

SURVEYING THE FIELD

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A SERMON

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“And I arose in the night; I, and some few men with me: neither told I any man what God had put it into my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.”
Nehemiah 2:12

NEHEMIAH, it seems, prepared himself for action by taking a survey of the necessities of the case. Although he lived before our Savior's day, he certainly acted upon one of our Savior's maxims about counting the cost, lest, after having begun to build, we should not be able to finish. I like to picture to myself that man of God going by moonlight round all the waste places of the city, compelled here and there to dismount by reason of rubbish, clambering over the fallen stones, leaping sometimes with agility from crag to crag of the city's walls—getting in his mind a clear idea of all the city's desolation, and feeling in his heart the pressing, heavy weight and burden of the responsibility which God had thrust upon him.

If he had begun his work carelessly and thoughtlessly, he might have failed in it, but having begun months before with prayer, having been guided by Providence so far, yet even now the very first step he must take is a personal survey of the work and a thorough personal acquaintance with the necessities of the case.

Now, I know that there are here, on the weeknight at the service, many who love the Master and are anxious to do something in His cause, and I thought I might very profitably commend to them the example of Nehemiah in this respect. We shall consider Nehemiah, then, first as a *fine example to those who would seek the good of the church at large*. Secondly, a *pattern to any of us laboring in any one distinct sphere*. And thirdly, I think I may apply the same principle in reference *to the personal work which is being done in our own hearts*. And before we conclude our meditation I may ask you to take a quiet ride around the desolations of your own spirit and so get a clear view of what must be done before you shall become a city inhabited by God to His praise and glory.

First, then, dear friends, I suppose I have here, as Nehemiah had, a few men and women earnest, resolved, unselfish, men and women who are willing—

I. TO SEEK THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH, OF THE CHURCH AT LARGE.

Such men will allow the word of exhortation when I say to them, first, you and I are in the service of the great church of God and we must, like Nehemiah, *firmly resolve that we will do it*. Our heart must be set upon this thing. It must not be with us a mere fancy which we have taken up as we might have taken up any other. It must not even be of a spasmodic kind, but our heart must be set towards the church of God because it is the home of our love, the place of our birth, the bride of Christ, the hope of the world, the pillar and ground of the truth. If we have not such a view of the work to be done and a resolve that it shall be done, we shall certainly not succeed in it.

And my brethren, we must, like Nehemiah, *be quite clear that we have no sinister motives*, no selfish ends to be answered. Nehemiah was in a high and good position as chamberlain or cup-bearer to the king, but he gave up that and came away from Shushan to the desolations of Jerusalem—a long and toilsome journey.

Even when the city was built, though the place was the beloved of his heart, yet he does not seem to have had any prospect of remaining in it, for the king had set him a time for his return, and though he

did stay there twelve years, yet it must have been by successive furloughs that he obtained this absence from the palace, so that he had no selfish object whatever. If the city were built, he would not dwell in it, and if the temple-glories were restored once more, he would but once look upon them, and then return again to the city of his employment, and to the palace of the alien king at Shushan.

God will not bless us to the Christian church if we want to make a party to ourselves or to take to ourselves the leadership. He will not own us in the work, if we are merely seeking our own esteem, and good name, and fame under cover of a zeal for righteousness and for the glory of God. No! There must be a resolution, but the resolution must be based on something better than the objects of personal aggrandizement. There must be a devotion to God, and a complete and perfect dedication and consecration of our souls to the good of the church and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Supposing that we have already, by divine grace, been called into such a condition, then, further, we must learn, like Nehemiah, *the art of waiting*. He first prayed about Jerusalem, but he did not cease to hope. And when he came to the holy, though wasted city, he did not rush to the work at once, as our hot blood too often suggests to us to do. He knew that “raw haste” was “half-sister to delay.”

He was there three whole days in which nothing was attempted. He did not seize a trowel in his hand and hasten at once to work, letting other people come and join him if they pleased, but he rode alone all round the walls to inspect the damage, and to estimate the cost in sacrifice and toil to repair it. We must be eager to labor, but we must also learn to wait.

God’s servants will find that their Master does not always give them instant and immediate success, but that He is often pleased to glorify Himself by testing their faith. If you are a soldier, you must not expect to be always in the fight, but must sometimes lie, perhaps for tedious days and even weary months, in the trenches, just as our army had to lie before Sebastopol—worn out with waiting, anxiously wishing for the order to charge.

