

Nehemiah 1-2

Leonard Ravenhill, Christian Evangelist and author, tells about a group of American tourists visiting a picturesque village in his home country of Great Britain. The Americans had been overwhelmed by the rich history of England, and especially the number of famous and notable men who had been born or buried in the small towns that dotted the countryside.

At one point in their tour, they walked a short distance along a quaint country road in one of those little towns, and they happened upon an old man sitting beside a fence. It was obvious that this man was a local, who wasn't particularly impressed by the group of foreigners.

One tourist asked the man, in a rather patronizing tone, "Were any great men born in this village?"

The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

- That story reminds us that all great men begin the same way: as babies
 - Today, we begin a new book, the Book of Nehemiah, but in reality, we're simply continuing in our study on Israel's restoration
 - Nehemiah tells the story of the third and final step of God's restoration of Israel
 - God reversing course in the first step He took in disciplining Israel
 - When Israel was in rebellion against God, He struck first against the nation's corrupt leaders
 - That first step cut the head off the snake, so to speak
 - And it was followed by two more steps of discipline on a path of descent into captivity
 - In Ezra, we studied the first two steps of restoration, as the Lord brought a remnant back to Jerusalem
 - First, the Lord restored true worship in the hearts of His people
 - Then He delivered a teacher who could lead the people into maturity and obedience to the Word of God
 - So now comes the step of bringing the people together in service to the Lord under the authority of a leader
 - Heartfelt worship, study of the Word, service to God

- These three steps are a concise description of every saint's walk of faith
- Broadly speaking, we find three themes in this book, each related to the restoration of Israel
 - First, Nehemiah completes the return of the exiles from captivity
 - After Nehemiah enters the land, the total number of Jews who returned from Babylon will number about 100,000
 - And this remnant shows little sense of national identity
 - And any previous anticipation of a coming Messiah is now completely absent
 - Interestingly, the books written during this time (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) make virtually no reference to the Messiah, except in pictures
 - But God was still preaching about the Messiah through Zechariah and Malachi
 - So the first theme is the reunification and nationalization of Israel in preparation for the Messiah's arrival, which was right around the corner, historically
 - Secondly, the people are being brought back under the custody of the Law
 - They had lost their identity, because they had largely ceased practicing the Law while in captivity
 - The Law was a custodian given to guard Israel and keep her pure until the Messiah could come
 - Without the freedom to worship and without a temple, it was literally impossible for the Law to fulfill that purpose in the people
 - Finally, the third theme of Nehemiah is how the Lord brought purpose and unity to the people through the gift of a skilled leader
 - In fact, the book of Nehemiah is often approached as a study in leadership principles
 - More than a few Christian, and even business books, have been written using Nehemiah as an example of godly leadership
 - Teachers focus on Nehemiah's organizational methods
 - Or his people skills, oratory skills, negotiation skills, etc.

- And the proof of his leadership acumen, they say, is found in the result
 - After lying in ruins for decades, the city walls are rebuilt in a few weeks
 - An astonishingly short period of time
- Certainly, there are many good principles of leadership on display in the story of Nehemiah
 - And Nehemiah's accomplishments are obviously impressive
 - But I don't believe that's the reason (or at least not the main reason) this book is included in the canon
 - The main purpose of the Book of Nehemiah is to show how the Lord raises godly leaders to build up God's people
 - God doesn't care about brick walls, does He?
 - Or does He care about the people who are protected by the wall?

[Neh. 1:1](#) The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital,

[Neh. 1:2](#) that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

[Neh. 1:3](#) They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

[Neh. 1:4](#) When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- The Book of Nehemiah is a continuation of the Book Ezra
 - They were originally a single work, written by Ezra
 - Though many chapters are written in the first person, it's likely Ezra wrote the book from Nehemiah's perspective
 - The events of Nehemiah span 15 years, but most of the events in the book occur in less than a year
 - Chronologically, it's the final book of the Old Testament
 - The next events recorded in the Bible are those of Matthew, a few hundred years later
 - The final prophet, Malachi, prophesied during the time

