

Waiting on the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 May 2020

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] Jeremiah chapter 2, the Old Testament. Let's read from the beginning down to verse 8.

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king.

Now I had not been sad in his presence, and the king said to me, Why is your face sad seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.

Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, Let the king live forever. Why should not my face be sad when the city, the place of my father's graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

Then the king said to me, What are you requesting? So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said to the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, then you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it.

[1 : 14] And the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, How long will you be gone, and when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

And I said to the king, But please, as the king, let letters be given to me to the governors of the province beyond the river. They may let me pass through until I come to Judah.

And a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.

And the king granted me what I ask, but the good hand of my God is upon me. And it's particularly the first three verses that I want to consider with you this morning, and thanks, Ian, for again putting these up.

The first three verses, the month of Nisan and the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him. Remember, Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer.

[2 : 21] He took up the wine, gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart. And I was very much afraid.

He said to the king, Let the king live forever. Why should not my face be sad when the city, the place of my father's graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

Amen. And may God add his blessing. That reading from this holy word. In these last couple of months that we've been enduring lockdown, and indeed as we've been conducting our services in this manner, much the theme, the subject of the sovereignty of God, has repeatedly been mentioned, repeatedly been uttered.

That truth that we speak of, of the control of God in our lives, in every aspect of our lives, even the control of God, even through these difficult and challenging times.

And we make no excuse to mention the truth of the sovereignty of God at these times. And it's that theme, the theme of God's sovereignty, God in control, that we see repeatedly through Scripture, repeatedly the emphasis of God in control, God sovereign, God ruling, God overruling, God in his directing the lives of his people.

[3 : 56] We see that constantly throughout Scripture. And indeed, we know it constantly through the ages and God's sovereign control over the lives of all who are his.

And indeed, all that we see and see again in the world, in the history of the world. Now, at the same time, of course, we can't say, we can't say that, well, okay, we believe in the sovereignty of God, but we can't say that, well, man somehow must just be a robot, you know, with no responsibilities.

We can't say that man is just a puppet with no mind or no heart or no will. That won't do. God has created you with minds to think.

He's created you with hearts to respond to his word. And he's given you wills, wills to, whether to do or not to do his will. And it's that wonderful mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility hand in hand that we profess and, and, and see truly evident in God's word.

And it's that wonder of the sovereignty of God and at the same time, the responsibility of man. We see that here in that little episode that we read in Nehemiah chapter two.

[5 : 23] I know, maybe we better be more precise and say, the Lord's man, the person who trusts in God, the person who seeks the Lord in his life and her life.

that person will exercise his, his God given heart to, to further God's cause. He'll seek to exercise his mind to, to think how best to serve God, how best to further the cause of, of God's word and God's truth and God's glory in the world that, that God has placed him in.

And the person who, who acknowledges God will seek to delight, to do the will of God and be able to echo Jesus' words that he delights and that it's not my will, but God's will that should be done.

We read in Proverbs chapter 16, verse one, the plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. And it's exactly what we're reading here in Nehemiah.

Nehemiah is this man of God. He's a very humble servant of God. He's got a heart for the things of God. He's got a mind to exercise wisdom about how he's going to further the Lord's work, how he's going to restore the Lord's cause in Jerusalem.

[6 : 41] He's got a will to, to do what's honoring to God, even though that's going to mean leaving his comfort zone there in the king's palace in Persia.

And he's going to honor God. He's going to do what God requires him to do, whatever the cost. The heart and mind and will of a servant of God that God will honor, that God will honor in protecting him in his amazing love, in his amazing grace.

And so as we consider this episode, this little episode in life of Nehemiah, that we're to be reminded that the same God who honors those who honor him is the same God who honors Nehemiah, is the same God whom you and I are worshiping even now.

The same God whom we serve is the same God whom we seek to follow with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. Yes, here's a, we're reading here a key example in scripture of God ruling and God overruling in the plans of Nehemiah.

This is a great servant of God whom we're reading on. But remember, you, you who serve the Lord of lords and King of kings, you're under that same sovereign care, that same sovereign control.

[8 : 04] You're under the ruler of, the ruler of the universe. And you will be given particular work that he gives you to do, to exercise with all your heart and your mind and your will to honor God.

And so there's many lessons for us here in this passage that a few verses and yet so much within it to encourage you, to direct you as to how to glorify God even in these times that we're living through.