So our heavenly Lord, our great Captain, sometimes teaches us patience, making us wait until the time shall come to do and dare. Fellow Christian, young man or aged believer either, I am persuaded you will need to have in the midst of your toil for Jesus, to hear the word, “You must wait. Trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”

But after he had waited, Nehemiah set a further example to us. *He felt that he could act alone*. Throughout the whole Book of Nehemiah, you are struck with the singleness of the man and the potency of his individuality. He is quite prepared, if no one else will rise up to serve God, to serve Him by himself, and yet at the same time *he never refuses the help of others*.

“And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.” He who would serve God to any purpose must be willing to serve Him all alone. If you cannot stand the brunt of being forsaken, you will scarcely do to be a soldier of the cross. Those whom Christ will greatly use must learn to be misunderstood, to be misrepresented by their brethren, and in their more daring projects to be looked upon as being perfectly beside themselves.

Yet they must count this among the cost and to be prepared still to stand to their work. Paul says, “At my first answer, no man stood with me, but”—sweet and mighty encouragement to your faith if you are alone!—“nevertheless, the Lord stood with me.”

Now, I think we shall find that it is not easy to couple the independence of a noble mind with the willingness to accept help from the few and the feeble, who at the very first are willing to gather around you. A man is apt to say, “No! I can act alone. These will but hamper me.” And yet let us always recollect that, though God has usually worked by one man, and though almost all the great wonders of the olden times were accomplished by personal courage and were feats of personal faith, yet at the same time He has frequently been pleased to ally to the one man a company of others, without whom the one man would have been feeble indeed.

Take the case of Gideon. We are told of “the sword of the LORD and of Gideon,” and of course, Gideon leads the van, but what would Gideon have done without the men that lapped? Those few and

feeble folk with their pitchers and their torches must go with Gideon, and God will bless Gideon through them, and the world through the man and those who follow him.

We must be willing, therefore, to take any help God may offer to us, and not be very particular about what that help is, so long as we are assured that God has sent it to us. We must be willing to lay aside our individual and sole reliance, to come down from the high place of personal independence, and work side by side with others, if it be the Lord's will.

Then, further, my brethren, if you and I should have in our minds now some great work for God, *we must be quite sure that we do not indulge in any boasting*. Oh! great things are going to be done! Oh! the wonderful prospectuses that some people have brought out, of wondrous things that were going to regenerate the world, and the only purpose they have served up to now has been to increase the work in some printing office! Nothing else has come from many of them.

And you know there are people who really, by their own talk, should have turned the world upside down by now, but they have not done anything of the sort as yet. Perhaps the time may not yet have come, but with them it seems as if it never did come or could come. Nehemiah says, "Neither told I any man what my God had put into my heart to do at Jerusalem." You will often find it best not to commit your plans to others.

If you want to serve God, go and do it, and then let other people find it out afterwards. You have no need to tell what you are going to do, and I may add, there is no need for your telling what you have done, for very, very frequently God withdraws Himself when we boast of what is being done.

One of the greatest injuries to the revival in the North of Ireland a few years ago was that it was made to be a kind of show-thing, and people said, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts," and after awhile the glory departed—not because the workers on the spot themselves desired any such vain-glorying, but because some who were not of a like spirit gave occasion to the flesh, in this respect.

We must mind and take care that when we work for God, we keep always before us that we are not working as unto men, and do not need men's approbation, but unto the Lord is the offering presented, and the Lord alone shall have it.

I have not yet come to this midnight ride of Nehemiah's, but I think it important to mention that he is again a pattern to us in our work for the church of God, in that he was *absolutely sure that what he was doing was right*. He speaks of the thoughts and longings that he had as something which God had put into his heart to do.

Get quite clear and assured of that, my brethren, or else go home. If you are not certain that the work you are about was given to you of God, and as positively and distinctly given to you as the work was given to Isaiah when the seraph touched his lips with the live coal from off the altar, you have no business to enter upon the work at all, for your whole strength will lie in a full conviction that your Master has sent you.

And now having brought the man before you, let me exhort you, dear brethren, if you long for the good of the church of God, to take quietly a walk round about her. Count her towers. Mark her palaces and her bulwarks. Do not go out and take notes and jottings as to what the world says Christ's church is, or ought to be. Do not go with the view of seeing faults where there are none and railing at Christianity generally. That is a very heathenish practice, into which some persons constantly fall.