of Nehemiah

- Chapter 1 of Nehemiah picks up 12 years after the end of the book of Ezra
 - Nehemiah is still living in Persia with the rest of the exiles who have not chosen to return to Israel
 - The king ruling Persia is Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, the king who married Esther
- In the late Autumn of 445 BC, Nehemiah is living in the capital city of the Persian Empire when he hears disturbing news
 - One of his brothers, Hanani, had traveled down to Jerusalem with Ezra, and now he has returned to see his brother in Susa
 - Naturally, Nehemiah is curious for any news for how the exiles were doing in rebuilding Jerusalem
 - We can assume that those stuck back in Persia were hopeful to hear that the city was rebuilt to its previous splendor
 - But when Nehemiah asked, his brother gave disappointing news
 - Hanani reports that the people in the city are in great distress and are a reproach to the surrounding people
 - In other words, Jerusalem is like a ghetto and is despised by the surrounding people
 - The city is probably raided at times by thieves
 - It has no glory and displays no strength
 - And whatever barriers the people might erect, they were incapable of ending their reproach
 - Naturally, Nehemiah's response is weeping and mourning
 - But his reaction goes beyond what we might consider to be a normal degree of mourning
 - He is mourning for an extended period
 - Which then gives way to a period of fasting and praying
 - We remember from the Ezra study that this combination is an effort to hear clearly from the Lord without the interference of the flesh
- Next, we discover what Nehemiah was fasting and praying about

[Neh. 1:5](#) I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserve the covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

[Neh. 1:6](#) let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, 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 father's house have sinned.

[Neh. 1:7](#) "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

[Neh. 1:8](#) "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

[Neh. 1:9](#) but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'

[Neh. 1:10](#) "They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

[Neh. 1:11](#) "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

- Nehemiah appeals to the Lord in a heartfelt, earnest manner for the Lord's favor concerning a matter Nehemiah intended to bring before the king of Persia
 - Nehemiah is burdened by the news that his people and city are in distress
 - Nehemiah's prayer is directed toward one request: that the Lord should keep His promises
 - He's referring to Lev. 26, where God declared that when Israel repented, He would restore them
 - Who shouldn't expect a prayer like that to be well received?
 - God will always keep His promises, so this request is a no-brainer
 - Except that Nehemiah is appealing to God for two very specific outcomes that are not necessarily assured
 - First, Nehemiah is asking the Lord that this moment would be the moment when the Lord would choose to act in accordance with his promises
 - God has made promises, but He still controls the timing of the fulfillment

- Many Jews prayed for the chance to see the Messiah in the flesh, but the Lord chose to grant that privilege to Simeon (Luke 2)
 - So Nehemiah is praying for the opportunity to see God fulfill His promise to reunite and bless Israel in the land
 - So far, a regathering has begun
 - But Nehemiah reminds God that His promises in the Old Covenant included blessing Israel in that return
 - To Nehemiah's ears, that blessing hasn't come as yet, so he's praying for it to come now
- Secondly, Nehemiah is praying for the Lord to accomplish it through him and not someone else
 - The Lord has promised to bring about certain events in the life of Israel, but the question remains who the Lord will select to bring about these things
 - Nehemiah was praying for the chance to be that man who could accomplish the blessing God had promised
 - Nehemiah knew God would bless Israel someday, somehow...that's why he prayed confidently
 - Throughout the history of Israel, many young women prayed for the blessing to be the woman to give birth to the Messiah
 - But it was Mary who was chosen
 - Nehemiah wants to be chosen for that honor now
 - We might even wonder why Nehemiah is praying so desperately for this opportunity
 - After all, why not just leave and go to Israel like the other exiles?
 - If Nehemiah wants to serve God in Israel so much, what's holding him back?
- Then, in v.11, we discover why Nehemiah is praying so earnestly for the Lord to hear his plea and release him to serve in Jerusalem
 - Nehemiah is employed in a very unique role
 - And he doesn't have any vacation time
 - Nehemiah is the cup bearer for the king of Persia

