

BUILDING 4 GENERATIONS TO COME

Asking the King

Nehemiah 2:1-6

INTRODUCTION: We began our study of the book of Nehemiah last week seeing a man who had come to a crossroad in his life. He was a respected leader of his people in a position of honor and responsibility. His job was lucrative and comfortable.

No doubt there had been times in Nehemiah's life when his soul had been afflicted and God comforted him.

However, this time, Nehemiah's soul was comfortable, and the Lord afflicted him.

Nehemiah received word that the walls of Jerusalem remained in ruins and the gates of the city still laid around charred by flames of destruction. With a heavy heart, Nehemiah mourned, wept, and prayed. But moved by the Spirit of God, Nehemiah committed himself to action.

- Even before he knew what was possible for him to do
- Knowing that doing anything at all would come at great cost
- Uncertain of what the future would bring if he said "Yes!" to God

Nehemiah said in essence, **I will do whatever the Lord enables me to do by His grace and power.**

Last Sunday morning I revealed discomfoting news to the congregation, news that has been afflicting those of us on the staff for over a year as we have wrestled with what God wants us to do about it. That news, briefly and simply put is

- **We are not reaching many Millennials, people from age 16 to 35 right now.**
- **26% of Bay County residents are Millennials.**
- **Less than 17% of our regular attendees are Millennials.**
- **It looks like the same thing is likely to be true in a few years with the generation following Millennials, Generation Z.**
- **Although the desire of our heart is to continue to be a 4 Generation Church, we are leaving the two youngest generations behind.**

At the close of the worship service last Sunday, we gave the church a ten page report that describes where we are as a church, and the recommendation that our church make an intentional decision to make the changes that are necessary to reach and disciple more Millennials and Generation Z.

Many in our church have studied, prayed over, and talked about this report all week.

I told you Sunday that the Ministerial Staff and I have all responded to what the Lord has shown us by saying, **“I will do whatever the Lord enables me to do by His grace and power to lead our church to reach and disciple these generations.”**

During the week, many of you have expressed that same commitment to us.

Tonight our church will decide in a Called Church Conference what our response to this news as a church will be.

This morning, I want to further prepare us for that hour of decision tonight by seeing in God’s Word what else Nehemiah did when God revealed the great need of Jerusalem to him.

And to you who are guests today and the crossroad decision facing our church is not of personal concern to you, do not fear. God’s Word never returns void, and I am confident that from the example of Nehemiah God will show you something of great personal benefit in your own life.

Let us read Nehemiah 2:1–6

1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, *when wine was before him*, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. 2 Therefore the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you *are* not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart.” So I became dreadfully afraid, 3 and said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire?” 4 Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.” 6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), “How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

After mourning the still ruined condition of the city chosen by God, Nehemiah, prayed, and decided that he would do whatever God wanted him to do. Then he waited upon the Lord for the right opportunity to make his request to the king of Persia, not only the supreme earthly authority in the empire but his own personal boss and supervisor. Because Nehemiah was the cupbearer of the King Ahasuerus I.

For very few of our requests do we need to make direct appeal to the king or president of our nation, or even the governor. However, we often have need to make our requests known to the One who rules over them all, to the King of the Universe, to God Himself.

And it is not surprising that as the Holy Spirit caused the Book of Nehemiah to be recorded that He would have it done in such a way as to give us instruction concerning the way to make our appeals to the King, the King of Kings.

I hope as there has already been much prayer offered to the Lord concerning the decision our church will make tonight, that there will still be much more this afternoon before we meet at 6 o'clock this evening. I also believe that what we see in this passage about asking the King will help all us daily as we call upon the Lord in prayer.

So, what does this passage in Nehemiah show us in answer to the question?

How do we ask the King?

Nehemiah 2:2-3 Therefore the king said to me, "Why *is* your face sad, since you *are* not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, "May the king live forever! ...

What seems like preliminaries to getting down to the business of asking the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild the broken walls is in actuality a critical part of making our requests to the King of Kings.

I. WE APPROACH THE KING WITH AWE AND REVERENCE.

A. God is worthy!

While God is omnipresent, He sits enthroned in the Heavens.

His countenance is brighter than the sun on a cloudless summer day.

His voice is stronger than the thunder of the fiercest storm.

Powerful, winged, angelic seraphim hover around the throne of this King declaring His holiness.

By His word the galaxies of the universe were born. Though they are too many to count, each having also an innumerable number of stars orbiting their center, yet each one of them has as a gift of their Creator its own unique characteristics.

He made all that is in the universe, and He made each of us also.

He rules in sovereign power and perfect righteousness.

He never errs in judgment, decision, or action.

