

Restoring Part 6

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 famous and notable men who been born or buried in the small towns that dotted the countryside.

At one point in their tour, 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."

- Great men all start the same way
 - As babies
 - This was an apt description of Nehemiah's start
- We ended in our Nehemiah study in chapter 2,
 - Just as Nehemiah had been surprised by the king with the question of why he was sad
 - Sadness was = the death
 - Had not been sad though
 - We're watching how God calls and prepares a man to become a leader for the sake of His people
 - And today we begin to watch that man as he assumes the role God had called him to assume
 - I said last week that Nehemiah is ultimately a study in how God raises up godly leaders over His people
 - Told through the experiences of Nehemiah

- For our purposes today, we're going to concentrate on certain aspects of this story as they apply to our theme
 - How God will bring godly leaders into our lives and into our church in order to propel us forward toward greater righteousness
- Start back in the King's court listening to Neh response to the king's question

[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.

[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.

- The king catches Nehemiah off guard when he asks his question
 - And we know he asked it in the first place because God directed his attention to Nehemiah’s sadness
 - But Nehemiah feared for his life
 - But look at his response
 - 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 potential 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 whose 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
- When you are looking for God to do the impossible, as was the case here
 - Then when the impossible happens, you aren't afraid to embrace it
 - Even when it seems like the worst possible alternative
- When the king hears Nehemiah's request, he asks when will you be back
 - In other words, you can go, but I want you to return
 - God is sending Nehemiah to attend to the needs of the city and the people
 - But 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
- I see a principle at work in this fact, 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 with Samuel and Saul

[1Sam. 8:4](#) ¶ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah;

[1Sam. 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."

[1Sam. 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.

[1Sam. 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
 - So that the nation could appreciate how much better it was to have God as their king
- I talked last week about our tendency to overlook the leaders God brings us to guide our walk with Him
 - Probably the classic ways to overlook leaders is to repeat the mistake 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 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 judges
 - Our king has already been appointed by the Father to rule over the church
 - And it is His Son, Our Lord Jesus
 - And the Father isn't interested in sharing His power with men

- He's looking for men like Nehemiah to serve Him for a time

[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 expect men to be raised into leadership as God may appoint
 - And we expect to submit to their authority for the sake of good order and effective ministry
 - And because to do so honors our Lord
 - But we expect our leaders to be first and foremost servants who will place the needs of the congregation above their own
 - And like Nehemiah, they have a desire to assume responsibility because their heart is for the people
- So Nehemiah sets out for the city

[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.

[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*.

- Much has been made about the way Nehemiah arrived and the way approached his task
 - Of how he stayed in the city three days before surveying the wall
 - Of how he took a few trusted men and surveyed the wall at night to avoid attracting attention and stirring up the people
 - And there are numerous theories for why he did these things and how they contributed to his success as a leader
 - We’re not going to spend much time exploring those themes
 - We’re looking beyond the details for the sake of something larger
 - 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
- When he does face the people and presents them with his call to rebuild the city
 - Look at the appeal he makes
 - He says you see the facts
 - You see the situation
 - 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 sure 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 in agree and lend their support
 - But where the world might have expect Nehemiah to make an appeal on the basis of his qualifications and experience
 - Or the genius of his ideas
 - Or the size of his bank account to fund the project
 - Or whatever

- 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 best us by appealing to our own sense 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 call 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 service God's purposes
 - On the other hand, they can't be opportunistic glory seekers who are obsessed with achieve something big and great apart from what God might assign
 - Those men will run the church to death in one major project after another
 - With few if any coming from God's direction and call
- So if the first thing God goes to raise up a godly leader is to lay a burden
 - And the second thing was to determine the manner and timing of that man's appointment
 - And then third was to appoint as a caretaker for a limited time, not as the king and ruler
 - Then the fourth was that a godly leader isn't appointed to do it alone
 - But instead, he calls those he leads to share in his own call
 - To participate with him in serving the Lord