- The role of cupbearer is an interesting one
 - Simply put, Nehemiah served the king his cup
 - But the role was much more important than that sounds
- The cupbearer was like the king's chief bodyguard
 - He had the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the king's food supply
 - He was like the head of the secret service
 - He was required to sample everything the king would eat and drink before the king ate or drank
 - Since the cup bearer knew he would eat and drink everything first, he made sure the entire food chain was safe from enemies
- He commanded a great deal of respect and authority
 - And he naturally became one of the king's most trusted advisors
 - In other words, Nehemiah served in a role where you couldn't just up and leave anytime you wanted
- But Nehemiah was burdened
 - He was inquiring about the welfare Jewish people long after most everyone else had forgotten them
 - Then, he mourns the bad news
 - And He losing sleep, concerned with what to do about the situation
 - This is a godly burden, one a godly person cannot escape
 - Nehemiah also recognized that obedience to God's Word demanded action in the face of a burden
 - And in v.11, Nehemiah begins to contemplate that solution
 - Nehemiah begins to wonder if he might be the one God will use to accomplish that plan
 - But how can Nehemiah be the one, since he was the cupbearer for the king?
- Immediately, we're confronted with a basic principle of how God brings godly leaders to guide His people
 - He doesn't cause them to audition for the part

- He doesn't entice them with promises of personal fame or fortune
- He doesn't lay out a career path, where each constituency is seen as merely another rung on a ladder of personal success
- If these things had been the motivation for a man like Nehemiah, he never would have left the king's side in Susa
 - Nehemiah is already serving in arguably the highest position any Jew in that day could aspire to hold
 - There was nowhere to go but down for a man like Nehemiah
 - And a job of leading the Jews in Jerusalem is about as low as you could imagine in that day
- So riches, fame and accolades were not the motivation for this job, and God doesn't seek for hearts motivated by those things
 - When God wants a man to move into a position of leadership and restore His people, He gives that man a burden
 - An unshakable, unmistakable calling to serve God's people
 - The only way he could act upon his burden, was if God opened a door for him to leave
 - And so God brings about that opportunity

[Neh. 2:1](#) And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

[Neh. 2:2](#) So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid.

- The second chapter begins with the month of Nisan
 - This is roughly March-April on our calendar
 - This is significant, because it means that between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of Nehemiah, roughly four months have passed
 - For about 120 days, Nehemiah went into the work and into the king's presence with this burden on his heart
 - Nehemiah spent every one of those 120 days in the company of a man who could have granted him his wish to join his brethren with just a word

- He must have thought time and time again about how he could raise the topic or ask the question of the king
 - His desire to press the issue and receive a response must have been eating away at him
 - And yet, he didn't say anything to the king for four long months
 - What was Nehemiah doing during that time?
 - Remember v.4
 - Nehemiah began four months of praying to God for action
 - But what do you think was running through Nehemiah's mind at about the second or third month?
 - Do you think he was growing impatient with God?
 - Have you ever had that same tendency in your walk?
 - You feel you've done your Christian duty to pray to God for an answer
 - You've been praying for some time, but eventually, you decide that either God isn't going to answer you, or you need to do something instead of nothing
 - So you get busy
- When God is ready for us to act, I am convinced that God is fully capable of making His will known to each of us
 - When God wants you to know it's time to act and when He's ready to show you where and how to respond, He won't hesitate to do it
 - And you won't miss it
 - You might not like the answer, and you might choose not to obey it, but you won't miss it
 - So often, the real test of prayer is in the waiting for God to answer
 - We can't assume that God's silence is equal to an answer
 - For obvious reasons, Nehemiah is often held out as a model of a praying man
 - He's a man who sought God's will before taking action
 - And that he certainly was
 - But don't overlook the real lesson in Nehemiah's prayer life

