most of the known world, used to spend most of his winter in the warm city of Susa. The lovely river Karun ran just near it. Nehemiah was an important man. He used to select and taste the wines for the king. To have such an important and trusted position was a great honour. It also meant that the king had absolute trust in him. Being even being a trusted official in the king's palace did not stop him getting upset by the very bad news.

The awful news was about how God's people were going, back in Jerusalem.

For 100 years, God's people had been living in Jerusalem after being freed from the rivers of Babylon. Things had started off reasonably well. But the city wall, which was supposed to protect them, was in pieces... worse than a 6 ½ yr old's smile. There were gaps everywhere!

And the gates... well the gates were a pile of ashes, swept into a corner of the road coming into town. The place was easier to get into than Hornsby.

And that was not good when you lived in 446BC. For people were not as friendly as they are now. They used to fight their neighbours.

Armies and marauding bands would gallop from town to town, killing, looting and raping at will. They needed food for their men, so they took what they could. City walls and gates were a vital protection for life.

And God's people in Jerusalem were surrounded by enemies. Just like many Palestinians resented

the establishment and advance of Israel in our times, so these people resented the Jews coming back into the land that they had squatted in during the 70 years the Jews were in Babylon.

Life was very difficult in Jerusalem. Nehemiah got the bad news and cried. He cried for them.

He was not a woose. He was not a wimp. The news was just so bad that he cried & refused to eat for a few days.

Nehemiah was also a man of faith. He knew that God cared for his people. Nehemiah thought it wasn't right for God's people to cringe in their rooms while foreign soldiers and bandits plundered. They should have let God help them. Nothing is too powerful for God to fix.

And then he prayed. His prayer asked for a few things.

[1] He asked God to remember to keep his promises. God had promised to help and protect them. So he prayed for that.

[2] He asked God for forgiveness. Forgiveness for himself and forgiveness for all God's people. Having been forgiven, then God would help in a greater way.

[3] He asked God to help him succeed in talking to the king.

We will find out next wk what he wanted to say to the king.

But his first response was to cry and fast, then to pray to God for help.

Nehemiah knew that they had to build the wall. He wanted to help them build it. How could he, from so far away? But even still, his first action after responding in sadness, was to pray.

When Jesus came about 460 years later, he came to build a church. Not the building, but the people. He saw that God's people were also in a bad way, and needed to be built up, just like the wall in old-time Jerusalem.

Jesus came to build the family of God. He was constantly in prayer, asking his Father for help

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to do the work that was needed.

He taught us to pray, so that we can build the family of God too. Before we can make any plans to build God's family here, we need to pray, and to keep on praying for God to give us success.

We all need to be praying

[1] that God would keep his promise to build his church.

[2] for God to forgive us, and to forgive others.

[3] for God to give us the opportunities to build his family.

As we look through Nehemiah in 4 weeks, we are going to see not only how Nehemiah helped build the wall, but also we will see how God will keep building his church even through people like us.

So we need to pray.

Please pray. I am handing out some bookmarks now which have those three prayer points on them. Please pray these daily, and let us see how God will use us to build his church.