

# Beware of Idleness

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Preacher: Eric Peterson

[0:00] So if you want to turn to Nehemiah chapter 2, I'll be there in a minute or two, but by way of backstory, let me start in Ezra chapter 1. Reading a number of Ezra chapter 1, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? Let God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel.

He is the God, which is in Jerusalem. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah chapter 1 now. The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hekeliah, And it came to pass in the month Chislu, in the twentieth year as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hannah and I, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

And they said unto me, Work is an interesting thing.

[1:50] As men, it's one of our primary callings, and there is great dignity in work. Work is not the curse. Even before the fall of man, Adam was put in the garden and given the responsibility to dress it and to keep it.

But the danger in work is busying and consuming ourselves with the wrong work, or in having a complete aversion to work and doing no work at all. We see here in the first couple verses of Nehemiah chapter 1 that Nehemiah is clearly concerned for those things which concern the Lord. It is obvious that he has a great interest and burden for those things which are of importance to God, and he is deeply affected and driven to prayer by these things. As men, we have much that competes for our affections, our jobs, our bills, our wives and children, the upkeep of our homes, our hobbies.

So on and so on. And these are legitimate concerns. Even the Apostle Paul recognized this when he wrote, He that is married carrieth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. However, we ought not to be so concerned with these things to the neglect of those things which are of true importance to the Lord. As Martha, who is cumbered about much serving, and careful and troubled about many things, but that one needful thing, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3:14] What do you care about? What are you concerned about? Is it the things that the Lord is concerned with? What's the topic of your conversation?

Do you have concern for souls? Are you burdened or are we burdened for the state of the church? Yes, this is the Laodicean age, and yes, the church is apostate, but there's always a remnant that God is pleased to work with and through.

The question is, are we among that remnant? Let's go to Nehemiah chapter 2, verses 1 through 6. First thought here, God is looking for those who are busy doing the things that they're supposed to be doing.

Nehemiah was about his work. David was tending sheep. Elisha was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen. Peter and Andrew were casting a net into the sea, while James and John were mending their net. [4:27] Each was busy with the thing that was required of him at that time. We know from chapter 1 that Nehemiah was well aware of the situation in Jerusalem with the children of Israel, but he still went about his own business, doing what he was supposed to be doing, until the Lord opened a new door of opportunity for him with a new set of marching orders.

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time. Don't run out ahead of the Lord because of your own presumptuousness and self-will, and find yourself doing what seems to be right, at the wrong time.

Remember, it's God who determines the timing. Nehemiah had to wait a number of months before he finally got a chance to have an audience with King Artaxerxes. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass.

Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live forever.

Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request?

[5:51] So I prayed to the Lord God of heaven, and I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldst send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchres, that I may build it.

And the king said unto me, The queen also sitting by him. For how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me, and I said unto my time.

Because Nehemiah remained faithful in his everyday duties and responsibilities, faithful in prayer, and faithful in obedience to the Lord, the Lord in due time, finally saw fit to send Nehemiah to Jerusalem.

Before we will ever truly be a benefit and blessing to others, we must first be actively living a holy life, acceptable and pleasing unto God.

And as we have heard numerous times over the last couple days, this is only reasonable on our part. Now let's jump over to Nehemiah. Nehemiah 2, verses 11 through 18.

[7:00] So I want to park for a couple minutes. So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, and some few men with me. Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.

Neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down.

And the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain and to the king's pool. But there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook and viewed the wall, turned back and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

And the rulers knew not whether I went or what I did, neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest of them that did the work.

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we may be no more a reproach.

[8:12] Then I told them of the hand of my God, which is good upon me, as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

Verse 17, Nehemiah says, Ye see the distress that we are in. The condition of the city was no secret. All the people understood the state of danger and disrepair that they were in.

The priests, the nobles, the rulers, the workers, the common people, all of them. And yet they had grown to tolerate their situation. Nehemiah essentially says to the people, Ye do fully understand

the distress that you are in, and you tolerate it as well.

From the time that Cyrus commissioned the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, to the time that Artaxerxes gives Nehemiah permission to return to rebuild the city, many, many years had gone by.

We know from chapter 2 that it was during the 20th year of Artaxerxes' reign that Nehemiah approached him. So when Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, some six months or so after receiving the news from Hannah and I, the Jews had already lived in the land for decades.

[9:26] Furthermore, Nehemiah says, Jerusalem lieth waste. Amongst the many definitions of the word waste, there are a couple that really shed some light on this passage.

One is, land untilled, though capable of tillage. And the other is, to suffer to be lost unnecessarily. So Nehemiah is basically saying, not only do you understand the distress that you are in, not only do you tolerate it, but you do so unnecessarily.

You do so willfully because your situation is entirely fixable. The people had grown idle. They had put off building and repairing.

They had put off doing what they were supposed to be doing. What are you supposed to be doing that you put off for years and years and years?

What have you been called to do that you keep delaying? Ecclesiastes 10.18 says, By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

[10:32] Proverbs 24.30-34 says, I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the men, void of understanding, and lo, it was grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

Then I saw on, considered it well, I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet little sleep, little slumber, little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man.

It was no accident that Jerusalem was in shambles. And we all know what happened at this time. Is it not entirely likely that, whoops, I apologize.

Well, in Ezra we read that sometime after the people of Israel had been there, that they fell into sin with the Canaanites that were in the land.

Because they had neglected their responsibilities to build, they found themselves occupied in sin instead. And we all know what happened, if you remember that. David, we all know what happened with David as well, when he should have been out fighting.

[12:04] David stayed in the city. Perhaps if he had been out fighting, he would have been able to avoid what had happened. The lesson this year is, you will occupy yourself with something.

Either what you're supposed to be doing, or what you're not supposed to be doing. There really is no middle ground. There is work still to be done. Jesus said, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

The night cometh when no man can work. He said again, In about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing idle. Saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

Are you idle? We sing a lot about heaven, talk a lot about how we can't wait to get to heaven. But for so many, heaven has become sort of a consolation prize.

Because this earth, this life has become the real prize. What we can accomplish now. We've got our bucket lists, our places to go, the people that we need to see, the things that we want to do.

[13:09] But the time to build, the time to work, the time for action is now. This is not a time for idleness and apathy. The judgment seat looms ahead.

Now is the time for running. Now is the time for fighting. Now is the time for pressing on. Apostle Paul wrote, Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth into those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded. And the verse, who are ahead me, says, therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Don't be idle. Do those things which you're supposed to be doing. Keep at them. The time is short. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We pray, John. I was wondering how long it'd take to get to that verse up there.

[14:29] I'm sure we're all staring. Amen. Amen.