- Nehemiah was going to wait on God to open a door and direct his steps
 - Nehemiah's real virtue in prayer was his patience to do nothing apart from an answer from God
 - If God had not opened the door for another 4 months, or 4 years, I believe Nehemiah would have waited
 - And all the while, his burden would have continued to be upon him for his people in Israel
- But then, God opened that door for Nehemiah
 - In v.1, Nehemiah says "I had not been sad in the king's presence"
 - This was an important detail to the story
 - Part of a cup bearer's official duties was to never show any sadness in the presence of the king
 - In fact, no one in the king's court could show any sadness or unpleasant emotion before the King
 - Under Persian law, anyone who would dare show themselves unhappy before the king could be executed, and they often were
 - The Persians were especially strict in enforcing their laws
 - And so Nehemiah has been careful to keep up the expectation that went with his duties, he says
 - But then in v.2, the king perceives Nehemiah's sadness, nonetheless
 - We have to assume that the king didn't come to know of Nehemiah's sad disposition through observation
 - In other words, Nehemiah says he *wasn't* sad before the king'
 - Nehemiah doesn't mean he was trying not be sad, but it came through anyway
 - He means exactly what he said...he wasn't showing sadness; and yet, the king somehow perceived that Nehemiah was sad
 - He must have come to know it supernaturally
- In other words, God revealed to the king that Nehemiah was sad
 - Which causes Nehemiah great fear, because he knew the king could have him put to death

- This was God opening a door
- God selected this day to reveal to the king Nehemiah's burden
- And though Nehemiah did nothing different on this day, God intervened to open this conversation
- God could have created this opportunity on any day, but He chose to wait until today
 - And Nehemiah's patience in waiting on God was now being rewarded
- When God moves to bring leadership to His people, He also moves to raise up men to fill that need
 - When God is ready to provide that leader, he will begin by preparing a leader who possesses a burden for the work that lies ahead
 - He probably won't have a burden for what the people want, but he's carrying a burden for what God knows they need
 - He will have a burden for God's people and for God's Word and for God's glory
- And that man will often be someone who isn't looking for the opportunity
 - At least not at first
 - But when he senses the burden, his first response may be to pray and seek the Lord's intervention
 - Ultimately, that burden gives way in God's timing to taking action
- A leader in God's economy is someone who answers a call, not someone who comes calling with all the answers
 - A godly leader knows that if God has brought the burden and the call, then God can be trusted to provide the means to answer it as well
- Equally important, God will usually raise a leader who doesn't fit the classic mold
 - Here, God is raising up a cupbearer to become a wall builder and a leader over a nation

- Nehemiah didn't go to wall building school
 - More than that, he had no background in building at all, as far as we know
 - In other words, in the eyes of men, he was wholly unqualified for the role
 - And yet he was God's man for this job
 - To be fair, Nehemiah was someone who had already developed leadership expertise in his role as cupbearer
 - So it's not that God had done nothing to prepare the man
 - It just might not look like the way the world would expect
 - We can say that God does not raise up incompetent men, but he often raises up unqualified men
 - Because these men are the perfect representatives to bring God glory
 - Men like Moses, David, Peter
- So the king's question no doubt catches Nehemiah off guard
 - We know he asked it, because the Lord directed his attention to Nehemiah's burden
 - And Nehemiah must have sensed this as well, but he responds in courage, assuming the Lord had made this opportunity available

[Neh. 2:3](#) I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?"

[Neh. 2:4](#) Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

[Neh. 2:5](#) I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." [Neh. 2:6](#) Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time.

[Neh. 2:7](#) And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah,

[Neh. 2:8](#) and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me.

- Nehemiah speaks boldly and truthfully in response to the King's questions
 - He says that his sadness was because his people were suffering in Jerusalem
 - Even in the face of a potentially life-threatening situation, he doesn't lie
 - Obviously, this tells us that the man had integrity – a godly leader
 - But it goes deeper than that
 - He's a man who's looking for God to answer his prayers
 - He's been praying for 4 months
 - But it hasn't stopped looking for God to answer that prayer
 - So when this unexpected, dangerous question comes from the king, Nehemiah may be surprised, but he's not unprepared
 - He recognizes it as the moment he's been praying for
 - So he steps up to answer the king
 - Nehemiah has clearly been ready to give this answer for some time, so he lays it out for the king
 - When you are looking for God to do the impossible, then when the impossible happens, you won't be afraid to go with it
 - Even when it seems like the worst possible alternative
- When the king hears Nehemiah's request, he merely asks, "When will you be back?"
 - In other words, you can go, but I want you to return
 - His reply probably stunned Nehemiah, if for no other reason than it was such an unexpected answer to prayer
 - A moment earlier, Nehemiah hadn't a clue that his life was about to change
 - And then, the next moment, his life has completely changed
 - God is sending Nehemiah to attend to the needs of the city and the people, but the king's question is an important detail in God's plan

