

# On a Mission

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.
- Special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad you're here, and we're glad you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we are following after Jesus together as one community.
- And as we follow after Jesus, we are so convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it. And so we look into God's word because we're convinced that everyone needs to hear what God has to say in his word, and God has something to say to every single one of us.
- If you were with us last week, you know that we just started the book of Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah is in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is everything that happened in God's plan before Jesus' first coming.
- And we're at a specific point in the Old Testament. We're at the point where God's chosen people of Israel had been given the promised land, but they had failed to do what God had called them to do.
- [ 1 : 1 0 ]     They'd failed to be a people of justice and mercy and goodness. And so instead of allowing them to live in the land, God had to punish them, and he allowed them to go into exile instead. And after they were in exile for almost around 70 years, they came back partially in 538 B.C.
- They began to return to their home city of Jerusalem, and yet not everyone returned. And even those who returned did not do everything that they needed to do to restore the city that God had given them.
- And so while they began to return in 538 B.C., we are now in the year 445 B.C., almost 100 years later. And even 100 years after God had allowed his people to return, we met a man named Nehemiah who saw and heard that the walls that were supposed to protect the city of Jerusalem had still not been rebuilt.
- And so we asked this big question of what does it look like to stay close to God? What does it look like to return to God or to know him for the first time? And as we watched the story of Nehemiah last week, we saw that first it involves seeing the ruin that is caused by sin.
- Nehemiah sees the fact that the walls around Jerusalem have been broken down and that Jerusalem is, instead of being a light to the nations, it's a disgrace and a shame. But after seeing the ruin, he doesn't despair.
- [ 2 : 3 5 ]     Instead, he repents. And finally, after repenting, we saw that Nehemiah understands and sees the great hope that God offers to everyone who returns to him.
- In fact, when we left off last week, we had this cliffhanger verse at the very end of chapter 1 because we find out that this man who sees the ruin, who repents, also happens to be one of the most powerful people in the Persian Empire.

We find out at the very end of chapter 1, he tells us, Now, I was cupbearer to the king. And if you're familiar at all with ancient history, you know that the cupbearer was, first of all, a practical role. This was someone who would show up and taste food that was given to the king to make sure it wasn't poison, to make sure that he was safe.

But it was more than that, because someone who was tasting the king's food is someone who would be in constant contact with him. Now, we don't know for sure in this situation, but often the cupbearer had political power as well.

They had influence. They were someone who had a relationship and access to the king that few people had. We might even think of it as something similar to a president's body man. They're with him all the time, making sure he knows what he needs to know and he has the information he needs.

[ 3 : 52 ] In some places we know in the ancient Near East, this person would have been someone who functioned almost like a chief of staff for the king. And so as he turns towards God in repentance, God has already begun to provide a way for Nehemiah.

He's brought the right man at the right place at the right time to begin to turn God's people back to him. As we begin chapter 2, then, we talked earlier this morning about what is repentance unto life, repentance that leads to life.

And last week we discussed the turning away from sin, the seeing of the ruin and the repentance. And this week we're going to, as we read chapter 2, we're going to turn to the other half of repentance.

Not just the turning away from sin, but the turning back to God and his mission. And so the question of chapter 2 is, what does returning to God's mission look like?

If we've truly turned away from sin, we're not just going to turn away, but we're going to turn to. We're going to turn towards everything that God has called us to do and be. Now there's lots of different ways we could define God's mission.

[ 5 : 01 ] There's lots of... ..about God's mission. God's mission to his people and ultimately to the world is that his kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. The purpose of Jerusalem, the purpose of Israel, was this.

We read about it this morning from 1 Peter, that it would be a people who would point the world to God. Not just for our good, but for God's glory as well.

And so what does returning to God's mission look like? We're going to be in Nehemiah 2, starting at verse 1. Remember that this is God's word.

And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our feet. In other words, God has not left us alone to stumble in the dark. He gives us his word so that we know the way to walk.

