

I Was the King's Cupbearer

Nehemiah 1:1-4,11; 2:1-5 [1] The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, [2] That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. [3] And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. [4] And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven ... [11] O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. **For I was the king's cupbearer** ... [2:1] And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. [2] Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, [3] And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? [4] Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. [5] And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

- George Bernard Shaw: "The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity."
- This statement certainly summarizes what Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and it rebukes every so-called Christian who would fold their arms complacently, smile benignly, and roll their eyes sarcastically every time a pastor preaches about reaching the lost. "Here we go again!"
- Nehemiah was the kind of person who cared – about the heritage of the past, about the needs of the present, and about the vision of the future. He could not sit idly by in comfort while the city of Jerusalem (capital of Israel) was in worse shape than the city of Shushan (capital of Persia). It bothered him enough to do something about it!
- Nehemiah served as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes Longimanus, who ruled the Persian empire for more than forty years. He tested the king's wine at every meal before offering it to him. Because he was so close to the king all the time, he had to be cultured, knowledgeable in court procedures, and able to advise the king when asked. To consistently be that close to royalty was a position of incredible influence. Nehemiah had a life that anyone would envy. Nehemiah had it made. Nehemiah was comfortable, to say the least.
- But like large doors, life-changing events can swing on small hinges:
 - It was just another day of sheep herding in the desert for Moses when God appeared to him at the burning bush.
 - It was just another day when David was called home from tending his sheep to be unexpectedly anointed king of Israel.
 - It was just another day of fishing for Peter, Andrew, James and John when Jesus called them to become fishers of men.
 - You never know what God has in store on an ordinary day!
- One conversation with some of his brethren from Judah about the state of his beloved Jerusalem, and Nehemiah can never be the same. Others can still be indifferent, but he can no longer sit idly by while God's kingdom is not faring as well as his secular job. Nehemiah is like David was – for forty years, a carnal and corrupted King Saul never concerned himself with the presence of God, but no sooner had David been crowned king than he traded his scepter for a sword and started shouting, "Where is the ark of God?!"
- Nehemiah said, "Everything is going great in my secular job, but that's not enough if God's work isn't going even better!" His burden affected him so much that the king noticed and asked him about it – and Nehemiah didn't cover it up! "Yes, God's work is more important to me than my secular work!" "Yes, God's kingdom comes before your kingdom!" "Yes, I need to give some major time to the Lord!"
- At the risk of losing his position, or even his life, Nehemiah told the king he wanted some time off so he could use the skills he had learned in the Persian court to organize the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Because Nehemiah had distinguished himself as a diligent employee, Artaxerxes willingly gave him permission.
- Where are the Christians any more who are concerned more about the house of God than their own house? More about the work of God than their own work? More about the kingdom of God than their own kingdom? More about the future of the church than their own financial future? Does God have any Christians like that any more?

- It used to be that people got saved and told their employers, their sports teams, and any company that happened to drop in, “I don’t do Sundays, I don’t do Wednesday nights, I don’t do prayer meetings, and I don’t do special service nights.” I’m going to church because God is the most important thing in my life!
- Things sure have changed, haven’t they? Now people get a job and tell their church, “I don’t do Sundays, I don’t do Wednesday nights, I don’t do prayer meetings, and I don’t do special service nights.” These same people are able to arrange vacations, day trips, getaways, and time off for anything they want to do. These same people often spend the equivalent of a forty-hour work week sitting in front of their television or their computer ... but they have no time! What does that say to God and to the world about our priorities?
- Nehemiah said, “I was a cupbearer to the king of Persia, but I want to be a wall builder for the King of Heaven!” I’ve enjoyed tasting the wine hundreds of times in the atmosphere of the royal court, but I’m disturbed that the walls of God’s city are in disarray and no one seems to care. **TAKE THIS GOBLET AND GIVE ME A HAMMER!**
- The walls of an ancient city maintained the distinctiveness of its citizens – not just anyone or anything could get in. Jerusalem was in reproach because her walls were down, and her people were just blending in with everyone else around them. Nehemiah couldn’t take it any more! Is there anyone like him around here?
 - Is your countenance saddened when the baptismal waters are untroubled week after week?
 - Is your soul smitten when no one receives the Holy Ghost service after service?
 - Are you sick at heart when lives remain unchanged?
 - Is your spirit troubled when you see the reproach of sin that is imprisoning the people in our city?
 - Is your heart heavy when you see the spiritual decay in churches all around us?
 - Are you consumed with concern when our own services become regular and routine?
 - And most important ... WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT IT?
- Take this goblet and give me a hammer ... I used to be just a cupbearer, but I want to be a wall builder!
- **Genesis 30:1** And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, **Give me children, or else I die.**
- Where are you, Rachel? Have you just accepted the circumstances and resigned yourself to a lifetime with an empty womb? Or are you begging God for babies? Give me children, or else I die! When is the last time you prayed, “God, whatever you have to do to me”? When is the last time you said, “I haven’t won a soul in a long time, and I hate it”? When is the last time you said, “I should be more involved in the church than I am, and I can’t stand it”? Where are you, Rachel?
- On July 4, 1854, Charley Peace, a well-known criminal in London was hung for his crimes. The execution was performed with formal ceremony. There was a priest present who read the formal prayer prescribed for executions. As Charley was marched onto the gallows a priest read these words from his book: “Those who die without Christ experience hell, which is the pain of forever dying without the release which death itself can bring.” At the reading of these chilling words, Charlie Peace stopped, turned to the priest and shouted in his face, “Do you believe that? Do you believe that?” The priest, stunned by the verbal assault, stammered for a moment and then said, “Well, I suppose do.” “Well I don’t,” said Charlie. “But if I did, I’d get down on my hands and knees and crawl all over Britain, even if it were paved with pieces of broken glass, if I could rescue one person from a place like that.”
- **Nehemiah 4:1-2** But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? (YES!) will they sacrifice? (YES!) will they make an end in a day? (YES!) will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? (YES!)
- God will use you even if your life is “rubbish” and “burned over”!
- In 52 days, 42 different working parties restored a 50 foot high wall with a circumference of 4 miles at a rate of 504 feet per day. How?
- **Nehemiah 4:6** So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.
- **TAKE THIS GOBLET AND GIVE ME A HAMMER!**