His Word and His way is always right.

We should in every moment we think of God, we should stand in awe of Him.

Every time we enter into His presence through prayer we should come with humility and reverence.

- B. This is how **Jesus taught us to begin our prayers, “Hallowed be Your name!”**
- C. Coming boldly to the throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16) means we can come with confidence to the One who loves us, but it does not mean we forget that we come before the throne to Him who sits upon that throne.
- D. Crying Abba Father does not mean we forget that the One who has adopted us as His children remains the King of the Universe!
- E. Even Jesus, God the Son, One with the Father, showed reverence to the Father when He prayed.

Dear brother and sister, when we pray, let us approach our Heavenly Father with a sense of awe and an attitude of reverence.

The psalmist gave us wonderful practical advice concerning this when he said

Psalm 100:4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

II. WE ASK FOR WHAT PLEASES THE KING.

Nehemiah 2:5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”

In the decision facing us as a church, we must remember, “The issue is not what I want or even what we want.”

The issue is what God wants.

My friend, **abandon this theology, whose origin is the devil, that God just wants you to be happy!** That is not all that God wants. **God wants things far greater and far more magnificent for us than just our temporal happiness.**

When I think back upon my 19 years of ministry as pastor of FBC, Slidell, I think of two particular ministries God gave me that were probably the most eternally significant that I had in Louisiana. I did not want either one of them!

One of them I have told you a lot about and that was my ministry in leading our Hurricane Katrina ravaged church in Slidell to become a major center of disaster relief and recovery for the whole community while rebuilding our own facilities and ministries. If God had advertised the position, I wouldn’t have even filled out an application, yet it proved to be one of the most rewarding, faith building, God glorifying periods in mine and Karen’s entire lives.

The other ministry I do not talk a lot about. I was president of the LBC for two years. Again, I did not want the job. When a group of fellow pastors asked to nominate me it

was not because I was a well-known pastor of a great church whom they wanted to honor. It was because I was a persistent proponent of moving our state Baptist work back to a position of believing in the perfection and inerrancy of the Scriptures. When a spokesman for the group called me, I was alone in a hotel room traveling on church business. When I hung up the phone, I wept. I did not want to lead this movement, even as committed to it as I was. I called Karen and told her. She said, "I already know." I said how could you have known? She said, "God told me. He wants you to do it."

I did it. There was nothing fun about it. In the middle of my term I had quadruple bypass heart surgery because of the stress of the job. But God blessed it, and over the years God brought our Baptist University and the entire state convention back to a position affirming the perfection and inerrancy of the Word of God. He also fully restored my health, and not long after that called me to get active in missions, a ministry that is one of the greatest joys in ministry God has allowed me to have.

My friend, God's way is always best, even when it is not fun at the time. And in following His way there is the greatest joy! But we cannot find that way by saying or thinking that's God's way is just what I think will make me happy!

The issue is not what I want.

The issue is what God wants.

Does God want these two younger generations left behind?

NO! NO! GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH!

Does God want us to reach Millennials and Generation Z?

YES! YES! THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY COME! ... LET HIM WHO THIRSTS COME! WHOEVER DESIRES, LET HIM TAKE THE WATER OF LIFE FREELY!

Does God want us to disciple people of the Millennial and Z Generations?

YES! OF COURSE HE DOES. JESUS COMMANDED US, "GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF EVERY PEOPLE GROUP."

Surely that includes Millennials and Generation Z!

So then why do we struggle with this decision?

We struggle because at points it conflicts with what we want.

We struggle because we are aware that at least some of what is pleasing to God is not particularly pleasing to us.

Do you know that you can admit that to God?

Jesus did. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed

Matthew 26:39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;"

We can be honest with God concerning our desires and fears. We can ask for His help in dealing with those feelings.

But Jesus did not stop there. He prayed,

Matthew 26:39 ... nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

III. WE ASK IN FAITH.

Nehemiah 2:5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

Did you notice in verse four that after the king asked Nehemiah, "What is your request," that Nehemiah prayed one more time before he voiced his petition to the king? He had already prayed for days.

When he made known his request, Nehemiah was able to do it in faith, believing God would grant his petition because he had already wrestled through prayer with what God wanted him to do.

Folks, it is my deep and earnest prayer that you have taken the report that the staff and I gave to you last week and you have laid it before the Lord in prayer. I pray you have sought His will in place of your own.

I tell you, I have done this.

Your staff has done this. Not just for a few minutes or a few hours or even a few days, but literally for months.

And we believe with all of our souls that we have heard from God. We are asking Him now to speak just as clearly to you, and we are asking in faith because we believe that this is the will of God for our church.