

Reading: Nehemiah 2:1-20

Theme: Building God's Way.

Those who saw the Dr Who Christmas special, either loved it or did not like it as it was too weird! We are all time travellers – going forward in time second by second... Christmas has come and gone so quickly, now we are a week into the New Year. Our lives, the life of the church, are all moving on, but where are we moving on to? It may seem daunting that the church is moving on - but we need to – we are a living body of God's redeemed people and that should be encouraging to us – it is to me, even if going forward brings changes or problems. Our text for 2018 is about moving on, building for God as He would have us do so. I want us to note 3 things this morning:

1. Passion and Prayer.

Nehemiah was a busy man, with pressures of work and life upon him. He was a man who loved the Lord, His work and His people. When sad news of the state of Jerusalem was brought to him, it brought him to tears and drove him to prayer (1:2-4a). With Nehemiah it wasn't a case of just saying prayers for Jerusalem, but because of his love, passion for the Lord, His city where His temple was and where the people of God were struggling, Nehemiah went to serious praying - *“For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”* The *“some days”* = he prayed for some 2-3 months. It would seem he had regular times of fasting and praying serious and passionate prayers for God to work and help. Even when asked by the king why he was looking so sad and what was the reason for the sadness of heart and he explained, the King asked him what he wanted and Nehemiah prayed again (v4) - not a long drawn out prayer, but an SOS type, an arrow prayer prayed very briefly and probably in his mind. Nehemiah had a passion, a

heart for God, His work and His people and called on this same God to keep His word He promised, and work to show He is the God who answers prayer.

We all have pressures on our lives - trying to get the balance of work and life right, spend time with the family and yet be involved in and part of God's work here. Do we have a heartfelt concern, a passion for the work of God in our own lives 1st of all? Then is there a heartfelt concern, passion for the work of God here in DEC and we want to see the work progress and move on? I wonder if that affects our praying in a heartfelt way - in our seriousness and passion in our own prayer life for ourselves, families and the church we belong to. We need a passion for the Lord, His work and His people. Having such we will pray for God's glory as He works His plans and purposes out. Pray for Him to work, to provide those to do the work. As we pray in such a way, we may find He has given us the burden, the vision, the abilities and the strength to be the answer to our own prayers! Turns out Nehemiah was going to experience being the answer to his passionate praying! It certainly wasn't *"Here am I - send somebody else!"*

2. Persuasion and Purpose. (2:20)

Nehemiah had a very cushy, comfortable job and lifestyle as cupbearer to the King. Yes, he would have to taste the wine to make sure it wasn't poisoned, but it also meant he was someone close to and very much trusted by the King, was probably his right-hand man. As we pray, prayer can change us, prepare us for future service and work as Nehemiah found out! His prayer fuelled passion was affecting him and it showed even in his face (2:2), but he is able to pour out to the King not only wine, but the burden on his heart (2:2-3). Incredible as the King then

asked him what he wanted! Wouldn't it be incredible if we could go to someone great and powerful and they ask us what we want! Yet we already can - that is included in the amazing privilege of prayer. We like Nehemiah are to pray for the work of God, His people and God's glory. We don't know what Nehemiah said in his very brief prayer to God, but in his answer to the King the situation showed he was the one called, set aside to do the very work he had been praying passionately about.

Nehemiah experienced a growing persuasion he was the one who was called of God to be Jerusalem's builder, and he acknowledged God's hand on him as the king granted his request - *"because of the gracious hand of my God upon me, the king granted my requests."* He was persuaded he was the one God was going to use, he had both an internal and external approval and evidence that God had purposed he was going to be the builder of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah recognised God's call and purpose for him to be the one to build and to establish Jerusalem and it was a great honour to serve both God and His people in that way. His passion, prayer and persuasion would keep him in that purpose in the hard, testing times and in his case the even harder and more testing times! He never lost sight of it even when internal discouragements occurred. In all he did he knew, as we say today, *"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!"* Nehemiah was a very practical man and almost as soon as he arrived, he inspected the scale of the work.

We see Nehemiah's persuasion and purpose in 2:20. See his persuasion at the start of v20 as he answered those who mocked and ridiculed the people of God who would rebuild *"The God*

of heaven Himself will prosper us;” Nehemiah had this persuasion, this assurance of God’s help, blessing and provision. He knew he could praise Him for all that was past and trust Him for all that’s to come. These were not hot air words spoken to impress, but expressed his own confidence and persuasion he was called to serve the living and true God. He could look and see how his prayers had been answered in so many ways not only the permissions, but the provisions also. When he shared with the people what God had put in his heart they were willing to work (2:18b). These people could see God’s purpose, plan, provision and were persuaded of God and would work with one heart alongside Nehemiah.

The purpose is expressed at the middle of v20 “*therefore we His servants will arise and build*”. All this fuss, this bother was about a building project! Yet it was more than that! This was the place where God had set His temple, had promised to hear and answer His people when they called to Him in trouble, here was the centre of OT means of grace and where His people would go to, to worship the Lord God Almighty. This was no ordinary city but a place set aside for the people of God to worship the God of the people together. The people also realised they were part of a great work – do we?

