

A Time for Praying and Trusting

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[0 : 0 0] read the first eight verses of Nehemiah chapter of the book. In the month of Nisan, which is around about April time, the month of Nisan in the 20th 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 the 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, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it. 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. I said to the king, if it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province beyond the river, that they may let me pass through until I come into Judah. And I'll answer 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 asked for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Amen. May God bless that reading from his holy word. At some point in all of our lives we'll come up against some particular crisis, some particular decisive moment when we lean, or certainly when we should lean, and lean more heavily on God the Lord.

Some turn of event that happens unexpectedly, something happening without warning, we find that the only place of refuge, the only source of comfort is the God of all comfort.

And the only voice to direct us through that crisis is the voice of God as he speaks to us through his word. And certainly Nehemiah, Nehemiah, this Jewish believer, this man exiled in Persia, this man living under a pagan king, working for a pagan king, living in a pagan land, this man whose heart was right with God, this man whose will was to do the will of God to serve him, this man whose mind was so exercised to do what would honour God and glorify God.

[3 : 0 7] Listen to Nehemiah find himself in exactly that situation that we've just been speaking of, a time of crisis, a time when a particularly decisive moment happened in his life.

For four months he'd been praying, he'd heard about the distress of his fellow Jews in Jerusalem. For four months he'd prayed that God would allow him to leave Persia, certainly temporarily, that God would open the king's heart to permit Nehemiah to go back to the homeland of his ancestors, his own homeland we might say, that God would grant success to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah would make a particular plea to the king. For four months Nehemiah has been pleading that God would move the heart of the king and that Nehemiah would leave his job as cupbearer and go to Jerusalem for a limited period of time, go to Jerusalem for a limited period of time to repair the walls, to bring security to the people there. And for four months that desire has dominated his mind, it's dominated his will, it's dominated his heart. But then the day comes and the day comes without warning.

He sees the details, we see the details, we see the details, we see the details, the king notices that Nehemiah's face is very sad, his demeanour is a giveaway, and we might say a very dangerous giveaway. Because to appear sad before the king could spell disaster for that person, nobody appeared before the king in any other way but with an expression of joy and gladness.

Nehemiah can't hide the sadness of his heart. And the king asks him, why is your face sad?

[5 : 13] You're not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart. And as we read there, we're told that Nehemiah was very much afraid. He was afraid for his life. I mean, this decisive moment had arrived, this crisis you might even say. I mean, would the king sentence him to death for coming before him? The king with that sad demeanour? Would the prayers of four months, these intense prayers, would that four-month period be wasted? Would God bypass Nehemiah and give the work to somebody else? And Jerusalem and Jerusalem deteriorate even further. We're certainly not told what was going through Nehemiah's mind at that point, but we are told that he was very afraid. In fact, he was terrified. I'm sure you're all very familiar with times when you've been very much afraid, when a crisis has developed, when a decisive moment happens and you have to address that crisis. And you can't run away from it. And you can't ignore it. It's there, it's there, it's there, it's there. And God has allowed you to face the situation to the point where it is a problem, it is a real problem that you have before you. And how are you going to exercise wisdom to deal with it? Well, see how Nehemiah dealt with that real crisis in his life. He'll face that crisis with honesty and sincerity of heart in his all-surpassing reliance and faith in God.

We notice, we notice first of all, that he speaks the truth. Yes, he's afraid, but in his fear, he still tells the king what's in his heart. Verse 3, 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?

He's not trying to hide this heart. He's going to speak the truth, but he doesn't know if that truth's going to cause him his death and give or whether it's going to give him continued life.

And in your times of crisis, times when perhaps there's that sadness of heart that's so evident to all around you, well, still be open, open before God and before man. Nehemiah certainly was open before God and before man, as we see there in the passage. But notice, first of all, he speaks to the king directly. It's a sincere reply. He tells him what saddened his heart. But all he has now that true and sure love for his fellow Jews, he's got that true love for God's people in their desperate condition. When he's pressed, when he's pressed to explain what his heart's desire is in relation to that sadness, he knows that he's got to speak to the king with wisdom and courage for the king to grant success. What do we notice what he does then? He prays. He has a time of prayer and commitment to God, that trust in almighty God. Just as we read elsewhere in David when he cried to God in Psalm 61. What time my heart is overwhelmed and in perplexity, that may lead unto the rock and higher is than I. In that split second, in that time it takes for the king to ask him what he's requesting, and for

Nehemiah to give the require of what he's requesting, in that short, short time, Nehemiah's prayed to God. He's prayed with what we call an arrow prayer or even a bullet prayer. We're told, so I prayed to the king of heaven and I said to the king. I prayed to the God of heaven and I said to the king. Just a few seconds of prayer, just a little pause and he's speaking to the king, but for a great moment in entering the presence of the king of kings going into the throne room of heaven itself. In that short prayer of a few words, Nehemiah has called upon God with the sincerity of his heart that God would make the difference, that God would bring immediate help in Nehemiah's time of trouble. And so Nehemiah prays.