- Before he gets any wrong ideas, God makes clear that this isn't going to be the start of another monarchy
 - In fact, Nehemiah will be called governor of Judah
 - And he will be there for a term or two
 - But God is going to reserve the place of king for Himself, in Christ
- There is principle of biblical leadership at work here, one that carries over into the Church today
 - God's idea of leadership usually isn't man's idea
 - People tend to prefer to have leaders with impressive titles and power and authority
 - Israelites preferred Saul

[1 Sam. 8:4](#) Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; [1 Sam. 8:5](#) and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

[1 Sam. 8:6](#) But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

[1 Sam. 8:7](#) The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

- Until that moment, God had provided leadership through judges, like Samuel, who enforced God's Law
 - But then, God allowed the monarchy to come into being in response to a sinful people's request
 - They got what they wanted, not what they needed
- Throughout history, men have had a tendency to dismiss and overlook the leaders God brings to guide their walk with Him
 - The classic mistake is to repeat the actions of Israel in the day of Samuel
 - We are so busy looking for someone mighty and impressive, that we forget what the Bible teaches
 - It is God who leads and guides all His children

- And He is as capable of working through a small child, as He is working through a mighty preacher or king
- We need to be careful not to reject God and demand leaders of our own making
 - Leadership for the Church is no different today than it was in the time of the judges
 - Our King has already been appointed by the Father to rule over the Church
 - He is Our Lord Jesus
 - He's looking for men like Nehemiah to be servant leaders under Him
 - And only for a time, not to replace Him on His throne

[Luke 22:24](#) And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.

[Luke 22:25](#) And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'

[Luke 22:26](#) "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.

[Luke 22:27](#) "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

- When we gather as a body, we should expect God to raise men into leadership positions, usually from within that same body
 - And we expect to submit to their authority for the sake of good order and effective ministry
 - For to do so, honors our Lord
 - We should expect these leaders to be, first and foremost, servants
 - Men who will place the needs of the congregation above their own
 - Like Nehemiah, they demonstrate a desire to assume responsibility because they have a heart for the people
- So the Lord has found the right man for the job, and now, he prepares to depart

- Nehemiah gives the king a return date of 12 years (we learn later)
 - And then, he asks the king for letters to the governors
 - The first letter allows Nehemiah passage to move through the kingdom unmolested
 - And the second letter allows Nehemiah to gain access to the king's forest
- The king granted these requests quickly, it seemed
 - As with Ezra before, there are political happenings to explain his willingness to go along with this request
 - Inaros had led a revolt in Lower Egypt in the late 460s, aided and abetted by Athens
 - While Megabyxos had led a revolt in Syria
 - So having a strong ally leading the Jews in Judah was probably a shrewd political move for the king, hoping to keep Israel's neighbors in check
- So Nehemiah departs

[Neh. 2:9](#) Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

[Neh. 2:10](#) When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.

[Neh. 2:11](#) So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

[Neh. 2:12](#) And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.

[Neh. 2:13](#) So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire.

[Neh. 2:14](#) Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass.

[Neh. 2:15](#) So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

[Neh. 2:16](#) The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.

- Nehemiah is accompanied by a military escort as he makes his way from Persia to Jerusalem
 - But not only was the military escort a source of protection, but it also served to provide Nehemiah with an impressive entrance into Jerusalem
 - It established credibility for Nehemiah, and authority
 - Nehemiah never asked for this as far as we can tell, but it seems the Lord was intent on providing it
 - Clearly, the Lord wanted to provide His chosen leader with an endorsement
 - God still does this at times, as well
 - The Lord appoints men and women to hold positions that come with certain trappings
 - Not for the purpose of building up egos or elevating the importance of servants beyond what's helpful
 - But rather, to help establish credibility and authority among the people
 - So that God's people will see that God is moving in this person's life on their behalf
- Much could be made of the way Nehemiah arrived and the way he approached his task
 - He stayed in the city three days before surveying the wall
 - He seems to want to get to know the situation on the ground before rushing into action
 - That would seem a prudent move for any new leader
 - Then, we notice he goes out at night to do his surveying of the wall
 - Most assume he didn't want to attract undue attention until he was ready to announce his intentions
 - He didn't want to alert Israel's enemies to the change that was coming
 - Or perhaps he didn't want to alarm the people of Israel, who might suspect he was planning an attack on the city

