

Nehemiah 1: 1-11

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia...” (Ezra 1:1) The result of this first movement was that almost 50,000 Jews got to return with Zerubbabel and they attempted to rebuild the temple...BUT it would be almost 50 years later that a priest named Ezra would be sent back by King Artaxerxes with the authority and resources to rebuild the temple. Another 15 years and you find God moving in the heart of a man who was uniquely gifted to take another important task that needed to be done for the sake of Jerusalem's identity and protection. That man is King's "Cup Bearer" ...a man named Nehemiah. The cupbearer is a very important person at that time. His task is to taste the king's food & wine to make certain that no one has poisoned it. So the person who serves as cupbearer must be someone the king trusts completely & without reservation. In our text today, when he was in the palace of Persia, one of his brothers, Hanani came to see him and gave him a message about the situation in Jerusalem. The news was that the remnant of people that had survived captivity, were in great distress and disgraced in Jerusalem. Also, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates had been burnt. After Nehemiah heard the news, he wept and mourned for many days. Let's imagine how the broken wall and the burned gate looked. It was a very sad thing. They lost the safe protection for their lives.

Without a wall, a city was nothing more than a group of people waiting to be robbed, harassed and even killed. During that first 50 year period, an attempt was made to rebuild the walls but King Artaxerxes was warned about the history of the Jewish people, they were rebellious people and he demanded that they stop. So those 50,000 or so people were LITERALLY in constant danger and the broken city walls and burned gates were a constant reminder of the humiliation. But even in that dark time, God continued to use his faithful people. They encouraged the people with God's hope and promises to make them return and build up the wall of Jerusalem. The task and the commitment to build up the wall of Jerusalem inspired the people to have hope of a New Jerusalem through these faithful people. As we see the people God used, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, we are challenged and awakened to say and cry to God, "Lord, use me in the way of God's construction for the ruined walls!" How can we be like these faithful people of God? What kinds of hearts and good characters that we have to follow?

Look at V. 4: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." the faithful people of God show us their tears and sorrow come from their broken hearts. The new construction of the walls in our lives and in our country will begin when the people who have hearts to cry and mourn. The person of God revealed their tears and they cry and mourn with a compassionate heart when he or she hears of the pain and sadness that other people and also our country has. A little boy was lost inside a busy shopping mall. He was standing in the aisle of a department store just crying and crying, "I want my mommy.. I want my mommy." People who passed by felt sorry for him and many of them gave him nickels and dimes and quarters to try to cheer him up. Finally a salesperson from the floor walked up to the distraught little boy and said, "I know where your mommy is, son." The little boy looked up with his tear trenched eyes and said, "So do I...just keep quiet, I got a good thing going here!" Nehemiah's life was very comfortable because of his position, and he lived in the palace as a cupbearer for the king. People get very easy settled in their own environments, and they block off other people's suffering and pain. But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Our hearts and minds can easily be dried out and blocked off towards others. Jesus wept when he saw a woman who had lost her son in death and at Lazarus' grave. He also wept when he entered Jerusalem before his crucifixion, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem who kills prophets---". So let us continue to check our hearts and minds to keep compassion in our lives.

Nehemiah accepted his own responsibility for the ruined wall, even though it had been done by others in the past. This is part of a leader's character of one whom God can use.

V.6 "...I am praying before you day and night on behalf of the sons of Israel, your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my have sinned". Nehemiah was accepting his part of the responsibility for the ruined wall of Jerusalem. The boundary of responsibility and concern expanded even to him and his father's house. He confessed the sin of himself, his house, his family and his people. This confession is important so as not to repeat the tragedy in our history again. We have our part of the responsibility for the ruined wall. Once upon a time a rat looked through a crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife opening a package. What food might it contain? He was aghast to discover that it was a rat trap. Retreating to