[9 : 56] He knows that what he's about to say to the king is going to be absolutely crucial in his desire to go back to Jerusalem or to go to Jerusalem and mend the walls, mend the temple, bring security to God's people there. Of course, he's prayed before, he's prayed all this before, he's prayed, as we said, for four months that God would open the heart of the king. He knows that this is the critical moment that's now come upon him. This is the moment of truth. And Nehemiah is praying that God would open the heart of the king and at the same time that Nehemiah's heart would be strengthened to give to the king what his heart's desire truly is, that Nehemiah would be given words to give to the king and that the king would receive these words and grant Nehemiah his request. From a human perspective, what Nehemiah is asking seems impossible, but with God all things are possible.

And you know, there's much in this incident to encourage you, to encourage me, to encourage all of us. And in times when we're faced with times of crisis, decisive moments when we need particular words to say, when we need wisdom from above, when we need to rest in the Lord for his guidance and strength, even when things appear impossible. So we said, oh God, all things are possible.

So what encouragement can we gain from this passage? Well, first of all, let's be reminded of the arrow prayers or the bullet prayer that we see Nehemiah bringing before God. As we said, Nehemiah knew that he'd reached a decisive moment, not just for himself, but for his fellow Jews in Jerusalem.

If the king refuses his request to help in the security of the people there in Jerusalem, then the people's lives are going to be the more in danger. Even Nehemiah's life in danger, as he's up front of the king and having a sad demeanor. So Nehemiah is set before the king his reasons for his sadness. Will the king sympathize? Will the king give what's in Nehemiah's heart and mind and will to do? And there's only one solution, one solution to the success of Nehemiah's God glorifying will. He'll come before God in prayer and he'll do it there and then. He'll pray to the God of heaven to make the impossible possible. He'll pray that God changes the heart of the king. He'll pray that God moves the heart of the king to have a favorable disposition to Nehemiah.

And even the fact that we're told that Nehemiah prays to the God of heaven tells us, yes, Nehemiah has an audience with the king of earth, even the greatest king of earth, that the God of heaven is all supreme, all glorious, all sovereign. But notice the words of Nehemiah's prayer. We're not specifically told what these words are, but all we're told is, or just a few brief words. And the king having asked Nehemiah what he's requesting, and Nehemiah replies just in a few words, because he's just uttered a few words before God.

[13 : 34] So Nehemiah, he's prayed that arrow prayer, the prayer of few words, the prayer uttered in the quiet of his heart, the prayer that's been directed towards God, a prayer that's been internalized within the heart, but directed to God who hears and answers prayer. Remember that somebody said this, this particular prayer of Nehemiah wasn't the full extent of his prayer life, but the overflow. It was the overflow of his prayer life. As we've already noticed, Nehemiah's prayer life was extensive.

He prayed night and day for four months that God would open the heart of the king. He's been praying for four months for this moment to come, when he'll leave the work of restoration.

But when the moment does come, his arrow prayer is sufficient for God to hear and answer that prayer. Well, it's taken me a long time to get to the encouragement to give you, but I pray that this is an encouragement.

You know, when you face times of particular need, real need, times of maybe particular danger, particular distress, times when you're faced with that need to pray to God immediately, God won't shut his ears to the cry of the brokenhearted.

God won't shut his ears to the person who calls upon him in need, in real need, and all he'll answer, all she'll give, are just the few words of pleading.

[15 : 11] God doesn't reject the prayer of a believing soul, even the prayer of a few words. Remember, as we see elsewhere, that is the case in Scripture.

Remember, the tax collector who prayed with that deep sense of the sin of his own heart, when all he could cry out was, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Now, of course, as we said, just as with Nehemiah, our arrow prayers, these arrow prayers, aren't the sum of all our prayer times before God.

Of course, we must take time to pray. Of course, we're told to pray without ceasing. Of course, if you're a believer in the Lord, if you're in Christ by faith, then your life's habit is to pray constantly in all circumstances.

