



**KING'S
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EDINBURGH

1. Getting God's Heart

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah lived in 445 BC. He was:

- *An immigrant. His family had been forcefully resettled from Israel to Persia (Iran) 83 years earlier.* He lived his life as “an exile”. Somebody’s son. It’s often God’s way that the people we influence and shape go much further than we ever will! Good for our humility. Yet clearly Nehemiah’s parents had done a good job- he was an educated man- able to write the book we have.
- *A person of great influence and responsibility.* Cupbearer to the King. He as the most trustworthy person in the land that the king would entrust his food and drink provision to him (when poisoning was a popular way of overthrowing a king) Sometimes God chooses no-hopers (Gideon etc). Other times God lets you develop skills and character at work, which he then uses- like Nehemiah.
- *Mightily used by God.* In our story he will rebuild Jerusalem’s walls and govern for 12 years.

Today’s main point from this passage: **He was a man who was deeply sensitive to the heart of God.**

His brother Hanani visits in the month of Kislev. Kislev was our November/December. It was the month when the rains came. Associated with anticipation and dreaming. Nehemiah enquires about Jerusalem- perhaps he’s been dreaming. Dreaming of a group of Jews who had been allowed to return to Jerusalem 13 years earlier to rebuild. Dreaming of a glorious city where God’s name would be made famous to the world.

In the absence of news he'd perhaps been reassured that it was going well, and nothing prepared him for the report he received- the walls are broken down, the city has no distinctive, no protection from enemies- the people in disgrace.

Nehemiah sits down and does that very unscottish male thing- he starts crying, weeping.

Nehemiah is a **HEART STORY**. The key points in these opening chapters (2:2 and 2:12) both reference what is going on in his heart. Faith in God affects us at a heart level.

So Nehemiah gets very emotional- he weeps for days, weeks. He expressed godly emotion in a powerful way. When dealing with emotions it's important that we see past the tears to the heart.

Emotions are:

- **Gifts from God.** As human beings we are image bearers of God so have the wonder of experiencing emotions. Happy, sad, grief, sorrow, joy, embarrassed, angry, hurt, unsure, love, delight.
- **Unsanctified and need to change!** Tinged by sin. Some of us cry too much, some not enough. Need to become more like Christ (who also wept over Jerusalem and on other occasions, but wasn't debilitated by his emotions).

It starts with hearing

Jesus said Luke 8:18 "be careful how you listen". These days everybody's learning but no-one is listening. We are overloaded with information through all kinds of media. How much do we hear at a heart level. Better to know less and feel it rather than no more and be hard.

Nehemiah heard news about the state of God's glory in the world (represented by Jerusalem):

- Have you heard the news - *judgement is coming to every person.*
- Have you heard the news - *the angels announced that a saviour is born- Christ the Lord.*
- Have you heard the news- *Jesus is alive and building his church today.*

What Nehemiah heard landed on a godly soft heart. Let's see some qualities of a healthy heart

Diagnosing a healthy heart:

1. **It takes an interest.** People say "Ignorance is bliss." However godly people ask questions, to inform themselves of the real state of things. A healthy heart is inquisitive. *Prov 15:14* The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.
2. **It cares about others more than itself.** Not self-centred. *James 1:19-20* "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

Human emotion is sadly often self-centred. E.g. we get angry because we are effected by someone's behaviour towards us.

Jesus anger seemed righteous when he drove out fraudulent money grabbers from the temple who were exploiting the poor. It was about God and about others.

1. **Sustained.** It still cares when initial emotion has subsided. Nehemiah sat down and wept. For days he mourned and fasted and prayed. He responded 4 months later in chapter 2. Jesus told story of two brothers- (Matt 21)- one made an emotional response to helping his dad (but didn't follow through), one refused to respond immediately and did the right thing later.
2. **It recognises its vulnerability to becoming hard and takes evasive action.**
>*Hebrews 3:12*: "See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

That verse tells us we need to daily resist hardening influences of the world, ensuring that we're part of a community where encouragement and not cynicism is the norm.

Treatment for Hard Hearts

People's most basic problem is their lack of responsiveness to God- our hearts are stoney towards God.

When Jesus saves us he removes our sin-hardened heart and gives us a heart of flesh (*Ezekiel 36*).

God's plan for that heart is for us to nurture it and allow the Spirit to grow our love for him and for his kingdom values.

Even as Christians we can find ourselves growing cold to God and to what he says matters. We must be careful to repent and ask for his help. Hebrews says "*Today if you hear his voice don't harden your heart*". It's urgent that we acknowledge our situation, but the great news is he is so willing to help us. God is good with hearts. Come and find grace.

Questions

1. *Cupbearer to the king*. Nehemiah was the most trusted employee of King Antaxerxes (a pagan king). What does it look like for us to show that quality in our jobs or on voluntary rotas or day to day responsibilities?
2. *God uses our weakness/ uses our gifts*. Which do you relate to more: God using your despite your weaknesses (e.g. Gideon), or God finding a use for your gifts/education etc (Nehemiah). How can we get this balance right?
3. *Read Nehemiah :1-4 again*. Do you find Nehemiah's display of emotion something you can relate to? Or does it make you uncomfortable? Nehemiah's emotion was in part public, largely private. Where do you find your emotions are best expressed?
4. *Nehemiah responded to a God-dishonouring situation firstly by engaging emotionally*. How can we engage in a more heart felt way about things God cares about?
5. *What things help you personally to stop growing cynical and hardened by sin*.



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