So what do we see? What do we read in verse one? We read there of a time of waiting, a time of waiting. We read it a third time already reading these words in the month of Nisan, the 20th year of King Artaxerxes.

When wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. You know, it's been four months since Nehemiah first heard news about Jerusalem.

Four months since he first heard that desperate news of the real problems there in Jerusalem. you'd heard that his fellow Jews, his brother Jews, were in great peril.

[9 : 16] The walls of Jerusalem hadn't yet been rebuilt even though the people or a great number of people had returned from exile to Jerusalem. And so with the walls not yet being rebuilt, the people were prone to attack from their enemies.

And not only that, there had actually been an earlier attempt to get the rebuilding work done. But the same king, this King Artaxerxes, a few years before had actually said no.

He'd heard reports from malicious people who said that if the walls were going to be rebuilt in Jerusalem, these walls were going to be rebuilt by enemies of the king. And certainly the king didn't want any rebels in his own territory to somehow gain any strength against him.

So, you know, the picture, and from a human perspective, didn't look very good for those in Jerusalem. But in that four-month period since Nehemiah first heard that report of Jerusalem, in that four-month period since Nehemiah first called upon God in prayer, we're told here in chapter 1, verse 4, as soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

And that day in this particular month, the month of Kislev, is, well, is our December. Nehemiah on that day in December had got down on his knees and prayed.

[10 : 49] He was praying for his brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and he was praying that God would answer his prayer and the concluding words of that prayer were these.

Oh Lord, give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man, this king. And then he says, now he was cupbearer to the king. That particular day he prayed for a breakthrough.

He was praying for a miracle. He was praying for an opening of what had been shut. He was praying for success. And there's no doubt this was a righteous prayer. It was a prayer from his heart.

But God didn't answer that prayer immediately. Nehemiah had prayed for an answer as he said today, that particular day. He prayed that the king's heart would be moved to permit Nehemiah to leave the palace and to go to undertake that rebuilding project in Jerusalem.

It wasn't God's time for that to happen. And from a human point of view, that sounds strange. After all, why not allow Nehemiah to leave Persia immediately to go to Jerusalem?

[12 : 06] The need in Jerusalem was real. It was severe. Work had to be done there. It seemed there was no time to lose. God's timing wasn't Nehemiah's timing.

And as we know, as you know, God's timing in our prayer requests are not always our timing. Nehemiah's prayer was a righteous prayer.

It was righteous in his request. He knew that only God could move the heart of the king, this obstinate king. That God would move in his time and for God's greater purposes.

Now, why God kept back from Nehemiah Nehemiah's desire for Nehemiah's today to be the day that God would grant Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem.

The reason why God didn't grant Nehemiah that particular prayer request, we're not told. There's so many guesses that are made as to why that was the case. But perhaps the best thing to say is this, this general truth that as one writer has said so wisely, believers constantly need to accept that behind life's frustrations lie divine purpose.

[13 : 22] Behind life's frustrations lie a divine purpose. Of course, there are times when we pray to God, when we pray to him to open a door and that door, figuratively speaking, that door remains shut.

But as one worldly saint said, the late Welsh preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones once said and said so wisely, I'm profoundly grateful to God that he did not grant me certain things for which I ask and that he shut certain doors in my face.

You know, there are times when we pray for a good cause, when we pray a righteous prayer for a righteous cause, but only for God to say wait, wait for his timing, his timing that's always the right timing.

you might be praying right now that God would remove this terrible virus from our land and do so right now. But that prayer isn't answered according to our desire for the now to be now.

God has his reasons for the coming of this pandemic into our own land and to every other land in the world. And yes, there has been so much devastation caused by the virus, but we can still say, certainly in part God's sovereign purposes and we can certainly see that what we're seeing in this virus is how fragile and vulnerable life is before God.

[14 : 57] How the need for mankind, how the need for ourselves to be done with trivial things and to turn to the one true God and to exercise our faith and continual faith in our Lord and Savior.

and to know that faith even through these times and in these times is that only remedy to sustain us, to provide for us and indeed to remember and be reminded that faith in the Savior, faith is the only remedy for the virus of sin that will destroy a life unless that life turns to Christ by faith and repentance of sins.

And you know, the church itself, the church of the Lord, the Lord's people, we're learning so much at this time, so much that tells us what truly matters in terms of faithfulness and trust in God.