But there are particular times when a moment comes and the bullet prayer is fired, the arrow prayer is fired from your heart that seeks God's answer, God's will, that seeks God to help in this immediate situation.

[16 : 22] Maybe even now. Maybe even now, at this very moment, you're firing these prayers to God, the God of all grace, the God of all mercy.

Maybe even now, even in the quiet of your heart, there are arrow prayers being fired even from your homes. For God to intervene in a particular situation in your life.

That God would reveal his power. That God would make the impossible possible by his grace and by his mercy. Because as we know, as we read in God's word, we know as a truth.

The broken and contrite heart the Lord will not despise. Well, as we've seen in Nehemiah's case, Nehemiah prays and he prays in faith.

He prays with trust. He prays and he doesn't hesitate then after he's prayed that arrow prayer. He doesn't hesitate to answer the king. His whole commitment is for the cause of God's people, the cause of God's glory.

[17 : 27] So Nehemiah has prayed in faith and he'll act in faith. So he tells the king exactly what's in his heart. And we're not told any longer that he's very afraid.

His fear has subsided. He knows that the God of heaven has heard his prayer. He knows that God's not meant to abandon him. God has laid it on his heart to seek the welfare of his people there in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah has placed his trust, his full trust in God who hears and answers prayer. And surely that again has to be the pattern of your prayer life and my prayer life.

That you pray in faith and act in faith. Pray and act in faith and trust in Almighty God. Listen to the words of James in the epistle of James chapter 1 that really captures that emphasis on the prayer of faith.

James 1, 5 to 7. Are you praying?

[18 : 56] Are you praying in God's absolute mercy that he will hear and does hear and does answer your prayers according to his wisdom and for his glory, for his great purposes?

Are you praying prayer without doubting? And that prayer, that commitment to God? Nehemiah prayed. He prayed with trust.

That trust that he had in his heart. That trust that we see in his confidence that he expresses before the king. When Nehemiah tells the king his plans for Jerusalem.

You see verses 5 to 8, a time for planning. We've seen there's a time for praying and trusting. There's also a time for planning when you commit to God and your commitment to him.

Your plans that you bring before God. And certainly Nehemiah had brought his plans before God. He brings his plans before the king. And although, you know, this is a moment, a decisive moment that Nehemiah has come to, there's no doubt that Nehemiah has been planning what he's intended to do in Jerusalem.

[20 : 08] Planning for these four months since he first heard of the plight of the people there in Jerusalem. He's planned for the protection of his own person as he travels hundreds of miles from the palace he's in in Persia to Jerusalem.

He's planned what he's going to say to the king. He's planned what he's going to need for the rebuilding process in Jerusalem. He's obviously been given God-given wisdom to deal with this situation.

He's used his understanding of the times, the culture that he's living in, when he tells the king the particular request that he has.

For example, we read there that he tells the king of his dead ancestors in the city there in Judah that he wants to go to. In the culture of the time there in Persia, there was great respect for the dead.

And so, obviously, Nehemiah is using this particular cultural awareness to emphasize his own particular desire and his own desire for the king to grant his request.

[21 : 22] He's also aware of the law there in Persia, the Persian Empire, the law that allowed safe passage for somebody to travel between the different parts of the empire.

The law that allowed safe passage. If a person had secure passes, a bit like our modern-day passports, if local governors granted these passports, then the person could travel through safely.

So he knew the law of the empire. And he actually knew, too, where he would find the best quality material, the best quality timber to rebuild the city and its walls.

Nehemiah was an intelligent man, but Nehemiah used his God-given intelligence to express his desire to be aware of the law and the times that he was living in.

He wasn't sitting back. He wasn't a hermit somehow detached from the world he was living in. Yes, he was in the world. He wasn't of the world. He lived in a pagan environment.

[22 : 22] He certainly wasn't of that environment. But he used his God-given skills, his God-given wisdom to bring before the king. Of course, above all, he's trusted in God.

He's prayed that arrow prayer to God. So he's trusted that God would rule and overrule in the heart of the king so that the king grants Nehemiah his requests.

And, you know, for Christians today to impact society, we've got to know the times that we're living in. To engage with a society that's lost its Christian foundation, lost its Christian roots.

We're living in a sea of relatives, of secularism, of humanism. Knowledge of God and his word is almost non-existent.

So we're to be aware of how our society thinks. We're to be aware of every facet of the society in which God has placed us in.

[23 : 23] Aware of the values that people hold to nowadays. And yes, use every opportunity that God gives us to impact society in a way that's God-honoring, God-glorifying and meaningful.