- Like Paul who asked the Corinthian church among others to be imitators of him even as he imitated Christ
- Of course, then what's our responsibility when God does send this kind of leader
 - Remember what we said about godly teaching
 - The nation had been given poor teaching before God brought discipline
 - And then God removed that false teaching
 - Then when He was ready, He restored truthful teaching through a man named Ezra
 - But we said that as important as godly teachers are to God's plan of restoration
 - They can't learn for us
 - We have a responsibility to do the work of learning and receive that training
 - And until we do, God may not bring us to the next step of a godly who will propel us into the next step
- Well, if God brings a godly leader appointed and equipped with a call to do God's work among the people
 - Then the people have a responsibility to receive and then support that leader in doing God's work
 - But did you notice what support looks like?
 - It's not just a pat on the back and welcoming handshake
 - It's not just writing a check or an invitation to dinner
 - It's a roll up of the sleeves and a recognition that there is work to be done
 - And not because you feel inclined to help this leader
 - It's not a personal favor
 - It's a response to God's call for a live of devoted to Him

- So just like a teacher can't learn for us
 - A leader can't follow for us
- And if we give heed to what Bible teachers tell us out of our respect for God's word rather than an admiration for the teacher
 - Likewise, we need to get behind the work of those godly leaders appointed to direct our service to God because we desire to serve God and not because we admire the leader
- These differences are so important, because sooner or later the teacher will slip and let us down
 - And sooner or later a leader will leave us disillusioned
- But we don't lose faith in God's word because of a teacher's failings
 - And we can't use the mistakes of any past or present leader as our rationale for withholding our support and participation in the godly work of the church
 - We serve God, not men
 - But we join with men and respect their leadership because God has called them to lead us
- Now anytime we see God's people called by God's appointed leaders to rise up and do a work to glorify Him
 - What can we naturally expect to happen?

[John 15:19](#) "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world **hates** you.

[John 17:14](#) "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

- The enemy and the world he controls will never stand idly by and watch God's work through His people
 - The enemy and the world will always oppose that work
 - Always
 - So we should always expect opposition and trials

- Nehemiah's situation was no different

[Neh. 2:19](#) But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *it*, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

[Neh. 2:20](#) So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

- Among the crowd were these three men
 - Notice their nationalities
 - There was a Horonite and an Ammorite and an Arab
 - In other words not Jews
 - Not God's people
 - Strangers
 - And they give the expected natural reaction
 - They mock the prospect of building the wall
 - They despise the people, they show them contempt
 - And look at their statements
 - Are you rebelling against the king?
 - Their statement is carefully worded to bring fear to mind
 - Fear that the Persians will return to destroy the nation again for taking such a presumptuous step of building a wall
 - A wall was the equivalent of putting a navy to sea or building a missile program
 - It signaled an intent to defend the city from attackers
 - Most cities were city states
 - So it could be seen as an act of independence

- Now we know that the Persian king has authorized it
 - But all the people knew that
 - And these outsiders want to bring fear and dread into their minds
- When you remember that the Bible tells us that the world will oppose and hate us, then how should we react to opposition?
 - We're not talking about opposition from within (that's a different problem)
 - We're talking about opposition from outside
 - It will come
 - And we don't care
 - Because it can't stop God
- Nehemiah says God will take care of those things
 - If God has truly called this leader to this people
 - And if He's appointed this group to rebuild the city, then He will handle the details
 - There is no reason to doubt
 - And we certainly have no reason to give attention to the world's attacks, especially knowing they are bound to come no matter how desperate
 - The final words of Nehemiah in this chapter are so important to understanding how godly leadership must approach their appointed task
 - Those who are not a part of God's people and His anointed group simply have nothing to say to about the work
 - Set them and their opinions aside
 - Place your trust in God and follow Him

Don't take counsel of your fears or of appearances. Do your full duty, and you can safely leave the results to God. - B.H. Carroll