So read with me now as we're in the sea. And the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, how long will you be gone and when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me when I had given.

[ 6 : 07 ] And I said, let me pass through until I come to Judah 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 of the temple and for the wall of the city and for the house.

And I gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

Verse 11. So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.

There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the valley gate to the dragon spring and to the dung gate. And I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

Verse 14. Then I went on to the fountain gate into the king's pool but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall and I turned back and entered by the valley gate and so returned.

[ 7 : 17 ] And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. And I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials and the rest who were to do the work.

Then I said to them, you see the trouble we are in how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem and no longer suffer derision. And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

And they said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the horror night and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, what is this thing that you are doing?

Are you rebelling against the king? Then I replied to them, the God of heaven will make us prosper and we his servants will arise and build. But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.

Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you do not just call us to repent of our sins, but you also call us into your plans for the world.

[ 8 : 32 ] You call us to be a part of your mission. And so we ask that you would help us this morning to do that, that you would show us everything that you have for us in your word. We ask this not because we have earned it or deserve it, but because Jesus has earned it and deserved it for us.

And so we ask it in his name. Amen. If you have been following the news the last few weeks, you know that we've had a couple important dates pass.

Now it's debate as to whether it's January the 12th or January the 17th, but there is an official ditch New Year's resolution day. And I believe it's based on some sort of polls or data about when people are most likely to drop their New Year's resolutions.

So there's some debate about which week in January it is, but there comes a point at which people decide or maybe don't even decide, but they finally drop off everything that they've resolved to do in the new year.

Now this is bad news for people who set goals. It's amazing news for all the gyms in the world. That was a joke. You can laugh. It's okay. But the reality is that it's one thing to set a goal and it's another thing to see it through.

[ 9 : 50 ] It's another thing to carry it out. Nehemiah in chapter 1 repented of the sins of himself and the people of Israel on the one hand.

But now he actually has to do all the work that it requires to come back. All the work to restore years and years of neglect of Jerusalem.

It's been hundreds of years leading up to this point. It's been almost a hundred years since the return from exile. It was decades in exile and it was hundreds of years before that as Jerusalem fell and Israel fell little by little into sin and rebellion against God.

And so while it's easy to at times feel sorry or regret the things that we've done it's on the other hand much more challenging to begin to walk the path away. To walk the path back to what God has for us.

And yet we had that great cliffhanger last week that great hint that there were wonderful things in store for Nehemiah and we're not disappointed at all. We find out at the very beginning of chapter 2 that Nehemiah has been praying for four months.

[10:58] It's the month of Nisan. So we've gone from November and December of one year to April of the next year. Remember I told you that this prayer that we saw in chapter 1 was a summary prayer of everything that Nehemiah had been praying for months.

And as he's been praying he's also been planning because we're going to see the brilliance of everything that he's thought through. He's waited four months. Now we would assume at this point that he's had many chances to bring food before the king.

There's many times that the king is going to eat. We can assume he hasn't been fasting for the last four months. Right? And so Nehemiah comes he's been waiting and finally he has the right opportunity. Everything that he does here it seems to be strategic.

First of all he's coming before the king when there's wine to be had. If there's any time that the king is going to be most friendly and receptive to what Nehemiah has to say to him it's going to be when he's feeling good.

Now Old Testament scholars have a debate here about whether this was a Pinot Noir or a Cabernet but the type of wine that is here is not important.

[12:03] The point is that Nehemiah is using everything at his disposal. He's using all the intelligence and faculties that God has given him. He picks the right time. Then he also does something else that's strategic.

He tells us in verse 1 he had not been sad in the king's presence before. Now we know that this isn't because Nehemiah had not been feeling sad he had been fasting and weeping in chapter 1. But instead it's more likely that Nehemiah strategically decides this is going to be the day that he finally lets the king see everything that he's been feeling.