In our own lives and here at DEC we have emphasised prayer, we have a week of prayer coming up to seriously seek God to bless the work here. Surely heartfelt prayer has been passionately made that God would come meet with us, deal with us, handle us and shape us, so that we would do His work in His way. Do we feel God will answer us? We are able to look back and see the encouragements and blessings God has granted us in various gracious ways. As we do so, we can be persuaded,

encouraged that God is calling us to do His work in His way for His glory. We are to hang onto that, to take a look at answers to prayer, the provisions God has made in remarkable ways in the life of the church even this past year. This should grip us and thrill us that God is prepared to use us as individuals and as a church in His great work and plan for not only this part of Doncaster, but perhaps for the world. As we see the good hand of our God upon us are we prepared to start building again in the life of the church? He has a purpose for the work here in DEC and also incredibly in our own individual lives as believers.

We too are to recognise that *“The God of heaven Himself will prosper us;”* and we are to be prepared, ready and willing to say and fulfil *“therefore we His servants will arise and build”*. For us personally, this will involve going on with our God and Saviour on a day by day basis, knowing Him, His love and ways in a deeper relationship. As a church it will mean that we’ll have to examine our lives and work the Lord here to see if our time, talents and gifting could be used in current works/roles or developing new works/roles. We may feel that everything is running smoothly in the church, but as in any church or organisation, it will be a small percentage doing a high percentage of the work. Not only would people need to step up and step in, but have grace to step out or aside to give others room to grow as may be necessary. None of us are indispensable - graveyards are full of people who thought they were indispensable and while they are missed, they have been replaced!

Our church text is both a challenge and an encouragement. We have God with us and can see it in many ways, but are we going

to be serious with God in our own individual Christian lives and also in the life of the church? To go on in this way is not always easy. See finally:

3. Personal and Persistent.

As an individual and as a leader, Nehemiah knew personal threats and attacks. This was coupled with attacks by enemies from without against the work and the people. Nehemiah personally knew discouragements from some of the leaders as they would not get involved in the work e.g. the nobles of Tekoa would not get involved in the rebuilding work (v5). Yet he must have personally been very encouraged as he saw a wide range of people being willing to shoulder the work, be involved in it and work together.

They weren't necessarily all builders as we read in chapter 3 - the high priests and the fellow priests went to work. Many individuals are mentioned as well as those making up tribal groups. Goldsmiths were involved, one of the perfume makers helped as well. A number of the Levite's were involved; one man had his daughters help him repair section of the wall (3:18). Some of individuals are mentioned for building more than one section. The men of Tekoa are mentioned as also building 2 sections (v5 & 27) - as if to say to their nobles that they disagreed with their lack of involvement as they might have felt that they were too posh to be involved and work! For each section they had to clean off old stones perhaps dig them out of the rubble and reshape them as they built their sections and gates.

There seem to be in a number of gates the Sheep Gate, the Fish Gate, the Jeshanah (Old) Gate, the Valley Gate, the Fountain

Gate, the Water Gate. The various groups built the different sections of walls. I guess one gate that no one really wanted to build was the Dung Gate, but someone did it - Malkijah son of Recab put in the doors, bolts and bars in place (3: 14).

As the people carried on this work in unity, apart from the nobles of Tekoa, they knew constant threats, constant discouragements of mocking and insults. They were even threatened with being wiped out by enemies around them. Nehemiah himself was maligned by a false prophet. Yet in it all Nehemiah persisted and kept on going on. As we note all these things, note that as soon as Nehemiah had a problem, not only was he very practical about it, but he was very prayerful about it. Nehemiah seem to have been a man who constantly committed everything to God in prayer. His passion for the work for his God was maintained as he prayed, because of that his persuasion and purpose did not alter – even despite personal discouragements and attacks he was persistent in moving the work forward. The work went on with great success and although nothing had been built for some 60 years after the temple's rebuilding, the work of completing the walls was achieved in 52 days and they celebrated all that God had done for them and His goodness.

How serious are we about the work of God going on in our own lives and the life of the church? Not so we can have our little agendas and wriggle into positions of influence, but we are going to put ourselves out to serve the Lord and His people for His glory here in the church, also in our lives! Are we going to act as the nobles of Tekoa and not get involved, but just stand on the side-lines criticising? I would urge us all, as we are able, to roll up our sleeves both physically and spiritually to get

involved in helping in the life and work of the church - especially in being faithful in prayer. I know there are a lot of pressures on us all, some who are older may feel frail; others have responsibilities in families, others have high-pressure jobs and are balancing time pressures for family and work, yet you also want to be serving the Lord in some way in the church. We all need to be wise in these time pressures and life balances we have, but we can always find time to do the things we want to do. I'd encourage us all to be involved in the work of DEC as we are able.

Nehemiah encouraged the people to go on to build for their God - I do the same to us all here. I long that I myself and you would have a passion for the things of God, we would be persistent in prayer for God to work and to provide all we need, that we would be persuaded of not only God with us, but the things He would have us do and together we would go forward with a God centred purpose and build for the Lord in our lives and the church, doing so with expectation that the God of heaven Himself would prosper us. As we do so in the year ahead, I pray we would know personal encouragements with which to encourage one another with and that even if there are personal problems and difficulties that we would encourage each other to be persistent in serving the Lord and one another. I pray we would look back on this year as the year the Lord did amazing things among us.