the farmyard the rat proclaimed the warning; "There is a rat trap in the house, a rat trap in the house!" The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Rat, I can tell this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it." The rat turned to the pig and told him, "There is a rat trap in the house, a rat trap in the house!" "I am so very sorry Mr. Rat," sympathized the pig, "but there is nothing I can do about it but pray." The rat turned to the cow. She said, "Like wow, Mr. Rat. A rat trap. I am in grave danger. Duh?" So the rat returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer's rat trap alone. That very night a sound was heard throughout the house, like the sound of a rat trap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see that it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital. She returned home with a fever. Now everyone knows that you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient. His wife's sickness continued so that friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer's wife did not get well. She died, and so many people came for her funeral that the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide meat for all of them to eat. So the next time you hear that someone is facing a problem and think that it does not concern you, remember that when there is a rat trap in the house, the whole farmyard is at risk. It is easy to ignore that we are all related with others concerns and issues and easy to say that is not my issues and my responsibility and it is easy for us to transfer our responsibility to someone else, and then the same mistake happens again. We want to excuse ourselves, and say we are too busy to think about it, or we say, "It's not my fault, not my responsibility; it's the fault of the person who came before me." As long as we continue to justify ourselves and blame others who came before us, and after us, we can never build up the ruined destroyed wall of our country, our homes, our communities, or ourselves. Nehemiah was a good example, to show us the responsibility of the ruined destruction of the wall, as he sincerely confessed his sin of his father and his house. Perhaps the next generation will ask about what the church and our country was doing now, since today will become the history of tomorrow. Like Nehemiah, we need to have the sense of moral and spiritual obligations that will determine, step by step the future of the church and of our country.

Sometimes I dislike listening to all that the politicians are saying. Now we MUST work together to construct the ruined wall of the country. This is our first step to revive our physical and spiritual strength. When we try to escape our own responsibility, it is like pointing our finger at someone else. But when we do this, one finger is pointing out, but three fingers are pointing back at us! We cannot escape our own responsibility. We each must do our part and take a responsibility. And we must avoid blaming others if we see any deterioration of our church, family, or nation. Avoid the "blame game". When the Israelites saw the ruined wall, they blamed the king of Babylon. But as long as they just blamed them, they could not start the reconstruction. We learn from Nehemiah's challenge that we cannot escape from the responsibility for the areas of deterioration, and the formation of our history.

V. 11. Nehemiah prayed, "Listen to my request and my prayer that I may glorify You. Give me success today in the presence of the king." Success is not just for ourselves, but to glorify God. This is what Nehemiah was seeking. The person who realizes his position or status is not for himself or herself, but for the glory of God, can be a real blessing to others. That is the reason why God has blessed them, to be a channel of blessing for others. We are like the man who approached God & asked Him, "Lord, up in heaven how much time is a million years?" "Well," God said, "a million years is but a second in heaven." "Oh!" said the man, "and up in heaven how much money is a million dollars?" "Well," said God, "a million dollars is only a penny in heaven." "Great!" said the man. "God, give me one of your pennies." "All right," said the heavenly Father. "Just wait a second." But if we really ready to bless others with God's blessing, please ask God for many blessings with this vision for the construction for the ruined walls around us. God said "open your mouth widely I will fill it." This is the whole message in the book of Genesis, why God chose Abraham and his descendants—to be a source and channel of blessing for all nations. Joseph is another example. Through him all the nations at that time of severe famine were blessed because of his position and success. He became a source of blessing, to impact. In our own situation we are in a position to bless many people as Christians, chosen people to be a channel of grace and a source of blessing to others and all the other nations. We should involve ourselves to reconstruct the world around us wherever we are, to the glory of God.

Pray for God' s blessing, good health, enough recourses, peace, joy, but also pray that God can use you and me to be a blessing to others to build them up too. Please go the area of the ruined wall and do some reconstruction with God' s many blessings; your wisdom, talent, time, energy, material resources.

Nehemiah wept for reconstruction when he heard of the destruction of the wall of Jerusalem. The weeping of tears in your heart will be the starting point of the reconstruction and revival. When was it we wept with tears for our children, home, community of faith and our country? We cannot exclude our own responsibility when we see the ruined walls in many areas. Ask God many blessings with confidence and compassionated hearts for building up the ruined walls, restoring the broken hearts.