Nehemiah Ch2v1-20 - Building A City

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Nice to see you today.

! Please turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah. Nehemiah, which is on page 484, something around about there, I think. Page 484, the book of Nehemiah.
We're going to be looking at chapter 2 together. I'm not going to read it because we'll do a good bit of reading during the sermon, but just to give a bit of background before we pray.
God's people have been taken into exile because of their unfaithfulness. And just as God had promised, 70 years later they would be allowed back.
So they go back in parts, in groups. So Ezra chapters 1 and 2, the first group go back. In Ezra chapter 8, the second group go back.
[1:26] And then in Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2, the rest go back. And when I say go back to the land, they're about a thousand miles away from their homeland in exile.

So that's just a little bit of context and background as we look at chapter 2 together today. Let's pray and ask for God's help. Father, we pray that the events that we look at together, although happening hundreds of years ago, would speak truth to us today with clarity and relevance, helping us to see that you are the God we can trust, who is building his city, a light for the nations and the good of your people.
So help us now by the power of your Holy Spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. So who would like to go on a city break?
Sorry, I don't have any free tickets for you, but where would you go? Where would you choose? Maybe the romantic city of Paris, or the historic city of Rome.
Perhaps you'd like the buzz of New York and all the shops. Or maybe you're young and you'd like the party life of Rio. Or old. I guess you don't have to be young to party, do you?
[3:17] Or maybe it's the views of Vancouver or the beauty of Venice. We're all drawn to our favourite city.

Well, Nehemiah is all about building the city of God. Ezra was about building the temple. Here in chapter 2, it's about building the city of God.
And it's to be a city like none other. A city of peace and prosperity. A place of safety and security. It's a city where justice rules and grace reigns.
In fact, the city of God lies at the very centre of God's purposes for the world. We might put it like this.
In God's city, God's king would reside and through his rule bring blessing and hope to the people of the world.
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So let's have a look at chapter 2 and let's follow Nehemiah and check in and see how the building project is going. Three things we're going to look at from this.
Mourning the city, restoring the city and anticipating the city. So first, mourning the city.
Instead of enjoying the city, Nehemiah is in mourning. Reports have come from the people who have settled back in the land and reports have come back to Nehemiah.
Look back at chapter 1, verse 3. They said to me, those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace.
[5:27] Why? The wall of Jerusalem, the city of God, is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.

Nehemiah is heartbroken, verse 4. When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

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Rather than the city being a place of blessing, it's become a ruin. Instead of a city of hope for the nation, it's now a pile of rubble.
Whatever happened, what went wrong for the city of God to be destroyed? Well, as we've been looking at over the weeks, God's people had been unfaithful.
Instead of following God as their king, they lived as if they were king. So as an act of judgment and discipline, God let the city be destroyed by the Babylonians.
[6:35] God's people are now under a new regime, the Persians. The Babylonians have been displaced. A new empire is on the scene. But the city is still in ruins.

And Nehemiah is heartbroken for the city and he can't hide his grief. Chapter 2, verse 1. In the month of Nisan, so this is about four months after hearing the first reports about the city.
In the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, who is king of Persia, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king.
That was Nehemiah's job. He was the chief wine taster. I had not been sad in the presence of the king before. So the king asked me, why does your face look so sad when you're not sick?
This can be nothing but sadness of heart. I was very afraid. You don't turn up to a king like this with a sad face because it could get you killed.
[7:49] So 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 is mourning. The broken walls symbolize the people's broken relationship with God. The destroyed gates symbolize the blessing and hope that has been lost.
For Nehemiah, it's a constant painful reminder of what should have been and what could be. Now in some ways, as we think about this city, isn't that how we might feel about the world in which we live?
The cities of this world are a daily reminder that actually all is not well. Behind the facade of the culture and the beauty of our cities, they're filled with corruption and crime, poverty and greed.
Our cities, instead of being a place of refuge, we find fear. Violent protests, social division, racial hatred, fill our cities' streets.
[9:18] Bombs destroy our cities and they're no longer a place of safety. Yes, people swarm to the cities in the hope of something better, but what they find is fear and hate.

You see, the cities of this world symbolise in some ways the world's rejection of God. What God had made beautiful and good is now broken and destroyed.
And we look out at the world and our cities and the places where we live and we mourn! For what is lost, we grieve for what we don't have.
Like Nehemiah, our hearts break for what should be and what could be. We mourn. But all is not lost, for there is hope amidst the mourning.
Second, restoring the city. Not sure who brought this, but thank you. Restoring the city.
[10:36] Look at verse 4. Chapter 2, verse 4. The king said to me, what is it you want? Well, what an invitation for a king to say what do you want?

