

# When It's All Gone Wrong

## - Nehemiah 1

### Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

#### **Nehemiah 1:1-4 - "Jerusalem's wall has been broken down"**

- What person - or group of people - would prevent you from enjoying your 'success' if they were failing or suffering?
- Does the state of the Church - in this city, nation, globally - make you weep?
- Do your friends / family see hope in the message of the Church? Why?

#### **Nehemiah 1:5-11a - "I said..."**

- How can our faith be affected when we allow 'the big ask' to dominate our prayers - rather than our big God?
- How does Nehemiah's prayer compare with the way you pray?

#### **Nehemiah 1:11b - "...At the time, I was the king's cupbearer"**

- How can we be distracted by our own goals and comforts or sense of prosperity and success?
- How are you using the influence and success God has given you to help others? What purpose do they serve?

### Sermon Overview (When It's All Gone Wrong)

If you have accepted that God exists - that He is real - the question of 'how can I know God and be at peace with Him?' is of great importance. Nehemiah is responding at a time of great shame for the people of God - at a time when they are no longer at peace with Him. A great restoration is about to happen - and this first chapter highlights what it looks like when Godly people see a world that has rejected God, and when they lay hold of the hope in a God who is truly merciful.

The history of the Israelites has been filled with stories of exile - where they have turned from God. God repeatedly goes after His people to bring them back to Himself. Adam and Eve were created and had a great relationship with God, yet they did not trust Him and were not faithful - and were exiled from Eden. As we continue in the Bible, we see God's people in Egypt as slaves. God raises up Moses to free His people and bring them home to Him - into a land He has promised them. Yet again, they reject God, worship other idols and are exiled again. The story in the book of Nehemiah takes place when God's people have been exiled in Babylon. God's instruction has come with many wonderful promises. Our purpose is in Him, yet we struggle to see God fulfilling His promises. Nehemiah is seeing God's people when everything appears to have gone wrong.

#### Nehemiah and the Comfortable Life.

Nehemiah was in a position of prestige as cup-bearer to the King. He had access to the most powerful man in the empire. He was prosperous and secure living a comfortable life. The Israelites have been exiled to Babylon, and for Nehemiah that had provided the choicest foods, nicest wines and a great position of influence. He has been elevated to a high position - but to what end? A comfortable life is a common desire - yet Nehemiah knew there was more to this.

It is not a bad thing to desire a comfortable life, to live a prosperous life. Yet Nehemiah was prepared to give it all up because there was suffering which made his 'comfortable life' uncomfortable. Nehemiah has been enjoying a comfortable life, but he has also come to realise that his comfort is not an end in itself. A life that brings glory to God matters more even at the cost of his own comfort.

#### A Reason for Tears.

A person's tears are an expression of their deepest affections - it is unusual to see a grown man weeping, when he does you take notice. Weeping and mourning is a normal response to death - but the report in verse 3 has Nehemiah in pieces and his response seems out of proportion. For Nehemiah, the state of God's people - and their witness - is a life-and-death situation.

The message of hope and restoration has been given to God's people, known through relationship with God. Death does not beat this message and does not destroy this hope. Yet when God's people are living in squalor, pain and suffering, the message of hope is gone. If the people of God are effectively 'dead' and 'disgraced' then what hope is there? If no one is bearing witness and bringing a message of hope to a destitute and disgraced people, then men and women will die in their sin without God, without hope! Nehemiah would not simply stand by and settle as God's people are crushed and humiliated, muted and sick.

We have been comforted by the work of Jesus. With what we have received through the provision of Christ on the Cross - we have comfort in all things. But this is not to leave us comforted alone - but so that we may comfort others (**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**). When the people of God are not praising and proclaiming Him in and to the world around then it is a sorrowful situation that we should mourn and weep over.

#### Praying like Nehemiah.

Nehemiah's response to this situation was to mourn, with fasting and prayer. His prayer is a great example for us.

- Pray to a **PERSONAL** God: Nehemiah prayed LORD (YHWH). We pray to our Father - who is personal.
- Pray to a **BIG** God: Don't start with the problem - start by praising God and recognising His position over it.
- Pray to a **FAITHFUL** God: He keeps His promise - a gracious covenant of love, which requires our obedience.
- Pray to a God who **HEARS**: He sees, and He hears our prayers - a God who is attentive to His people.
- Pray to **CONFESS**: Nehemiah recognises how the people have rejected God - to usher in His victory over sin.
- Pray the **PROMISES** of God: Know the Word of God! Have faith that God will accomplish His promises.
- Pray the **BIG** ask: Following the other steps, faith is stirred to pray for - and believe in - the big ask.