But go with this solemn intent as before God, "Now, if I am to be serviceable to the church in any large measure, I must know what her present condition is." My own solemn conviction is that a painstaking, judicious investigation into the present state of the Christian church will have the result of perfectly appalling you! It has been said, and there are abundant facts to prove it, that probably during the last two hundred years, instead of Protestantism, taking it in the large sense of the word, making any increase in the world, it has rather been diminishing and that Popery has increased.

It is also, I believe, very certain to any of you that like to read the reports of many missionary societies, that the number of conversions wrought under the missionaries abroad is so insignificant that really it scarcely keeps up to the number of converts in years past. We have heard of a missionary

returning after twelve years of labor, and on being asked if he knew of one heathen being converted under him, said he did not know of one. We feel that the whole field of missionary work everywhere—with but the exception, perhaps, just now of Southern Africa and of the labors of some in China—is just simply working without results. Not but what we ought to work all the same if we have no results, for even then we must not fall back.

And the Church of God in England is just the same. There is no increase. We know it is a matter of statistical fact that our own denomination, with the exception of London and one Welsh county, has made no progress whatever during the last twelve months. Statistics prove it to be in the same position now as then. The whole mass of Methodism, which was once so potent for good, has, I think, only received one hundred increase on the year before—and it is questionable whether they have increased at all.

So it is everywhere. New churches are built, but what is the information we get? Why, in several built in the poorer districts, the whole congregation might go into the vestry, and so the buildings are now practically useless, seats without occupiers, because some of the preachers are men that cannot be understood of the common people. If they preach the Gospel—and often they do not—they preach it after such a dull and lifeless fashion that it is not worthwhile going to listen to it.

Now, if this be so, we must get the fact, saddening as it is, well wrought into our hearts. The errors of some churches, the division of others, and the general coldness and deadness—oh! if we did but keenly realize these, I am persuaded that many of us would cry day and night unto God, that He would make bare His arm in the midst of His own church.

We should not go in and out of our pews feeling happy and comfortable because our own church may be prospering, and because in our sanctuary souls are being saved—but there should be great searching of heart for the state of Zion. There should go up a weeping and a wailing unto God, until the set time to favor her, even the set time should come, because her children take pleasure in her stones and favor the dust thereof. I would encourage you to get a clear view of the church at large and then, in God's strength go forward to any work which God has given you for her good.

We shall not need much time, in the second place, to indicate that this is also—

II. THE RIGHT METHOD OF PROCEEDING WITH REGARD TO ANY SERVICE WHICH, IN OUR SPHERE, WE ARE RENDERING TO CHRIST.

Brethren and sisters, I hope you are all working for Christ. If Christ has saved you, can you do otherwise than live to your Savior? If, indeed, your sins are all put away by His precious blood, if you are wrapped in His spotless righteousness, and accepted in the Beloved, I do trust that the love of Christ constrains you to tell to others of the way of salvation, and to seek to bring in the wandering sheep of the house of Israel.

Now, if I am right in my belief that you are engaged in some departments of Christian service, I am sure I shall be judicious in saying to you—*take a thorough investigation of the work in which you are engaged*. If it be to teach a class of children, lay those children on your heart. Think a great deal about them. Think about them by night, as Nehemiah thought of Jerusalem, and remember that they have souls, that those souls are under condemnation, that nothing but the precious blood can deliver them, that if they are not so delivered, sooner or later those boys and girls of yours will perish. Yet said our Lord, "It is not your Father's will that one of these little ones should perish." Get that solemn fact thoroughly wrought into you.

Mothers, fathers, you have children committed to your care. You are longing for the conversion of these little ones. Now, I want you to get a full estimate of the character of each child. You have peculiar opportunities of riding around, as it were, your little city. Mark the different constitutions, the special weaknesses and defects of that boy, and the blemishes and sins of that girl—and ever keep this before your minds—that your children, like the children of others, need the regenerating of the Holy Spirit and the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not take a light view of sin in your children any more than sin in others' children. The hate of God against sin is as real and intense in their case as in others, until they be born again. When you sit down to breakfast with them, think, "Ah! my dear child, I shall not meet you in eternity, unless you be brought to the cross!"

Look the girl in the face, as you see her growing up to womanhood, and say to yourself, "Ah! my Lord! in mercy bring her to sit at Your feet as Mary did, and learn of You, or else she shall be no joy to me, for I must be parted from her in the world to come."