What matters, what truly matters with respect to fellowship and worship, that we've been given this time to wait in the Lord, to trust in His sovereign purposes, that we learn how important it is to depend on Him, yes, even for our daily bread, to depend on Him for all our needs, and yes, to use the time that God has given us to be the more in faith, to be the more in love for God and for one another, to be the more caring for one another, to be the more focused on our witness, yes, now,

even as we show forth the love of God in our lives to others, and yes, to be reminded that there will be a time when we leave this lockdown and how we are to maintain that faith and trust in Almighty God and to exercise and develop our love for Him and our love one for another.

As far as Nehemiah was concerned, he had to wait for the right time that was God's time. There was that unseen divine purpose in that waiting.

[17:10] Nehemiah was being asked to wait and wait a little bit longer and to continue to trust in God for that right moment when Nehemiah would seek and find the King's favour.

So there was that time for waiting that we learn that we learn as a time of waiting that indeed the Lord's people exercise even in these times that we're living through.

Secondly, our second point which is our final point for this morning, a time for opportunity that we see in verses 2 and 3.

in the month of Nisan in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes when wine was before him. Nehemiah tells us I took up the wine and gave it to the king and had not been sad in his presence and the king said to me why is your face sad seeing you're not sick?

This is nothing but sadness of the heart and I was very much afraid. I said to the king that the king lived forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city the place of my father's graves lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

[18:22] In many ways in one sense it's just another day and certainly it certainly would seem and strongly would suggest that Nehemiah had waited so long for this day to happen that he actually didn't expect that day that particular day would be the day when his prayers would be answered.

So he comes into the king's presence just as he'd done all these months before since he first prayed that prayer that we read off in chapter 1. So he comes as cupbearer he comes with the king's wine there's no doubt he would have selected the wine for the king as he'd done every other day he'll have tasted that wine to make sure there was no poison in that wine before the king as he'd done every other day.

but this particular day was different normally Nehemiah would come before the presence with a positive demeanor a positive face a happy face good spirits before the king that day's different the king notices that Nehemiah is downcast Nehemiah doesn't need to say a word his face shows that he is very sad he has a deep heart a deep sadness he's got a heaviness of heart that we all can display when our hearts might be particularly downcast at particular times and we don't need to mention these things our faces as it were betray our hearts and the king says to Nehemiah that there's something wrong with him as he says a sadness of heart and in the culture of the time that was considered so out of place before the king if somebody appeared before the king looking downcast that was considered an insult to the king and that could be punishable by death if that was the king's particular desire there and then but God was working of course in that scenario the king wouldn't put

Nehemiah today so through Nehemiah's sad face God used that sad face as an opportunity for the king to question Nehemiah to question his respected servant and for Nehemiah to give the reasons for his sadness there's nowhere for Nehemiah to hide Nehemiah he's got to answer the king and he's got to give the reasons for his sadness he's going to speak the truth he's going to conceal nothing that was the state of his heart for the state of affairs in Jerusalem at that point he didn't know if he was going to live or die at that moment after all the king had the power to put him to death as he did appear before the king with a sad face Nehemiah didn't know what would happen what would be the result which is why we're told that he was very afraid when the king asked him that question but he has to speak he has to speak before the king he has to tell the king was troubling his heart the moment has arrived the moment that he'd been praying for the moment he'd been waiting for has now come before we move on in this episode there are actually applications for us in what we've read so far we see of course that Nehemiah's heart was in the right place Nehemiah's heart showed that he had a true passion for God's glory even the fact that he had a real burden for his fellow Jews for God's people he had a real burden for the state of God's people there in Jerusalem he himself was in distress for the situation in Jerusalem he prayed constantly day and night for his people and he's spoken to the king about that desperate situation that's made him so sad and we've got to ask ourselves you've got to ask yourself I have to ask myself if you have the same burden of concern for the land that we're living in indeed for the world that we're living in do you don't I have that same sorrow that deep sorrow even for the state of true religion and our land and our nation at this time I mean Nehemiah was so distressed at the broken down walls in

Jerusalem that spelled real danger to the inhabitants of the city he had the same concern for the broken down state of the church in our own land when there's so much compromise and even downright rejection of God's word and