So he picks the right time. He sets the right mood. And the plan begins to work because the king notices that something is wrong with Nehemiah and he asks him this question.

Nehemiah continues in his brilliance there because he doesn't even make a request at this point. Verse 2 the king asks him why he's sad. And Nehemiah doesn't say here's what I want you to do and says instead he says let the king live forever.

Verse 3 why should not my face be sad when the city the place of my father's graves lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Here Nehemiah's strategy continues because instead of talking about his regret over sin his repentance he speaks in words that the king can understand.

[13:19] And at this time in history there is few things worse than your father's graves being destroyed. And so Nehemiah chooses the right time. He chooses the right mood.

He chooses the right words that he knows will be most effective to the king. And it leads to the result that he wants. In verse 4 the king says to him what are you requesting? What does Nehemiah do?

After he's laid out this brilliant strategy after he's decided for the perfect moment at the perfect time to speak to the king he prays. He does again what he's been doing for the last four months.

He continues and we can see that he has planned out everything. The king continues to ask him questions and Nehemiah has thought through every contingency every need that he has.

He strikes when the moment is right. He asks for the permission that he needs the letters that he requires to be able to do everything that is required. Even so much so that he gets the king to pay for the resources that he needs.

[ 14 : 32 ] You see in verse 8 he asks for a letter so that he could use wood from the king's forest. And so Nehemiah does two things here.

He acts decisively and boldly and intelligently with everything that God has given him. but he also prays and relies on God to give him the favor that he needs in the eyes of the king.

And so what does it look like for us to return to God's mission? What does returning to God's mission look like? It means that we act and we pray.

We act and we pray. Now some of us are going to fall more on the side of acting others of us more on the side of praying. we don't just invite our neighbors over to our house or invite them to church.

We also pray for them. And we don't just pray for our neighbors that they would come to know Jesus but we also act. We also invite them over to our house and we invite them to join us at church.

[ 15 : 49 ] We don't just pray that our children would come to know Jesus and embrace him. But we also model for them what that looks like as we talked about last week in repenting.

We don't just model for them what it looks like to repent but we also pray. We don't just pray about injustice and poverty and homelessness but we also join with people in our city who are doing that.

We don't just join with people who are doing that though we also pray. pray. Oftentimes for Christians as much as God calls us to pray prayer can become a cop out.

I often hear people say well I'm praying about that and that is good and right. God calls us to pray about things but he also calls us to act. He calls us to step out like Nehemiah and to use the resources that he has given us to return to his mission.

He doesn't just call us to repent of our sin but he calls us to fight it as well. And so we don't just pray that God would give us victory and faithfulness in the things in our lives that continue to trip us up but he calls us to take the action that we need to put it to death.

[ 17 : 12 ] It might look like confessing not just to God but to a friend and asking for their help. It might look like joining an accountability group that will help us move back away from sin and towards righteousness.

When we return to God and his mission we don't just act but we pray. And we don't just pray but we act. Nehemiah sets a model here of depending entirely on God.

He prays for four months before doing anything. but he also sets us a model of being bold and decisive.

And he doesn't do it because he is a man of great confidence and ability. Did you see what he said in verse 2?

Just as his plan is about to succeed just as it's underway the king is asking him about the sadness of his face.

[ 18 : 18 ] The very end of verse 2 then I was very much afraid. As Nehemiah repents and moves back towards God and his mission he is not immune from fear.

He is not immune from the challenges and the frightening reality of living in this world. Of pushing back against all the effects of sin.

Everything that sin has ruined. And yet he moves forward not because Nehemiah is brilliant. But he knows that God's good hand is upon him.

That's what he tells us at the end here in verse 8. The end of this scene. The king granted me what I asked for the good hand of my God was upon me. And so as we turn back as we return to God and his mission as we want God's kingdom to be here on earth as it is in heaven.

We work and we pray but we work and we pray because we know that God's good hand is with us. It's on us. Because it's God's mission. It's God's kingdom that he wants to return.