Take, I say, a full survey of each child's condition and of its future ruin—and you will be most likely to be a blessing to the child, if with your whole heart you are thus earnest and careful.

Now, my dear hearers, most of you are working with me in this place. Let us go around the walls of this Tabernacle now, and find you out, as it were. Well, here are a great number of church members—between three and four thousand—all professors of religion. But are all saved? Ah! *there* is an inquiry! *We know they are not!* We have used our best judgment in this question. We have urged upon them continually to make no profession unless they are sincere, but alas! the sad faces of some, and their ultimate departure from the truth, prove that they went out from us because they were not of us.

I know this is one of the worst parts of the wall with me. There is no grief that stings our heart like this, when Demas forsakes Christ, having loved this present evil world, or when some—overtaken by the lusts of the flesh or the pride of life—crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. It is a mercy when such hypocrites are found out and put away, but oh! it is a grievous injury to the church which they have disgraced!

Then, next, let us think of this. There are a number of people who always occupy these seats. They belong to them—they are *their* seats and they have been sitting in them, some of them, ever since the house was built, and some of them were in the former house and have been under our ministry now for these thirteen years. And yet some of them are not saved!

A gentleman told me the other day he was surprised to hear that the church was half as large as the congregation—or more, and he said, "That is a very great thing!" "Nay," said I, "*that is a very little thing*, for when we were at Park Street the church was larger than the congregation." That is to say, there were more saved souls among us than there were seats for hearers, so that the members of the church could not all come at any one time.

And my soul will not be satisfied until this Tabernacle becomes much too small to hold the church, if they were all to come together at one time. I shall be very glad indeed if they swarm off and go elsewhere and form other churches. I shall be most happy if they do that. But still I shall always be looking forward to seeing all those saved who have sittings here.

You know that at Park Street it came to this. On one occasion when a man wanted to take a seat, he came to me and said—I recollect him well—"Sir, I understand that if I take a sitting here, I should be expected to be converted, but I cannot count upon that." "No, my good friend," I said, "I know not, but still, if you take a seat, let us hope you will be." "Oh!" said the man, "is that what was meant? I heard somebody say that when persons took seats, you expected them to be saved." Well, some do, and why should we not? Ought we not to expect that if they hear the Gospel preached, God will bless it to them?

We do trust that day will soon come, but meanwhile we may go round this place and say that a great many who have seats here are unblest, unsaved, have no desires after Christ, but are dead while they live.

Well, then, you are painfully struck, in the next place, with the *many casual hearers who come here and are not saved*. It was once well said by someone, that if sinners were scarcer than they are, we should think a great deal more of them. If there were only one unsaved soul now remaining in London, why, the whole church would be awake and in earnest to pray for that one soul.

But when I say to you that, Sabbath after Sabbath, these aisles are thronged, and these pews, too, and that yet a very large proportion of the congregation remain unconverted—why, you hear it and you say,

“Well, it is a very sad fact”—but it does not impress our hearts. We do not get the same impression of human ruin that Nehemiah got as he rode round Jerusalem.

I wish we could. I wish we could think it over, resolve it in our minds, and resolve it yet again until it came to be painful to us to think that so many human beings to whom the Gospel is preached should remain callous to its influence. And so many to whom Christ Himself shall become a savor of death unto death and not of life unto life.

Thus would I urge each brother here, who is working for Christ, to get a clear view of the needs of the case.

And now, lastly, I shall be happy if I shall be successful in this last point. It will be well for us, individually, to—

III. TAKE A LITTLE JOURNEY AROUND THE CITY OF MANSOUL WITHIN.

Let me speak to *every professor* here. You say, “I am a believer in Jesus.” Well, brother, then you can have no objection to look within, to search your heart. Ride round your soul now. How about the tower of prayer? Is that well-kept? Are you much with God in secret? And how about the castle of communion? Do you maintain fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ?

How about the gate of humiliation? Do you bow before the Lord, humbly acknowledging what you owe to Him, or has pride been pulling down the cornerstone thereof? How about the gate of holy zeal? Is that wide and in good case, or has it been burned with fire and taken away? And what about the wall of your love? Does that stand erect as it used to do?

Have you not heard of one of old of whom it was said, “Grey hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not”? May not that be your case? If you will spend an hour or two tonight when all are asleep, if you should lie awake and commune with your own heart upon your bed, it might be a wondrous blessing to you. If you shall honestly look at yourself, not flatteringly. If you shall determine to know, as God shall teach you, the worst of your case.

