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**SERMON TITLE: Faith without Fear Gains Reward**

*Rebuilding a City: Trusting God & Each other*

**SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:1-8**

**DATE: May 17, 2020**

Online service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

READ also Hebrews 11:17-27. Watch online at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org)

Nehemiah prayed daily. However, well over a hundred days passed before anything happened at all.

Prayer is not always simple or short. Through prayer God builds a vision and then shapes the person to whom the vision is given.

Should you and I dream a dream, what would it look like? You may recall the song “I Dreamed a Dream” sung by the young, abandoned mother, Fantine, in *Les Miserables*. The dream was spawned in the young woman’s youth. The dream was idyllic. Her dream was later shattered by life’s cruel realities of abandonment, poverty, and illness.

Life sometimes kills our dreams.

Most would have said dreams of Jerusalem’s restoration were naïve and idyllic. Reality was that Nehemiah’s home city was under a “no build” edict issued by the very king Nehemiah served. Remember, Ezra, the pastor, had led the second group of returnees back to the city twelve years earlier. Those 5,000 people enthusiastically completed the unfinished temple and hoped to also rebuild the wall. However, there’s always resistance and a group of resisters petitioned the king with false charges of sedition against them.

Indeed, Israel’s enemies won the lawsuit. The work was halted.

Several years passed. Building the wall and reviving the city seemed like a pipe dream.

Today we embark on the dream that was planted in the mind of an urban planner. It wasn’t his dream alone. The vision has as its source the God of promises; the God who can make a way; the light in the darkness.

What kind of dream would it be? Idyllic? A pipe dream? An abandoned dream? Let’s hear the story. READ Nehemiah 2:1-8

Let’s notice the timing that is displayed in this reading.

It was the month of Nisan. During the time of Moses, the Lord had designated Nisan as the first month on the Jewish Calendar, the month of Passover which celebrated his people’s

liberation from Egypt. This significant holiday was core in Israel’s history and was faithfully observed.

What if you were residing in a country that knew nothing of the birth of Christ and Christmas. December 24 rolled around. Your job on December 24-25 was just another day. There happened to be a big banquet for work and you held an important role. The party would go on all evening, into the 25<sup>th</sup>. You are a believer and love Christmas traditions—the tree, the story, candlelight service, being with family. What would you be thinking about on December 24-25?

Of course! Nothing would be the same. You would deeply miss your own customs on Christmas.

Nehemiah would have had similar reasons to be sad. Here he is, in Susa, chief of security in the world’s largest empire; working directly for the king, serving in the palace—the very palace where 25 years before Queen Esther went unsummons to her king to save the Jewish people. Susa had everything—it was the pulse of a powerful nation, exuding success, wealth, and resources. He lives in the inner circle with a wonderful career. What more could he want? Yet he can’t shake the sadness.

His own capital city, once vibrant, lies in ruins at the time of the most important religious holiday in his nation’s history. He’s been praying for months. Nothing has happened. Is his dream naïve?

The King notices his downcast face. This is not a safe. He’s the one who ensures the king’s protection. He knows the particulars of who is to be trusted and who is not. He understands that he serves the king with all confidence. He also knows King Artaxerxes pronounced the very edict that said Jerusalem was not to be rebuilt.

The king probed. “*You’re not sick.*” Is Nehemiah plotting against him?

Nehemiah responds with the truth, but does not reference Jerusalem by name. He cares about “his ancestral home,” he says. That’s respectable in Persian values. What was not acceptable was to be a high level employee and speak of your personal problems.

But something triggered the king to suddenly show concern and ask, “What is it that you want?”

Why this uncustomary response? We can ask ourselves that question all day. Kings held the power of life and death. At the

snap of a finger, the lowering of a scepter, your life was in the balance. BUT, remember our questions from last week?

- *Is God involved in the world's troubles?*
- *Does God take action with the intent to rescue, protect, and rebuild people and cities?*

Let's recall Nehemiah's prayer from four months before. "Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me." (Neh 1:11)

God answers prayer. *God is never early.* . . . Why? Because through prayer God builds a vision and then shapes the person to whom the vision is given. This takes time

At just the right time, God answered Nehemiah's prayer verbatim.

If you were Nehemiah, would you have been able to immediately give the King an answer?

This man was utterly prepared. Why? Through prayer God builds a vision and then shapes the person to whom the vision is given.

This was not a whim, a wish, or an idyllic dream.

He prayed enough that he felt God was building the vision. He said that. (Go back and reread it!) As God planted the vision, Nehemiah took the idea and began planning.

- ✓ What materials would it take to accomplish it?
- ✓ What would it require of him personally?
- ✓ Who would be his supply and monetary resource?
- ✓ How much would he need?

Are you strategizing for your projects? Do you count the cost?

Jesus said once, in talking about being his follower, *you must count the cost.*

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'" (Luke 14:28-29).

You have to count the cost because you are getting ready to step out in faith.

"What is it that you want?" the king asked. Nehemiah shot up an arrow prayer. An arrow prayer is an instantaneous prayer for help. He had been praying and preparing for this moment. The prayer is specifically for success. NOW you need help. Now SYNERGY kicks in. With God, 1+1=3.

But don't think if you limit your prayer life to arrow prayers, you are going to get very far. It's not enough—it's like keeping your car on a quarter of a tank all the time. Who's to say there's a gas station when you need it?

You need to be tanked up better than that to rise to the occasion when the occasion presents itself.

Because he had prayed and planned Nehemiah was ready, the arrow prayer went up, and even though afraid, he embarked on an amazing risk of faith.

Prayer leads to courage. He went for broke and asked for everything he needed!

- ✓ He was the king's security – *now he asked the king for his own security.*
- ✓ He was an employee – *now he asked for extended vacation.*
- ✓ He worked for the nation of Persia – *now he asked for money and supplies to build his own city and a home for himself.*

The king gave everything he asked for. **God is amazing! God is good . . . (all the time! And all the time . . . God is good!)**

Dallas Willard said, "Prayer is a power-sharing device. God wants to empower you to do what you want." Through prayer the vision and plan materialize.

**Then, you must have faith to act.**

Taking risks of faith is the culture of being a believer: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses – all walked by faith. All Christians are called to walk by faith, and nothing happens without it.

Faith requires courage. Faith without fear gains reward.

What is it that we need to pray for our own nation? What do we need to inspire in others who are fearful due to this pandemic? What steps of faith do we need to take to help rebuild?

It is reasonable to pray to God for what is unreasonable to humans. With God, nothing is impossible. Our God will supply. God will make the way for us, too.

AMEN