[ 19 : 32 ] And so God is going to bring his good hand anywhere and everywhere that his people are returning to him. And so our next portion as we return to God's mission is this.

First we saw as we look to return to what God has called us to do, we act and we pray. But we also have to make sure that the mission that we're on is God's mission.

In other words, how do we know that the good hand of our God is upon us? When do we know that God is with us? What are the actions that result in God's blessing and favor here?

God's God's mission? Sometimes it's tempting when we talk about God and the coincidences that he provides, the doors that he's opened. Sometimes I hear people talk about those things but it's things that seem to have nothing to do with God and his mission.

So God's promised to us. His presence with us is not a promise that he's going to help us with everything in every way. God is not necessarily going to help everyone in this room become a multimillionaire.

[ 20 : 56 ] God is not going to help everyone in this room start a successful real estate business. God is not necessarily going to help everyone in this room find what we're looking for.

And so as we're praying and acting, how do we know that we are on God's mission? How are we with God? How do we know that that good hand of God is upon us? We see here in this chapter in the following section that Nehemiah is pursuing the kingdom of God.

He's looking to rebuild and restore Jerusalem, the place where God wants his kingdom to be modeled on earth. The point of Jerusalem was that all of the nations would be able to look and see what it's like when God's people live in God's ways.

God's mission. And so we see here in this chapter that Nehemiah is on God's mission. We see in verse 10 that he's come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

We see in verse 12 that God had put this in his heart to do something for Jerusalem. And so Nehemiah here has a special mission from God.

[ 22 : 11 ] And what's difficult as we ask and wonder what is God's mission is that Nehemiah doesn't just have a special mission from God but he plays a role in the Bible that we do not play. Not everyone in the history of Israel makes it into the Bible.

Not everyone has a special mission from God in redemptive history. God has not called us to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem like he called Nehemiah to do that. And yet we do have God's commands to us in the Bible.

God has given us enough that we know everything that God loves. And so we experience God's good hand.

We know that we are returning to God in his mission when we work for the things that God loves. We know that we're returning to God's mission when we are seeking for God's kingdom to be here on earth just as it is in heaven.

And so on the one hand we make a mistake if we want everything to happen to us just like it happens to Nehemiah. We are not an Old Testament governor of Judah. On the other hand we can be confident that God's hand is with us whenever we turn back to him and his mission.

[ 23 : 30 ] And so what we see here in chapter 2 is similar to what we saw in the book of Ruth. Remember Ruth goes out trying to provide for Naomi and it just so happens that she turns out in the fields of Boaz.

We expect things to just so happen not with every coincidence in our lives but whenever we're seeking God and his ways.

And so how do we know that we are with God on his mission? One thing we can do is we can ask the why test. We can use the why test.

In other words, why is it that we are pursuing what we're pursuing? Why is it that we want what we want? How is it that our lives are seeking after God and his mission? One way that this shows up is in our prayers.

Yemiah here has been praying to God that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Excuse me, not destroyed. Jerusalem would be restored after its destruction. And so we can ask the same question for ourselves.

[ 24 : 31 ] How does our life relate to God and his mission? And this is not just something that involves building up the church but all of our lives. If we are single and praying for a spouse, are we praying for a spouse so that we will not be lonely?

Or are we saying to God, please bring me a spouse and here is how I see my marriage bringing you and your kingdom glory. I want it to be a place where people see the gospel lived out and acted out.

Do we ask God for a house? Because we are interested in our own comfort. Or are we asking God that he would come and bring us a place that's not just for our good but for his glory.

A place where people are going to experience the safety and belonging and rest and challenge of the gospel. If we are asking God for children, are we asking him for children so that we won't be lonely in our old age?

Or are we asking him that he would provide us with children so that we can be part of raising them to love God and know God and that they would play a role in bringing God's kingdom here on earth.