- Being sensitive to the situation he was entering was another wise move on his part
- And then when he did go out, he only took a few trusted men
 - Limiting his circle of trust until he could know who were God's people and who were not
 - Once again, a shrewd move for a new leader
- There might be numerous theories for why he did these things and how they contributed to his success as a leader
 - But we're not going to spend much time exploring those
 - We're looking beyond the details of leadership style for the sake of something more important
- Nehemiah goes about his business in the way he does because he is acutely aware of his purpose and mission
 - He's not running for office
 - He's not trying to impress people
 - He's not doing this for himself
 - He's serving God
 - Nothing he is doing is calculated to build an image
 - He isn't concerned with appearances, except to minimize unnecessary gossip or worry
 - He isn't trying to build allegiances or undermine challengers
 - In other words, he isn't overly worried about the politics of his situation, because he is confident that the Lord will clear his path
 - His only worry is being a diligent workman in the task God has given him
 - Leaders in modern ministry are so often taught the opposite
 - In fact, the story of Nehemiah is ironically taught as a good example of a new pastor exhibiting a good sense of politics
 - He knows how to build the right kind of relationships in his new position

- But it's apparent that Nehemiah's true focus is in the work itself
- We can see this clearly when we look at the way Nehemiah approaches the people after he's done his investigation

[Neh. 2:17](#) Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."

[Neh. 2:18](#) I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.

- Nehemiah faces the people and presents them with his call and argument to rebuild the city
 - Consider the appeal he makes to them
 - He says you see the facts
 - You see the situation
 - What do you say we fix it together?
 - He appeals to their shared interest in the problem and to a shared solution
 - But didn't these people know this already?
 - You think they would have noticed the desolation already
 - And then having noticed it, you would think they would have done something about it
 - Perhaps they lived by the motto: *Tomorrow is the excuse of the lazy and the refuge of the incompetent*
 - Whatever the reason for their past inaction, now here's Nehemiah telling them what they already know
 - Why would it make a difference?
 - Because Nehemiah tells them the one thing that can make a difference
 - Nehemiah says that the God of Israel had been favorable to him

- Meaning that God was working behind the scenes to make all this possible
- And if God had been working to bring Nehemiah here and to appoint him to this important work, then surely, God was going to see it accomplished through the people
- Nehemiah knew the key to his plan and to his success was not to turn God's work into his work
 - Nehemiah had received a calling and appointment to do a work for God by serving God's people
 - But he's not going to be able to do it alone
 - He will need to people to agree and lend their support
 - But where in the world might Nehemiah expect to make an appeal on the basis of his qualifications or experience?
 - Or the genius of his ideas
 - Or the size of his bank account to fund the project
 - Or merely to order them to work, because he was in charge...
 - No, he appeals on the basis that God was prepared to do a work
 - He established that the call was from God and he asks God's people to join in that work
 - Friends, that's all we should expect from a godly leader
 - Leaders are servants in the Church
 - We look for them to serve the needs of the congregation
 - But they serve us best by appealing to our own sense of responsibility in serving the Lord, and then calling us to join in that work
 - They aren't sent to do all the work for us
 - We don't want leaders who give us no higher calling and lay no expectations on us
 - We should expect a godly leader to demand we use our gifts and participate in the work of the Church to serve God's purposes

- On the other hand, they can't be opportunistic glory seekers who are obsessed with achieving something big and great apart from what God might assign
 - Those men will run a church into the ground in one major project after another, trying to build an edifice to their own ego
 - Few, if any, arise from God's direction or call under those terms
 - We need to look past people like that and look for the godly leaders God has appointed around us
 - Those people will always rise up, but that never stops God from raising up true leaders in some other context
 - And usually, these are the least likely ones we can imagine
 - Nehemiah is that least likely person, called with a burden and present to do the work of the Lord