

Sermon Series: “Hand Me Another Brick”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—4/10/2005

Title: “Preparing for a Mighty Task”

Text: Nehemiah 2: 1-20

Intro.: Ills.: *The Secret to Life*

Theme: When we undertake the task of carrying out the mission of God in our local circumstance it is a mixture of faith, planning, and action which we undertake in the confidence of being one of the redeemed in Christ.

Decision time—discerning God’s will and timing (Print 2: 1-8)

- Changing the heart is God’s specialty
 1. Artaxerxes was the same one who had put an uninformed “stop work order” on the project in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21f)
 2. Nehemiah knew he had to talk to the king but waited until God initiated it (2-3)
 3. *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.” Prov 21:1*
 4. Sometimes wisdom exercises its “**right to remain silent**”
 5. **Ills.: Biting your tongue**
- Prayer and waiting go hand in hand
 6. While Nehemiah was waiting he was not idle—he prayed before (Neh 1), during (vs. 4b), and after his request
 7. Prayer is more than a religious activity—it is a necessary act of faith in God’s ability when moving forward
- Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning (vs. 5-8)
 8. Nehemiah didn’t come to the table empty handed—expected God to act upon the King and was ready with a request
 9. Planning, raising funds, approaching investors, planting trees, —part of using God-given gifts/ability already present

Managing the challenges that arises

- Expect opposition when you are carrying out God’s will and plan (**Print 2: 9-10, 19-20**)
 10. Be wise in anticipating and taking spiritual common sense steps to avert trouble
 1. Nehemiah knew that natural suspicion and turf protection could get in the way so he prepared for it with “letters”
 2. Jesus and the Scriptures alert us to how Satan will oppose believers efforts through an unwitting ally in the world
 1. *All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. Matt 10: 22*
 2. *Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Pt 4: 12-13*
 3. Joy of sharing in God’s salvation plan to bring a Savior through a remnant people that kept Nehemiah focused
 11. Some resistance we receive is not about us but about who we represent
 1. Don’t make it personal
 1. *“He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” John 13:20*
 2. Don’t be intimidated
 1. *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:14,15*
 3. Don’t shrink back

1. *We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.* Heb 10:39

· Not every challenge is an enemy (**Print 2: 11-18**)

1. Initially be reflective and less expressive of the perceived problems at hand
4. External processing can steal away the trust of others in what God can do
5. Remained focused on the promise of God rather than the challenge to God
6. *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Eph 3: 20-21*
12. Physical barriers can be used by God to become faith boosters and prayer energizers (vs. 13-16)
13. People problems are all about ministering to and through people (17-18)
 1. Sometimes we get so caught up in offense and personality and ego, and we make each other out to be the enemy
 2. **Ills.: Ego = Edging God Out**
 3. Nehemiah knew people needed admonishment (*disgrace*) but also encouragement (*gracious hands of my God...*)
 4. When focused on being vessels of God's grace, he effectively orchestrate plans beyond our wildest dreams

Secret to Life

The famous English sculptor Henry Moore was asked a fascinating question by literary critic Donald Hall. "Now that you are 80, you must know the secret of life. What is it?" Moore paused ever so slightly, with just enough time to smile before answering. "The secret of life," he mused, "is to have a task, something you do your entire life, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for your whole life. And the most important thing is: It must be something you cannot possibly do." **Citation: John Byrne, *Fast Company* (January 2005), p. 14; submitted by Gino Grunberg, Gig Harbor, Washington**

Biting your tongue

It was his first day on the job. He was a new clerk in the green goods department of a super market. A lady came up to him and said she wanted to buy half of a head of lettuce. He tried to dissuade her from that goal, but she persisted. Finally he said, "I'll have to go back and talk to the manager." He went to the rear of the store to talk to the manager, not noticing that the woman was walking right behind him. When he got into the back of the store, he said to the manager, "There's some stupid old bag out there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce. What should I tell her?" Seeing the horrified look on the face of the manager, he turned about and, seeing the woman, added, "And this nice lady wants to buy the other half of the head of lettuce. Will it be all right?" Considerably relieved, the manager said, "That would be fine." Later in the day, he congratulated the boy on his quick thinking. He then asked, "Where are you from, son?" The boy said, "I'm from Toronto, Canada, the home of beautiful hockey players and ugly women." The manager looked at him and said, "My wife is from Toronto." The boy said, "Oh, what team did she play for?" **Citation: Bruce Thielemann, "Because," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 105.**

Neh. 2:1-20

¹In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; ²so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid, ³but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" ⁴The king said to me, "What is it you want?" **Then I prayed to the God of heaven,**

⁵and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." ⁶Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. ⁷I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? ⁸And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

⁹So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. ¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

¹¹I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days ¹²I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

¹³By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; ¹⁵so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. ¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

¹⁷Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are 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." ¹⁸I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" ²⁰I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."