He could ask for anything, but Nehemiah has one thing on his heart. I prayed to the God of heaven and I answered the king. If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.
you cannot be serious, Nehemiah. Rebuild the city? I mean, it's a heap of rubble.
Corrosion and erosion have been eating away at it for over a hundred years. You want to rebuild the city? In fact, Nehemiah is asking the most powerful man in the world if he can build a city for God's people which will install God's king.
Now, if that doesn't sound like treason, what does? That's rebellion. What an audacious request from Nehemiah to go to the king and say, restore the city.
[12:00] How could he ever think that the king would agree? for two things, two reasons. First, is God's promise.

He went to the king with God's promise. Look back at chapter 1 verses 8 to 9. In his prayer to God, Nehemiah reminds God and reminds himself of God's promise.
Remember the instruction you gave to your servant Moses saying, if the people are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from where they are and bring them to

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the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my city.
I'm going to bring them back back to the place where they were, back to the city. You see, Nehemiah believed in God's promise and it fuels Nehemiah's audacious request to go to the king to say, let's build the city.
In fact, he goes a step further. Look at chapter 2 verse 7. Nehemiah said to the king, if it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of the trans-Euphrates so that they will provide me safe conduct until I arrive in Judah.
[13:40] And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel at the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy.

Nehemiah stands on the promises of God and he goes to the king with that request. He knows that God said he would restore the city so God will restore the city.
So first, he stands on the promise. Second, he stands on God's grace. request. Nehemiah makes his request and the king grants his request.
Now why would the king do that? Well we're told at the end of verse 8, and because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.
You see the only way in which the city would be rebuilt was because God's gracious hand was at work. You see this is the kind of God that we have.
[15:00] When he is met with unfaithful people, he responds in unending grace. Look what happens.

In verses 11 through to verse 16, Nehemiah goes back to the land, to Jerusalem. it's a thousand mile journey, and he goes and inspects all the walls, and he sees that yes, they are utterly and completely broken, but look at his response, verse 17.
then he said to them, to the people, you see the trouble we're 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. You see, it was their shame that the city of God had been attacked and burned.
It was their disgrace that the city of God was no longer a place of blessing and hope, but God would enter in and meet them in their shame. The disgrace was on the people, but the grace of God flowed to the people.
[16:14] Verse 18, I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me, and what the king said to me.

And the people replied, let's start building. So they began the good work. It's not what they deserve, but it's what a faithful, gracious, promise-keeping God does for his people.
So the building begins. The walls will be erected, and a king will be installed. Hope and blessing are there again.
those buds are turning to shoots. Nothing and no one will hinder God's promised grace. Now isn't that the God that we have?
A God who surveys this broken world, and in response has promised to restore broken lives, and renew the disordered world.
[17:25] when confronted by sin, God responds in amazing grace. Do we deserve it?

No, we don't. We deserve to be shut out. We deserve to be left in our own brokenness and mess and our sin. But God comes in promised grace to restore and renew.
God, not Nehemiah, nor anybody else, will ensure that God's city will be built.
So, question, where is the city of God now? How can we experience the city? Well, third, anticipating the city.
Anticipating the city. The building begins, but with it comes opposition. Verse 19, But when Sunballat, the Horonite, Tobiah, the Ammonite official, and Geshem, the Arab, heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us.
[18:48] What is this you're doing? You think you can build this city again? Are you rebelling against the king? You see, God's city will always be opposed.

There will always be enemies against God's city, but Nehemiah is in no doubts whatsoever. Look at his answer, verse 20.
I answered them by saying, The God of heaven will give us success. We, his servants, will start rebuilding.

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Whatever the enemy may throw, God will give success. The city of God will be rebuilt. The city of blessing and hope is going to be restored.
Now, if we were to read through Nehemiah, and we will see this more next week, we will see that the city is rebuilt. But sadly, with the rebuilding comes a return to sin.
[20:03] God's people yet again reject God's rule, and God's king is never installed. That is, until 400 years later, something amazing happens.

Turn with me, please, to Zachariah. it's forwards in your Bible. I haven't got a page number, so those who know their books of the Bible can...
950. 950. page 950.
So, Zachariah, you may wonder, well, what's he got to do with anything? Well, Zachariah was a prophet, speaking at the same time as Nehemiah was going to the king and beginning the rebuild of the city.
So, Zachariah is a prophet at the same time. And here's what he says in Zachariah chapter 8 verses 1 to 5. Chapter 8 verse 1.
[21:35] The word of the Lord Almighty came to me. This is what the Lord Almighty says. I am very jealous for Zion. That's God's city. I am burning with jealousy for her.