If you should desire to see which grace is fainting, which holy passion expiring, which sacred feeling ready to die—oh! it shall be well with you. Examine yourself, whether you are a Christian. This is a duty which cannot too often be performed. Ask the Lord to examine you. Say to Him, “Try my reins and my heart: search my inward soul: see if there be any wicked way in me: and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Oh! that some men would be more careful about the garden of their souls. But they let the weeds grow and they see them not. Like the sluggard, they do not want to see what will involve so much toil, but tossing upon the bed of presumption, from side to side, they dream of comforts and consider themselves to be safe, while all the while presumption is stealing away from them all their goods and making their garden to be a wilderness.

Come, you slumberer, up! God help you up! Mistake no longer presumption for assurance. Recollect that assurance will stand the fullest examination, but if you dare not examine yourself, depend upon it—you are a presumptuous soul. I suggest this to the professor.

And now I want to suggest the same thing to *some of you who are unconverted*. Some of you, perhaps, who have come in here tonight do not often listen to the Gospel, and you wonder what I am going to make out about riding round a city. Well, I want you to *ride round yourselves*, as it were, to take stock of your heart—to make calculations about your present state.

Now, I will venture to say that some of you are not happy. You know you are not. You do not seem as if you had anything to live for, but to work hard at the shop or to go to business. If you make money, it does not satisfy you. Time was when, if you went to the theater, you spent a very glorious night, but now if you go there—well, it seems a very dreary sort of stuff to you—and the enjoyments you once got on with so well are very empty things to you now.

I am glad to hear it. I am glad to hear it. I should like you to keep on thinking about this, and you would soon find that, in addition to the world’s not satisfying you, you want a great deal more to content

you than this world can ever give you. I wish, dear friends, you would think of yourselves, for when we get men to think, the battle is half won.

Thoughtless persons are on the outskirts of hell, but thoughtful persons God blesses. Heedless and Too Bold went on, and fell over the precipice, and were dashed to pieces, but he who, being checked, waked and said, "Where am I? I do not know," and began to look about him, found himself just on the brink of ruin, but he had just time enough to start back and so was recovered.

My dear friend, if you are not a converted person, do you not know that all your past life has been a waste? God made you, but you have never served Him! Why, if you make a tool, you expect it to be of use to you. God made you, but you never serve Him. If you keep a dog or a cat, you expect to have some pleasure from the creature.

God has been keeping you all these years and what have you ever done for Him? If a man keeps a horse, it does him service, and when God makes a man, it is but reasonable that the man should do Him some service—and yet you have not. So your life has been a dead waste as to its noblest ends. And as for the present—why, that is no better. You are not living as you wish to live, and as *for the future*—no, no, no—do not say, "I won't think about that." Be a wise man and do think of it.

You cannot escape the future any more than I can. You and I must die—and after death the judgment follows—and an appearance before God. Now, my dear hearer, be bold enough to look forward. Oh! but you do not like the prospect. Well, but nevertheless gaze upon it, for it will be for your soul's good to know what it is to die without Christ, and to rise again without Christ, and when you have got an estimate of that, it may be you will say, "No, I cannot endure this. Jesus, I throw myself into Your arms. Save me, and I shall be saved!"

Oh! that men would but take stock of their souls and it would do them good. What a routing-out there is of corners, what long, long hours of extra toil at our great shops to take stock. Nobody thinks of going on in business without taking stock every now and then, or if he did he would soon find himself in the Bankruptcy Court. Every good trader knows there must be a stock-taking. Why should not men take stock of their souls? How is it that here they say, "Oh! let well enough alone! I daresay it is all right," and so at last wake up and find themselves eternal bankrupts with nothing wherewith to pay, shut up in the prison, out of which they can never come?

May God the Holy Spirit press home these words so feebly spoken, and if any sinner here shall be led by the sight of himself to tremble before God, let him remember and rejoice that there is life for a look at the Crucified One. Whosoever trusts in Christ is saved. Rest wholly in Him. Cast yourself upon Him. As the swimmer gives himself up to the water, that it may support him, so do you, and thus shall the grace of God that brings salvation appear unto you.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

NEHEMIAH 1; 2:1-8

Nehemiah, Chapter 1. Verses 1-2. *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left in captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.*

This good man was, of course, one of the banished Jews, but he had greatly prospered. He had risen in the empire of Ahasuerus until he had come to be great—even to be one of the chamberlains of the empire. But his heart was towards his poor people—his brethren—that were in poverty. Now, whenever God exalts a Christian man in a temporal position, he ought not to disown his poor brethren, but his heart should go out towards them to see what he can do for them. It is a shame for any man to forget his country.

