

Coach House Church BEACONS

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

20TH APRIL 2020

Nehemiah was in exile in Persia, along with many of the Israelites. In effect he was in lockdown in a different country. The Israelites history had been one of constant change- at times enjoying the blessing of God, acting on his instructions and being led to victory in mighty battles while at other times, forgetting their vows to trust in God fully and suffering the consequences of their own actions with massive defeat and humiliation.

However, all was not doom and gloom as Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king. The cupbearer was a high position in the court. He would have been well-trained in court etiquette, a friendly companion, willing to lend an ear and even to give advice to the king. He was a highly trusted man. Nehemiah would have eaten the best food, worn the best clothes, and lived in very comfortable quarters in the palace at Susa. So what was the problem then? Well, a message came from Jerusalem that upset Nehemiah. He learned that the small number of Jews who remained in the city were in distress and that the walls of the city were broken down. This weighed heavy on him.

Nehemiah saw the bigger picture, the need to rebuild Jerusalem's devastated walls, to provide protection for the temple which was the symbol of God's power and authority in that place.

He could have said: "Why be bothered about Jerusalem? We live in Persia and have lived here for over 100 years. What's the big deal about Jerusalem anyway? Why not just settle down and worship God here?" He could have stayed safe and comfortable. But Nehemiah knew something about what God wanted to do with His people

(Nehemiah1:9): “I ... will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.”

It was so much more than a wall. It was God’s glory in Jerusalem. God in his rightful place.

To put this task in context here are the dimensions of the city walls:

Nearly 2.5 miles long, just over 4000 metres long

Nearly 40 feet high, or 12 metres

Walls that were 8 feet thick, 2.5metres

And there were 34 watchtowers as well !!!

This was indeed mission impossible – he needed to approach his employer, the King of Persia to ask for time off, for permission to visit Jerusalem. Then there was the matter of materials to repair and rebuild the city walls and gates, as well as a workforce to sort out.

Wouldn’t you be tempted to stop where you were- with a job, security...rather than the logistical nightmare that would be organising this project?

I was once asked to apply for a job for which I wasn’t qualified and didn’t have the experience. Straight away I said: No. I can’t do that. I don’t want the extra work, it’s something new and different and I really don’t think I can do that!

However, God reminded me that I was right that I couldn’t do it but that with God’s help I could.

In Philippians 4:13 the apostle Paul says:

I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. By refusing to consider the job I was putting limits on God. When God has a plan there is always a way to complete it.

Back to Nehemiah. Although he knew what God wanted him to do, He didn’t immediately rush into the king’s presence. For four months he concealed this heavy

burden from the king and presented it to God in private. Nehemiah's prayer can be found in chapter 1. It is a heartfelt prayer asking for forgiveness and also reminding God of his promises to gather his people together again. Through prayer and planning, he finally asked for a year's leave of absence because God had called him to Jerusalem. Psalm 27 reminds us to wait patiently for the Lord- not to rush.

Philippians 4:6 begins with:

'Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all that he has done.'

In this story, the King also granted Nehemiah safe passage escorted by army officers and cavalry, as well as permission to collect timber from the royal park. God always listens to our prayers and as it says in Ephesians 3 he is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. The first part of the mission completed, now there was the matter of walls to be rebuilt!

Remember the size: Nearly 2.5 miles long, 40 feet high, with walls that were 8 feet thick and 34 watchtowers!

Now, once my Dad knocked down the old coal sheds at the side of the house as he intended to use the space for a garage. He left in the original foundations which were fine and he thought 'how difficult can it be to build up a few rows of bricks?'

Well some time later, our neighbour who was a time-served 'bricky' couldn't take the agony of watching him struggle any further and came across to help. His first words were 'knock it down and we'll start again!' And true to his word, the walls grew true and straight and quickly as Billy the Bricky took charge.

So, the amazing miracle of Nehemiah's story is that he gathered together many non-specialists in stone laying. In Nehemiah 3 it lists amongst others: a goldsmith, a perfume maker and even the daughters all pitched in.

In addition, they faced increasing opposition from the surrounding people groups who hurled abuse in their direction and ridiculed their efforts. Nehemiah 4:1 can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble-burned as they are?And a fox could knock that over..

No matter how fierce the opposition, the people continued to build and they continued to call upon God's strength and protection, until eventually the walls were completely restored and ...the miracle was that it only took 52 days! Amazing. This is a great story. It's always good when a plan comes together and so satisfying when you read of how the people persevered in adversity, working closely together to triumph even under the threat of violence and insult.

What do we learn from Nehemiah? Prayer patience perseverance and plans
Prayer – always take your problems to God, both big and small. God is never surprised or fazed. You may not be tasked with rebuilding the city's defences but your concerns are important to you and to God.

1 Peter 5 v 7 says: Give all you worries and cares to God for he cares about you.

Patience – God is not in a rush to move onto the next prayer. God is the creator of time and is not bound or limited by it. Psalm 121 says that God doesn't snooze or sleep. He is always available and will always listen.

Perseverance – don't give up, keep going, hold onto God's promises and rely on his strength. Isaiah 40:31 says: ...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Plans – God always has a plan. Throughout the Old Testament, the family line continued through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through the house of Judah, King David and eventually to Jesus. God's plan was always to provide a Saviour, a Messiah who would then provide a way for everyone to be able to have a relationship with Almighty God.

Remember Nehemiah trusted in Almighty God to complete the impossible. You might feel like you are standing among the rubble with a mountain of a task in front of you - just like Nehemiah. You don't know how to tackle it, where to start. The whole thing seems an impossible task. The problem far outweighs any plan or resources you have available. There seems to be no way ahead, no way through it.

Jesus completed the impossible task of being the perfect sacrifice and took our place of judgement before Almighty God. We can now approach God directly in the name of Jesus, bringing our prayers, our concerns, asking for forgiveness, for strength, for comfort and peace, for the impossible.

To finish, I'd like to read Ephesians 3:16

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses all knowledge- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever. Amen



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