

Nothing Else But Sorrow of Heart +++

Nehemiah 1:7 – 2:16

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~ Our Spiritual Safari didn't get far with Nehemiah in our first report. I hope you have read all of this Scripture in your Bible very carefully because, if you have, this report will be much more meaningful to you. We left Nehemiah during his prayer in our last report. Remember, Nehemiah was the cupbearer of Artaxerxes the king; and word was brought to him that things weren't going well back in Jerusalem with the rebuilding of the walls or the temple. That's when Nehemiah just dropped down on the pavement and started praying, weeping, fasting and mourning. This is when Nehemiah, the layman, takes his position among the people saying, "*... I have sinned.*"

It sure would be refreshing to hear more people say that today. I guess all of you critics who think you don't sin after you are saved haven't read the Book of Nehemiah? It's obvious you do not consider the proper approach to this problem in your life from a Biblical viewpoint. Nehemiah could have taken a pious position and said to this man, "*... I'll pray for you.*" Likewise, Nehemiah could have been critical of those who had returned by just calling them failures. Caustic criticism may have a place in the world – and I think there are times when it is the right thing to do because we do need to hear the truth – but if your criticism does not disturb you, concern you, and effect you deeply, then my advice is to keep your mouth shut.

Jeremiah was the harshest critic in the entire Bible; and his criticism burned like fire. Jeremiah's sarcasm rankled the souls of the wicked, to be sure; and they threw him in the dungeon as a result. Remember, the fall Jeremiah took when he was thrown down in there broke bones and left him up to his armpits in mire. That's not good – not good at all. However, Jeremiah was always called the weeping prophet because his message broke his own heart. So, if your message doesn't concern you – then stop – because if your criticism doesn't break your heart, then you aren't speaking for God. You can just write that down. There's just too much talk today, friends; not

enough tears. There are too many hardened lives and not enough soft hearts. Well, what we find with Nehemiah is a very real concern as he also weeps and prays about what to do. We should note Nehemiah didn't work and pray, either; no, he prayed and worked. That happens to make all the difference in the world, too, by the way....

I

⁷ We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

~ We're not examining some Pharisaic onlooker, friends. This man is just about as honest with God as he could have been. Nehemiah believed God's Word, obviously, and he knew it – so, he rested in it. Not only did Nehemiah believe the Word of God, but he also believed in the successful return of the Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild what had been destroyed. It may shock you to learn that most preachers don't believe either one of those truths today. That's why God uses the layman as He does: because He usually can't get through to those who deign call themselves preachers. This is a great prayer and an awesome section of Scripture....

⁸ Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

⁹ But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

¹⁰ Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.

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.

II

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.

~ Nehemiah was both willing and wanted to be used by God. God heard that prayer request. Nehemiah is a layman we can like; and there are many laymen like him. Being the king's wine taster was a high and important political position – and dangerous. Any man who was so trusted by a king became the king's close friend, naturally. I would imagine Nehemiah was asked many times by the king what he thought about certain matters that had come up. I also think Nehemiah likely waited so long to return to Jerusalem because he thought his position might help his people.

Either way, Nehemiah isn't running way out ahead of God here. He has had a very bad day and he doesn't feel well; he's been fasting and crying and praying. I think his eyes were all red and he didn't look happy. Usually, Nehemiah was a cheerful man – and everyone knew something was wrong. Then, to top it off, Nehemiah becomes very afraid; because he didn't think his sorrow showed. That's when Nehemiah made himself available to God; and said he was going in to talk to the king, whom he addressed as simply

“this man” in the last verse of the last chapter. So, as we read on, we’ll see the king’s response — and we’ll see Nehemiah return to Jerusalem. This is also where the seventy weeks of Daniel begins, by the way....

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.

⁶ And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

~ That’s when Nehemiah gets down to business. This is also where we have the second use of the little word “so” – which occurs thirty-two times in this book – and it means Nehemiah wasn’t wasting words. Today, many people take fifteen minutes to say things they could have said in two sentences – particularly politicians. Well, I guess everyone wants their fifteen minutes of fame, right? – Not Nehemiah....

⁷ Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

⁸ And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

⁹ Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

~ It was a difficult trip back to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah trusts the Lord; but – he doesn’t mind asking the king to help. As a result, this man returns to Jerusalem escorted by a small army. So, don’t mind when I ask for help with this program, friends. I trust the Lord — but the Lord wants me to tell

you about a very real need. Consider yourself advised. I suspect no one really cares about the Word of God anymore, and I suspect I won't get a single response to this paragraph; because I doubt anyone is even reading anyways. See, God leads us all differently; you'll be led one way and I'll be led another way. Maybe we'll cross paths again – maybe not....

10 When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

~ There is another, Geshem the Arabian, who we will meet later on in this same chapter – and these are the enemies of God, friends. They have already tried to hinder the rebuilding of the temple; and now, they want to stop the rebuilding of the walls and infrastructure. When Nehemiah came riding in with the army, the enemy was not happy; in fact, they were exceedingly grieved. It always matters who you are when it comes to receiving good news. Good news to you is *NOT* good news to everyone. The Gospel is *NOT* good news to the enemies of God, friends – you can just write that down – actually, it is anything *BUT* good to them. Nehemiah could have written several chapters at this point; but that's not how he did things. And, here we have "so" again for the third time. Sometimes word power is found in the absence of them....

11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

~ Nehemiah wasn't alarming everyone, and he isn't making a huge spectacle of his survey, either. His inspection of the city is done under the cover of darkness. This way, Nehemiah can see the true condition of the state. That's the way a prudent businessman would do it. So, our Spiritual Safari concludes this leg of our expedition with Nehemiah surveying debris so twisted and mutilated that he couldn't even ride a horse through the city. He had to dismount. This simple inspection is where we dismount, too. No one knows what Nehemiah is doing at this point. He is using good judgment and caution in doing God's work. I happen to love Nehemiah, friends ~

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