

Welcome, good to see you.

Last week we began to new series in the book of Nehemiah.

And today we come to chapter 2.

Last week David told us

that this book was written about 450 years before Jesus, and

about 150 years **after** the Babylonians had

sacked Jerusalem,

taken the people as slaves, and

carted them back to Babylon

where famously, a few of them sat by a river, and wrote a Boney M classic.

*<sound clip – sorry I couldn't resist>*

When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem

they pulled down its wall,

burned its gates and

removed all their weapons.

Those that were left were pretty defenceless

And so, over the next 150 years, rather than rebuild the city,

what actually happened was that the inhabitants began to slip into total

obscurity

As a race they were dying out.

We pick up the story exactly 141 years later

with a chap called Nehemiah who was

*Chapter 1v11 Cupbearer to the King.*

*Now "Cupbearer to the King" is a cross between*

*an "Espresso Maker" and an "Early Warning Radar"*

*He's a sort of "vending machine" cum Miner's Canary rolled into one!*

You see everybody wanted to kill the king.

And the favoured way of doing it was to slip poison into his wine.

*That way you could be long gone before he croaked.*

So the king would hire some guy who was either very bold or very stupid, who

would taste the wine before he drunk it.

The theory being that if it was poisoned,

the cup-bearer would keel over.

So Nehemiah has courage, is trusted,

*but hasn't really bothered to take out a pension.*

And Nehemiah hears the news about Jerusalem

how it is in ruins;

how the people are struggling;

how God's name is being forgotten

And I want to focus this morning on his reaction.

Because three things are clear

He has a Passion for the lost and the broken;  
He Prays about his passion; and  
He Plans on what to do about it.

He has Passion. He Prays and he Plans  
And this has real relevance to us this morning.

### **1. First of all, he has a passion for the broken and lost.**

We know this because when he hears the news about the imminent extinction of God's people, he is emotionally distraught and devastated.

He is SO sad that he can't hide it from the King

*v1 In the month of Nissan,*

so this is four months later...

which means he has been worrying about this for ages

*in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes,*

which is 445 BC,

*When wine was brought before the King,*

*I took up the wine and gave it to him.*

*And I had not been sad in his presence before*

The truth is, if you wanted to keep your job you are never sad in the presence of the King

*The last thing the King needs is a depressed Espresso Machine.*

*The last thing the King wants is for his "Poison Taster" to look a little under the weather!*

*What does he care if his slave is having a bad hair day?!!*

*So if you want to keep your job, your perks, your head—  
you fake being happy!*

*Some of us do this at work with our boss —*

*He says "How are you"*

*And we say "Great. Glad to be here. Love broom cupboard office you've given me — very efficient!"*

*We pretend to be happy, because we want a promotion, we want to get on, so we pretend it is a joy, a delight, a privilege to be working for our boss!*

But Nehemiah is sad

He goes before the king, serves him wine, and he's glum!

This is a dangerous thing

*v2 And the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad, when you are not ill?' This can be nothing but sadness of the heart!.*

And he is right!

Nehemiah's heart is sad because the people he loves are lost,

the city that he is from is broken,

And the reputation of God is fading fast.

Nehemiah sees this brokenness,

and even though it is 500 miles away from it,  
his heart is devastated,  
People are lost, his generation is broken, and the name of God fading  
And he wants to do something about it.

His problem is he's just a servant, a slave - **and a disposable slave at that!**  
Yet he feels this empathy with his people,  
this burden for their well being,  
this sense that God is calling him to "do something about it".

So he says  
*v2 "I was very much afraid."*  
No Kidding!  
Nehemiah is a nobody,  
He has no power or prestige or training  
*(all he knows how to hand out wine and die quietly)*

Yet he wants to do **something**  
he wants to do what he CAN  
And what he CAN,  
is very risky, very dangerous **and** way outside his comfort zone!

Look we live in Lewes,  
This is a beautiful town, but it is broken.  
All the time we come into contact with  
Broken relationships and hurting people who are struggling with life, to cope,  
to feel valued, to make ends meet...

We live in a broken town, a town that once knew and loved God so much that  
there were more churches than pubs. We live in a town that is spiritually lost,  
where people live and die without knowing  
why they were given the gift of life in the first place,  
what their purpose is,  
that God is real and can be found and known.

And when faced with that  
I think God calls us all to make a difference  
to say in some way that they can receive  
"hey, God CAN be discovered, you can know his love, you can experience his  
life, you can follow his plans for you".  
I think God calls us all who have found God to the Good News  
In fact, this is exactly what this congregation is all about!  
The reason why we created this service is so that we can reach people who  
would appreciate a more informal, more contemporary, more community based  
style of worship.

**We are the Heineken service –**  
**We can reach parts of Lewes that our other congregations cannot reach!**

And yes, you and me – we don't have much power or influence, or gifts or  
connections

But we can make a difference

We can serve our town and we can be part of God's plan to save some.

It may be scary,

it may well take us out of your comfort zone

but I want to ask will you do this, will you help, will you develop a heart for the lost?

Will you see the spiritual brokenness in our town that is forgetting busily forgetting God and DO something about it?

Nehemiah, he is very much afraid when he steps out in faith

but he loves people and he has a passion to do something about it.

And so he says,

*v3 Let the king live forever*

That's a good start.

"King, I'm sad, but it's not YOU, it me."

*When Owen's girl-friend dumped him she used those famous sensitive words*

*"Owen, its not you it's me"*

*Since then he bought this Tee-Shirt and he has wanted to say to someone really sensitively*

*"looks its not YOU its me – I just don't like you anymore!"*.

Look King says Nehemiah, "its not you it's me"

Sorry, but my home town and the people I love are lost and broken and I feel I must do something about it

*v4 "So the king said to me, 'What are you requesting?'"*

So he says

*So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

He does, what he has been doing for 4 months now,

## **2. He Prays.**

He has a passion for the lost and he wants to do something about it so he prays.