This is what the Lord says. I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the faithful city and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the holy mountain.
This is what the Lord Almighty says. Once again, men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with their cane in hand because of their age.
In other words, people will live. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. No fear.
Verse 7. This is what the Lord Almighty says. I will save my people from the countries of the East and the West and I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem and will be my people and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.
[22:50] Well, how would the people know when this is going to happen? It's a prophecy. Well, look at chapter 9, verse 9. Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion.

Shout, daughter Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
Yes, God's king is going to come and you will know when the king has come, when he comes riding into the city on a donkey.
A king who would come to renew and restore all things. Well, I know you know the answer, but we're going to ask, who is this king?
Well, go with me, please, to Luke's Gospel, chapter 19. Luke's Gospel, chapter 19. and verse 28.
[24:17] Luke 19 verses, verse 28. After Jesus has said this, so Jesus has been talking about his authority as God's king.

He's claiming to be the king. He went up ahead, going up to Jerusalem.
That's the context. He's heading for the city. Verse 30. Jesus says to his disciples, go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, why are you untying it? Say, the Lord needs it. Verse 35.
They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road, and when he came near the place where the road goes down from the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to joyfully praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.
[25:39] Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Jesus, God's King, has come to the city to restore it, to bring hope and blessing to the nations.

The people rejoice, but Jesus doesn't rejoice. Jesus mourns.
Look at verse 41. As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it. not just a little tear, but he wailed.
He was heartbroken and said, if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes.
Just as before the people had turned against God, he had come to bring peace, peace with God, peace with men and women, men, but they had refused to listen.

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[26:55] And within a few days the crowds who cried out, rejoice, the king has come, would cry, crucify him, crucify him.

Jesus the king is led out to the hill of crucifixion. What did all of this mean? well, Jesus is taken out of the city to be condemned to death so that we might be welcomed into the city and have eternal life.
The only way that we could be part of God's city was if Jesus came to die for our sin and as he hung on that cross, God's king took all of our disgrace, so that we might be covered by his grace.
Of course the enemies of God thought it was a victory. Jesus was dead, but no, three days later Jesus rose from the grave defeating death and his enemies once and for all because God gave success to his king and his king now rules and reigns forever.
You see, true peace and security is not found in a city with big walls. Blessing and hope is not found in any physical building.
[28:29] It's found in the person of Jesus. The city that Nehemiah longed for and thought about has come to fulfillment in the person of Jesus.

what was promised is now experienced in Jesus Christ. In other words, in Jesus he is the true gate into the city where we find true life in all its fullness.
As we come to Jesus, we find forgiveness of all of our sins, rest for our weary souls, comfort in all of our struggles and assurance in all of life.
Jesus is the city we all long for. It's in him that we find blessing and hope. And as we come to him, so we become part of the city of God, the true city of God, the people of God, the church.
Us gathered today, if we are trusting in Christ, are part of God's new and wonderful city. A means of hope and blessing for the world.
[29:52] You see, Nehemiah's experience is an experience that we can share in. Because as we look out on the city, the town of Carigaline, as we look out at all that is going on in this island of ours, we mourn for those who are outside of the city, for those who do not know God, whose lives are broken by sin, our friends, our family, our neighbours.

But not only do we mourn, we come with a message of peace, a gospel of hope about a saving king, Jesus Christ, who has come to restore us and renew us and to bring us to be his people in his city.
And together, as we trust in him, we can anticipate the coming of God's new creation, which is pictured in Revelation as the ultimate city, the eternal city.
we come to him, our king, who restores and renews and sends us out to be a city, a light on the hill, shining brightly, drawing people unto Christ.
I'm going to read from Revelation. You can just listen. as together we anticipate all that we look forward to because of Jesus, the king.
[31:39] Let me read for you. Meditate on these words. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.
and he will wipe every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things have passed away.
And he who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.
On no day will the city gates ever be shut for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.
[32:57] Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Let's pray. Let's pray. our Father God, as we look out on this world, our towns, our neighbourhood, we mourn.
we mourn the brokenness, the fears, the hurts, and yet we thank you that we have a king in Jesus who restores and renews broken lives, who forgives and restores and makes new.
We thank you that one day the king is going to come again and we will be with him and his people for all eternity in the wonder of that new city, life with you forevermore.

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We praise you, we thank you, in Jesus name, amen. But we're going to sing in response to what we've been thinking about, the city of God.
[34:49] As we sing, let's raise our voices in encouragement to one another. As we praise our king, let's stand together.

Thank you. Thank you.

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