

## **Nehemiah: The Man in the Business of God**

(A study on the life of Nehemiah)

Text: Neh 1:1-11

### ***I. Introduction:***

The text for our meditation is Nehemiah 1:1-11. But I will also refer few other verses in the same book.

Nehemiah is one of my favorite books in the Old Testament, because Nehemiah was a lay leader, not a liturgy. The story tells us that he was a cupbearer and then the Governor of Jerusalem, and yet he was in the business of God. He was in a secular profession, but his knowledge of scripture (perhaps the writing of Moses), His love for the people of God, and for the city of God was amazing.

The context of the story has great relevance to our context in the OFUESI ministry. We are lay people called into different profession and yet we are men and women of the Word of God. We desire to engage in the business of God.

Let us read the text in the NIV version: **Neh 1:1-11**

**Let us pray**

In our meditation today, I would like to highlight three things:

- 1. Nehemiah was a man of godly expectation**
- 2. Nehemiah was a volunteer**
- 3. Nehemiah was a man of sacrifice**

### **I. Nehemiah was a man of godly expectations**

The Bible does not tell us specifically about the family history of Nehemiah. How he came to Babylon and what happened to his parents. But Bible does tell us about the plight of many Jewish youths like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

It will not be wrong to imagine that Nehemiah and his father suffered in the hands of Assyrians, Babylonians, and then in the hands of Persians.

However, Nehemiah, as a young man, aware of the cruel plight of his people, he grew up without any guile or bitterness, but with the knowledge of the Word of God. With positive and godly attitude, he won the confidence of the Persian king—king Artaxerxes. And Nehemiah became his cupbearer, a privilege that even a Persian could not acquire.

As we listen to the prayer of Nehemiah, it becomes clear that Nehemiah knew that his people along with his ancestors went into exile because of their sins. That God had promised to Moses that he will gather his people again and that God's promise had begun to fulfill as many Jews had returned to Jerusalem and the temple was built. But God's vision for his people was not yet complete.

Nehemiah was well informed of the Scripture. The Scripture shaped his thinking. Put differently, the Word of God shaped Nehemiah's dream for future and the expectation. He clearly understood the vision of God for the people of God and the city of God. He knew that God had not redeemed them from Egypt and then from Babylonians with his great and mighty hand only to keep them in Persia.

Nehemiah was caught by the biblical expectations, not human frustration. Through the Scripture, he saw a vision for the people of God to live in a city that has beautiful and glorious gates, mighty and secure walls. He was not ready to settle for the less.

When the vision of God grips the heart of men and women, it makes them dispensable instruments in the hands of God in spite of the cost that it may entail. They begin to look at the things the way God looks at them. Their ambition changes, their destiny changes, and they become **a man of great expectation.** They begin to anticipate the fulfillment of the word of God. They foresee what God has foretold. They do not see ordinary dreams, but extra-ordinary visions. They anxiously anticipate God to take full charge of their circumstances and transform their broken world right side up.

Their great expectation leads them to an intensive inquiry

Look at Ch 1: 2

*I questioned them (ch.1: 2)*

It implies that he questioned more than one person.

They just do not do mere inquiry. They actually research, a thorough research.

Let us examine the text. What did Nehemiah hear about the people of Jerusalem?

- *those who returned are in great trouble and disgrace.* (ch.1:3)

- *walls of Jerusalem is broken down.* (ch.1:3)

- *its gates are burned with fire.* (ch. 1:3)

When our anticipation seems to be crumbling down, we get upset and in desperation, we turn to God. In such circumstances, our turning to God is not a routine activity. In all seriousness, we would not settle for anything less than our expectations.

Read Ch 1:4.

When I heard these things (ch.1: 4)

For some days I mourned (ch. 1:4)

Nehemiah is stirred, and turns to God in desperation

*Mourning, weeping, prayers, and fasting.*

In 1993, when I discovered that Asangla, my wife, was suffering from a brain tumor, I was terrified and shocked. I literally began to lament and cry like a child in my prayers. We

anticipated having a family and serve God together. We did not marry expecting that we should part so early. My expectations led me to ask all kinds of questions about my wife's sickness. I asked not one doctor, but many doctors. I mourned, wept, prayed and fasted. I did all that I could do. Finally, after thirty days, God in his abundant mercy healed my wife.

The point I intend to make here is not about the result, but our Godly expectation that produces a passionate effort for the result.

What are our godly expectations for the Christian world? What do we expect to happen in next 20 years in OFUESI?

I see more than 20 millions students in the Universities of India who have every opportunity to become intellectually capable, but spiritually miserable.

I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I see 865 million unreached Muslims, 550 million unreached Hindus, 150 million unreached Chinese, 275 million unreached Buddhists, and 2550 unreached tribal groups with a total population of 140 million in the world. Do they meet my godly expectations? Do I see *great trouble and disgrace* like Nehemiah saw? Am I upset about it?

I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I see 97% of one billion people in India who does not believe in God of the Bible. They are either agnostics or worship the idols as their gods in order to overcome their daily sufferings. Do they meet my expectations? Am I upset about it? I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I see a large number of youths in India who want to serve Jesus Christ but they don't know how to handle the Word of God. Some don't have money to go to seminary. Because of the lack of training they interpret the Word wrongly and mislead the Church.

Do they meet my godly expectations? Do I see *great trouble and disgrace* like Nehemiah? Am I upset about it?

I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I see alarming high rates of divorce among Christian families weakening the very foundation of Christian homes that build society and a nation. Do they meet my godly expectations? Do I see *great trouble and disgrace* like Nehemiah saw? Am I upset about it?