[23 : 24] God's law when the influence even of the church in our land is so marginal just last week well six days now on Monday at the online general assembly we admitted a minister from another church another church body into the free church that minister that man spoke of his having been some time before and a way before that particular church body which he's now come from spoke of having left the national church because it had departed from God's law and God's word and his distress was our distress I know it's been in the distress of so many who've left a church that can no longer testify to the authority of God's word and in all its fullness do I grieve when we see God's word compromised and refused by and rejected by men and women even in clerical colors who won't abide by

God's truth when the broken down walls of truth are kept broken and there appears nobody to repair them do we grieve and mourn when the walls of fellowship even that fellowship that brothers and sisters in Christ are to exercise in unity but the broken down walls of that unity are seen when denominations even that share the same gospel share the same confession are so divided and unity is abandoned at a time when the church needs to speak with one voice are we praying for these broken walls to be mended and the ramparts of true faith and love are to be seen to be strong and unified in the face of constant attacks from a world that laughs at a disunited church I pray even that this pandemic brings us to our knees as we cry out to

God for mercy upon our land for mercy upon our church even mercy upon our national church mercy upon our own church our sister churches that God would act and that God would reverse the decline of true spirituality in our land that he'd revive his work in the midst of the years need to God's church in our land so we have that encouragement that reminder praying to be constant in prayer that God would revive and restore his church in our land but we see something else we see and learn something about courage courage in the Lord in the face of real danger Nehemiah as we said was really afraid he was truly afraid before the king but that fear didn't prevent him from telling the king what was in his heart what concerned the plight of his people and we can work out as I said from the passage that the day that Nehemiah was sad before the king wasn't a day that he'd expected to happen in other words he didn't expect that particular day to have to face the king and for the king to ask him why his heart was sad

Nehemiah certainly hadn't manipulated that situation he didn't manipulate you know the process of the king asking him about his heart he didn't manipulate that situation in order to get a response from the king no it was unexpected but for Nehemiah the man whose heart was right with God the man whose will it was to do the Lord's will for the Lord's people the man who truly came before God in prayer with a true heart he now will speak to the king but he's still afraid even when you and I we can be so afraid in fact very much afraid when a moment comes when we have to speak for the Lord a moment comes when we have to make that stand for righteousness and especially when these occasions come when we least expect them to come we still have to exercise that wisdom of the Lord in dealing with unexpected situations unexpected confrontations when we come before even difficult people and we don't know what the outcome will be just as

Nehemiah didn't know what the outcome would be when how the king would react to his request Nehemiah exercises his God-given courage to stand before the king the king was the greatest king the greatest the most powerful individual in the world at this time Nehemiah put his trust in the king of kings the lord of lords and remember that when you're afraid when what might appear real danger when you're faced with you know having to proclaim the truth of god's cause well you remember that you're not on your own remember what Jesus said to his disciples when he encouraged them to to make that fearless confession when when the time would come for them to to make that stand for truth when they'd have to make that stand before religious and civil authorities remember what Jesus said he said do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say for the holy spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say chapter 12 11 to 12 to be encouraged by the example that we've read there of Nehemiah Nehemiah had a heart for the things of God Nehemiah had a mind that thought deeply about the cause of true religion Nehemiah had a will to do something for the Lord's work even though afraid he was afraid that when the time came for him to speak to the king about his distress at the condition there in Jerusalem Nehemiah pressed on in faith and as we'll see next week as we'll see God willing

next week as we return to this chapter we'll see how nehemiah god given mind god given heart god given will is seen and exercised in the furtherance of god's cause and for god's glory i pray that you have that same heart and mind and will to serve the lord of lords and king of kings to serve him in the work that he's given you to do for his sake for his sake for the good of the church and for the glory of his name and so may god bless to us his word this morning amen let's pray lord teach us to honor you with all our heart with all our mind and that truly that our will will be to do your will give us strength lord to serve you in in the place and the positions that you've given us where we might serve you with that heart and mind and will may it be lord that you show us that you are sovereign that you rule that you overrule and may it be lord that when we are afraid that you will strengthen us and that we will not fear but place our faith in you in all things hear us lord as we continue in worship before you now we pray these things in and through the name of jesus amen i believe what the lord says to his saints be our peace but his people must wander and return to foolishness sure lord all those who fear him his salvation is our time

[32 : 19] so that once again his glory may he sing within our land long to come together righteousness and peace and grace righteousness to stand from heaven from the earth say faithfulness what is good the heart will give us and our hand is to the air righteousness will only for and destroy the pain in air close with the benediction now and now may grace mercy and peace from

God Father Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with you both now and forever more Amen