[ 25 : 47 ] That he would raise them up and give them vocations and work. That they would be a part of restoring this world that God has given us. Are we seeking to help those who are homeless so that we can feel good about ourselves?

Or are we praying that God would use us to help restore everything that's been ruined by sin? In other words, are we seeking God and his mission?

Are we seeking the things that God loves? For the reasons that he loves them. God has not called us to build a wall around Jerusalem.

And yet he has called us, just like Nehemiah, as we repent of our sin to turn back to all of his purposes for this world. And so whatever we're pursuing, whatever we're doing, we're pursuing it with God and his mission in mind.

It's not that we need to become frantic and fill our schedules with more things in our lives. But that the things that we're already doing are not more things, but they become mission things.

[ 27 : 01 ] Things that are bringing God and his goodness and his justice and his love to bear in the world. We see in this section, Nehemiah meets some enemies.

We're going to see a lot of Nehemiah's enemies and the rest of Nehemiah, so we're going to save some of that for later when they oppose him even more. But we see throughout all of this, as he faces the enemies, as Nehemiah looks around the wall, that he is interested in God and his good hand.

It's God and his provision that is the motivating factor for Nehemiah as he's leading. We saw already in verse 12 that God had put this in his heart.

We see in verse 8 before that the good hand of God was upon Nehemiah. In fact, that's a theme here in this chapter because it shows up again in verse 18.

Nehemiah is trying to lead and encourage the people of Jerusalem to join him in the work. And so he says, And I told them, this is verse 18, of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

[ 28 : 14 ] And they said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work. In one verse, we see that God has given his good hand to his people.

And the result is that they can strengthen their hands as well. But then the real kicker comes in verses 19 and 20. Nehemiah's enemies and opponents come to him and they make fun of him.

And they ask him a question that he doesn't answer. Do you notice that? Verse 19. What is this thing that you are doing?

Are you rebelling against the king? And Nehemiah doesn't answer whether he's rebelling against the king. Because he answers to a different king.

And so in verse 20 he says, Then I replied to them, The God of heaven will make us prosper. And we his servants will arise and build.

[ 29 : 18 ] But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. In other words, Nehemiah knows that God allows and calls and invites his people to be a part of his mission.

He invites them not just to repent of sin but to turn back. And he does that not because of our good hand but because of his. It's God's good hand on his people.

It's God's good hand on his people here in the Old Testament. As they look forward to Jesus coming. And it's God's good hand on us as well as we look back to Jesus coming.

God doesn't allow us to be part of restoring the world that's been broken by sin because we are not a part of the problem. He allows us to be a part of it even though we are.

Even as we are part of the brokenness of this world, God allows us and invites us to join him. because his good hand is with us and it's with us because of Jesus. As we talked about with repentance, God is bringing his justice on the earth.

[ 30 : 31 ] And yet for those who follow him and have faith in him and trust him, he allows that justice to fall on Jesus. He takes people who allow the walls to be torn down and destroyed and he invites us to come back with him and rebuild them.

And so because of everything that Jesus has done for us, God's invitation to Nehemiah is his invitation to us as well. That we can be a part of his mission and we can return with action and prayer joining God in everything that he has that is good for this world.

And so that's what we're about to sing as we sing By Faith. We're going to sing a verse about the city that God has given of justice and goodness. That it's something that we don't see now but we walk by faith knowing that God comes and joins and gives us his good hand as we choose to walk with him.

Even when we don't see and know everything that lies ahead. And so let's do that now. Please pray with me before we sing our closing hymn. Dear Father in Heaven, we thank you that even though we are part of the problem of this world, we've contributed to its brokenness, to its destruction.

You allowed Jesus to be broken and destroyed for us so that we could join with you in rebuilding everything that's been broken and lost.

[ 32 : 13 ] We ask that you would encourage us with that this morning, that you would remind us of your love and your grace. And we would take that and it would allow us to walk forward in faith, building and restoring as you guide us and lead us.

We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.