Does not the Pole still say, “No, Poland you shall never perish”? And we admire such patriotism. But the like feeling should be in every Christian breast. We should love the church of God even as Nehemiah loved the chosen race from which he had sprung. So when he met with Hanani, the conversation was all about the poor brethren that remained at Jerusalem.

3. *And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.*

A sad story they had to tell. Ezra had assisted in somewhat rebuilding the temple, but little had been done for the private dwellings, and for the walls and public buildings of the city. It was in a sad and wretched estate—and the Jews were despised and reproached. Nehemiah was a great man, but he was sorry to hear this. He felt as if he was a fellow sufferer with his poor brethren.

4. *And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*

Was it his concern? Was it any more his concern than that of other men? Yes, he felt it to be his—and the tender heart which he had towards the people of God made him feel it to be peculiarly his. If nobody else did anything, he must. And oh! dear brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you see the cause of God in a sad estate, lay it to heart—weep, lament, and pray—feel that you have an interest in it. Christ is your Savior. Of the church you are a part. These blessed interests of sovereign mercy belong to you. Take them to yourself and say, By God’s help, I will lay myself out for the progress of His cause. “I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

5-6. *And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned.*

He seems to act like a priest for God, taking the sin of the people upon himself and confessing it. If they were hardhearted, and would not confess, he would, and pour out his complaint before God.

7-10. *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. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: 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 heavens, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.*

You see what an admirable prayer this is. There is a full confession of sin—an acknowledgment of the justice of God in having punished His people. But then there is a quoting of the divine Word—a putting of the Lord in remembrance that He had made such-and-such a promise. That is the very backbone of prayer.

If you go to the bank, the main part of the transaction is to put the check—the note of hand—upon the counter. You get no money else. So when you go in prayer, the main part of prayer must lie in pleading the promise, “Thou have said it. Thou have said it.” Hold God to His word with a sacred daring of faith. “You have promised. You have declared. Now be as good as Your word.”

Then notice another plea he has. He says he is pleading for God’s servants—His redeemed—redeemed by great power. Oh! it should always make us feel strong in prayer when we recollect that God’s people are very dear to Him and He has done great things for them—therefore He loves them, and for those whom He loves, surely He will work great deliverances. These are arguments. There ought to be great argument in prayer if we hope to prevail.

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.*

That was king Artaxerxes, whom he rightly viewed as a man, for, great as he was—all-potent king of Persia—yet still but a man. Nehemiah consoles himself in the prospect of having to go in before him to ask favor at his hands.

11. *For I was the king's cupbearer.*

Nehemiah, Chapter 2. Verse 1. *And it came to pass in the month Nisan,*
Three or four months after he began to pray.

1. *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.*

We have in some of the old slabs and carvings some singular pictures of the dainty way in which the kings of Persia and Media were served by their cupbearers. They always spilled a little wine upon their left hand and drank first, for fear the king should be poisoned. So the greatest men of the different provinces of the empire were called by turns to act this part before the king. It was a piece of state ceremonial.

1. *Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.*

And there was a law—one of those stupid Median laws—that no man was to come before the king with a sad countenance. It was supposed that the king must be so serenely happy himself that none might come there unless they were happy, too. Nehemiah had been able to obey this rule, but on this occasion he did not, because he could not.

2-6. *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, and said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,)*

Who was probably, Queen Esther and therefore abundantly agreeable that such a work should be done for her own nation. "The king said unto me."

6. *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.*

He was a valued servant. They did not wish to part with him, and if he would go for a time to do this business, yet they take security that he should return. There are some servants that I know of, who, if they were to go away, their masters would not be particularly anxious that they should come back again. It is well when a man is so in favor with God that his piety acts upon his ordinary life and he becomes in favor with men also.

That is a poor, miserable religion that does not make its possessor a good servant. Yes, in whatever station of life we may be placed, we ought to be far more valuable to those round about us on account of our fearing God. May we always be of such a character that, if we were gone, we should be missed. "I set him a time."

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