Without compromise. Let's not piously withdraw from the world, but engage with the world to make that difference that only through Christ that difference can be made.

We're in a world that's lost its way. But let's be not just hearers of the word, but doers also. Because that's exactly what Nehemiah wants. He wasn't just a hearer of the word.

He was a doer. And he was someone who glorified God. Because we've seen he has a time for praying, a time for trusting. We've seen he's exercised a time for planning.

But it was a time for acknowledging God, a time for giving glory to God. As we saw there in verse 8, And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

[24 : 31] Nehemiah has prayed for this moment for four months. He's been absolutely diligent in prayer and in planning. Obviously, his heart was right with God.

His mind had been exercised in seeking all the various particular solutions to the various aspects of his journey to Jerusalem and then his time in Jerusalem.

He's been praying about how he's going to lead the work there. His will is to do the will of God. That's been uppermost in his motive. He's been blessed now with the courage to speak to the king about all the distress in his heart for his people.

He's not going to seek any glory for himself. He's not going to bring glory to himself or praise for himself in his constancy in prayer.

He's not going to seek glory for himself and all the particular planning that he's been involved in. He's not going to seek glory for himself because his will is to do the will of God.

[25 : 31] No. He acknowledges God. He's acknowledging that it's God who turned the heart of the king. That God, yes, God ruled and overruled in that king's decision.

And yes, God enabled Nehemiah to exercise wisdom in dealing with the king. But he acknowledges above all that it was God who turned the heart of the king to grant Nehemiah this request.

He speaks of the good hand of the Lord. The good hand of my God was upon me. In other words, the perfect grace of God was evident in Nehemiah being blessed and the king granting Nehemiah's request.

It's there. It's obvious. This is King Arthur Xerxes. Last week, I think it was, when we were told that this was the same king who before had actually refused an earlier request for someone to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls there.

This is the same king who'd denied that particular request. But God has moved the heart of the king. The good hand of Nehemiah's God, the one true God, the good hand of God, Nehemiah says, was upon me.

[26 : 55] I pray that the good hand of God be upon you. As you commit to him your heart's desires.

As you wait in the Lord. I pray that the good hand of God be upon you. As you continue to trust in the Lord. Yes, through these particular times that we're living in.

And indeed in particular circumstances of your own lives. That you commit your way and your ways to the Lord. Be assured that when you do commit your life.

And indeed when you commit the lives of others, loved ones to the Lord. That he hears. And that he cares. And he blesses the prayers of those who call upon him in faith.

Listen finally. Listen to the words that Jesus gave us. To give that comfort. To give that assurance. To give that blessing to those who are calling upon God in faith.

[28 : 08] Listen to these words. Even as you're sending out your arrow prayers to God right now. Listen and be encouraged. Even as we close with the words of our Saviour Jesus.

Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives.

And the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Amen. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, may it be that your people truly are asking.

May it truly be that your people are seeking. Seeking you. May it truly be that your people are knocking. Knocking on that door.

May it truly be that the words that we have even closed with this morning. Will be words that seem to be true in the lives of your people. That those who are asking.

[29 : 11] That they will. And it will be given to them. That those who are seeking. That they will find. And that those who knock. That the door will be opened to them. Lord, may that be the case.

Lord, encourage us. We pray. By the word that has been proclaimed this morning. Encourage your people to be the more in faith. To be the more trusting in you.

To be the more calling upon you. And committing to you. All their plans. And may it be, Lord, that you answer. According to your great wisdom. According.

And for. Your great glory. Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we're going to close in Psalm 25.

Psalm 25 verses are verse 4 to verse 13. Psalm 25 verse 4 to verse 13. O Lord, reveal to me your ways.

[30 : 15] And all your paths. Help me to know. Direct and guide me in your truth. Instruct me in the way to go. Psalm 25 verse 4 to 13. To God's praise.

O Lord, reveal to me your ways.

And all your paths. Help me to know. Direct and guide me in your truth.

Direct and guide me in your truth. Instruct me in the way to go.

You are my Savior and my God.

[31 : 18] All day I hope in you alone. Remember, Lord, your love and grace.

Which from past ages you have shown. Because the Lord is just and good.

He shows his paths to all who stray. He guides the people.

He guides the people. In all his stripes. And teaches them his holy way.

Who they are those who fear the Lord.

[32 : 41] He'll teach to them the chosen way. That they may prosper all their life.

Their children in the land will save.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's close with the benediction. And there may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon and remain with you both now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.