I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I see homes where children grow without Christian parenting, just left alone in front of TV and the violent video games. I see a stream of young lives becoming the victim of the devil's scheme. Do they meet my godly expectations? Do I see *great trouble and disgrace* like Nehemiah saw? Am I upset about it?

I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I read about high percentage of Christian youth engaging in pornography, teenage pregnancy, and the shootings and killings on the school campuses. Do they meet my godly expectations? Do I see *great trouble and disgrace* like Nehemiah saw? Am I upset about it?

I see the broken walls and the burnt gates when I see young Muslims memorizing the Koran to become martyrs for Allah by becoming suicide bombers. Do they meet my godly expectations? Do I see *great trouble and disgrace* like Nehemiah saw? Am I upset about it?

**If yes! Then why there should not be mourning, fasting or tears in our eyes today.**

Remember! Tears do not represent our weakness and immaturity alone, but also the seriousness and the depth of our involvement. It is an overflow of a genuine love and dedication.

The smallest sentence in the Bible has a profound meaning—Jesus wept.

## **II. Nehemiah was a willing volunteer.**

Well, Nehemiah had other options. Nehemiah could have called for a town hall meeting-discuss how to raise fund from the Jews of diasporas, organize prayer meeting and mobilize resources, and organize a short-term construction mission trips. The natural response could have been to mobilize resources: man and money. There is nothing wrong in itself.

But Nehemiah did not begin this way. The question is what do I do with my godly expectations? Am I only a dreamer? Every one of us can copy Martin Luther and pose like him and say “I have a dream.” I used to make such a fun as child. Until I understood what it really means. The real question is what I am doing about my dream.

Notice in Ch 1:11, what Nehemiah does

*Give your servant success today. (ch.1:11)*

Nehemiah clearly saw his personal role in the crisis because the vision of God had gripped his heart. He was personally in love with the people and the city of Jerusalem. If we are only available to pray and not do anything then our praying is just playing with words.

We not only pray for those whom we truly love but we also make ourselves personally available to them. The questions arise here:

Who are the people whom we love? Where is our Jerusalem? Have we carefully considered our mission field?

*For God so loved the World that He gave his only begotten son*, and now it is our turn to pick one specific part of the world, people group as our Jerusalem given by God, so that we can practically love them, mourn for them, pray for them, fast for them and cry out to God for them.

This leads us naturally to consider the next point.

### **III. Nehemiah was a man of sacrifice.**

To see that our godly expectations in God are fulfilled, we need to sacrifice.

We, who are entrusted with the business of the Kingdom of God, cannot afford to be a miser in our investment of the resources. There is not place for tokenism in the mission of God. We cannot do great missions of God with tokenism. You get what you invest.

We must ask the tough question: What percentage of your income goes to the mission field?

Notice chapter 2 onwards, Nehemiah was using selflessly all the resources that were available to him.

#### **1. He sacrificed King's personal favor for God.**

-What is it you want? (ch.2:4)

#### **2. He sacrificed his personal leisure time for God.**

- By night I went out. (ch.2:13)

#### **3. He sacrificed his position and authority for God.**

“Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me.” (ch.4:23)

“Moreover, from the ....” (ch.5: 14 – 16)

#### **4. He sacrificed his income for God.**

Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews...” (ch.5: 17-18)

We don't know if Nehemiah was worried about his retirement, the future of his children, and his security. But the scripture does say that he was giving away which he was not supposed to give.

If we are giving to God an amount, which we owe to the IRS (tax-exempt money), we are only relocating the IRS money (Thank God for the government who allows their money to be used for God's work). But we still owe to God what is due to God. If we give only what is due to Caesar and what is due to God, it is still not a sacrifice.

Furthermore, if we give out of abundance or out of the things that are useless to us, that is not a sacrifice.

What is sacrifice? Sacrifice reflects our absolute trust and dependence on God. It reflects the measure of our sincere love. We bring our best to God because He is our best and He deserves the best.

Nehemiah reflected such trust, dependence, and true love for YHWH. He was able to sacrifice because he trusted in God's goodness. Our sacrifice is directly proportion to our trust in God.

He had the absolute confidence in the God who called him. When God calls, He not only appoints, but also He sees it through that we accomplish the task for which He called us out.

Notice in chapter 2:20: *I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us..."*  
Again, notice in ch 4:20: *Confidence that God will fight for us.*

REMEMBER OUR GIVING REFLECTS OUR TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD FOR OUR NEEDS. IT REFLECTS OUR LOVE AND PASSION FOR HIS WORK.

### **Conclusion:**

Finally in 444 BC, Nehemiah completed the building of the walls and the repairing the gates of the city of Jerusalem in 52 days.

*So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)*

HOWEVER, our walls and gates are still in ruins. Who will build these walls and repair the gates? Where is our Nehemiah?

I believe we are the Nehemiah. We can do even better than Nehemiah did. We have the revelation of the New Testament. We have full gospel. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We have the community of God, the body of Christ. We have the 2000 years of history of the Church to protect us from errors and pitfalls. We have the modern technology and the power of the human intellect. And above all we can do better than Nehemiah because we have God who promised, "Lo, and behold I am with you to the ends of the earth."

### **Let us pray**

\* that we will not be complacent toward God's mission. WE will expect great things from God and we will attempt great things in God because our God is great.

\* that we will volunteer ourselves for His service

\* that we will sacrifice our resources for God's purpose.

\* that we will choose to trust God and never UNDERMINE the importance of building the Kingdom of God SACRIFICIALLY. AMEN