He began a dialogue with God, a conversation with God

and as he did so his relationship with God grew and

his sense of God's plan for his life developed.

He prayed.

Back in Chapter 1v4 it was a considered prayer

Here in Chapter 2v4 it is an emergency prayer!

Look we all have passions in our life

to get married, to have kids, to buy a house, to finish school, get a job, to find our ministry, to pay off our debt, whatever it is.

We may have been praying for weeks about something and nothing seems to be happening.

Nehemiah has been praying for 4 months up to this point!

Sometimes, we just have to be patient, and to keep praying

You say,

“Why do we have to keep praying – does God forget to check his in-box?”

No. But the truth is, its about working out our passion with God

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says *“Pray without ceasing.”*

Keep on praying, keep on waiting, keep on looking for God’s timing

*You’re going into a meeting, pray.*

*You’ve got a job interview, pray silently*

(always best silently in a job interviews).

*You’re going to take a test in school, pray like crazy!.*

She’s cute, you’re scared, but you’re hoping for the best. **Pray!**

You’re sitting in a meeting at work,

you feel compelled to speak, *pray God, give me the right words, give them ears to hear, give me courage!*

Some prayers are long, some prayers are short.

It doesn’t matter - sometimes we make prayer way too complicated!

Look, God’s our Father and we’re his children.

In the best homes we can talk to Parents about anything.

Sometimes we talk to our parents for a long time – sometimes we just say “Hi”

Sometimes we’re pouring our heart out to God ,

Sometimes it’s just “Thanks.”

There are all kinds of prayers: long, short, considered, spontaneous – it doesn’t matter they all count!

*Sometimes I have long conversations with my wife,*

*But I don’t sit her down at the dining table,*

*get myself in the zone with her,*

*fix her intently in the eye and*

*say listen we must talk I have something to ask you....*

*“would you like a cup of tea!”.*

*That would be freaky!*

God’s our Father, we can tell him about the big stuff AND the little stuff – he listens to it all!

Sometimes Owen will call me over to look at a video he has made

Now if it was anyone else – I would say to be honest, I’m way too busy!”.

But it’s my son and he wants to show me something

**that is important to him**

So if its important to him, because I love him, its important to me.

So talk to God about the big things and the little things

because to be honest there is nothing in an of itself that could ever bother the God of the Universe

Even the biggest things on earth are insignificant to him

**BUT**, but because he loves us –

if they are important to us they ARE important to him.

Pray long, Pray short, Pray Big, Pray Small, Pray planned, pray spontaneous - but pray.

because it develops our relationship with God and  
God uses it to unfold his plans our life.

Nehemiah says: “God, give me the right words, give me the right spirit, give him the right attitude, and please don’t let him kill me.”

And then he prays before the King his Plan

He has the Passion to be used by God

He has been Praying to God; and

### **3. He has been developing a Plan with God**

*v5 If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, send me to the city of Judah, so that I can rebuild it*

Now this is an incredible request!

This is an unbelievably cheeky request

You can see why he’s so afraid.

It goes on.

*v6 The king said to me, with the queen sitting beside him –*

It’s one thing to be cheeky in front of the King.

It’s a whole other thing to embarrass him in front of the queen.

This is a big risk and the King says

*How long will you be gone, and when will you return?*

Don’t you love the king?

he cuts right to the chase...

what do you want? how long will it take? how long do you want off work?”

*So I set a time.*

Now he doesn’t tell us what he said

but in Chapter 5v14 and in Chapter 13v6 we can work it out.

He asks for 12 years. He asks for 12 years off.

*You’ve got to be praying when you ask this, don’t you?*

The King says “*How long do you want off work?*”

And he says “*Twelve years?*”.

But he hasn’t finished because then

*v7 “he said to the king ‘If it pleases the king.’”*

and he asks for protection, for timber and for a house while he’s at it!

He has been praying and he has been planning

They go together.

When we say, “I want to lose weight, I want to make more money, I want to finish uni, I want to get married, I want to buy a house, I want to do ministry, I want to make a difference.”

Prayer is good, but it needs to lead to a plan.

Some people say, "It's not spiritual to have a plan."

That's rubbish!

As soon as the King asked Nehemiah "What's your plan?"

Nehemiah asks for 3 specific things

time off, protection and resources.

He has spent 4 months praying and listening to God and forming a plan.

### **Some of us are naturally better at praying than planning**

*We say things like "I'm just trusting the Lord."*

*What that actually means is "I have no idea what's going on."*

*We say "wherever the Lord leads." which is just Christianese for*

*"I have no idea what's going on!"*

→ Prayer is good, we need to do it, but praying and planning go together.

### **Some of us are naturally better planners than prayers.**

*We like catalogues and spreadsheets and PERT charts*

*We got plans and strategies and SWOT analysis coming out of our ears.*

*We are always eager to get started*

*And when it all starts to go belly up we say*

*"oops I guess I better pray about it now!"*

*We consult God just at the point where we are about to screw it all up!*

→ Planning is good, we need to do it but praying and planning go together.

Do you know this service was first being prayed about 3 years ago. Since then we have been praying and planning.

David staying, Helen getting ordained, Chris changing his role to help us reach out across the town was all first prayed about 3 years ago.

Since then we have been praying and planning

In our life the key is to pray that God gives us a passion;

and then to pray that he reveals his plan (his path for you), and

then to move forward, praying at each step,

checking your bearings with him, as you follow through on the plan.

This is what Nehemiah was doing.

The king says, "What do you want?"

He says, "You know what? I got a plan."

If the king had said "What do you want?"

and Nehemiah had replied "I don't know. I'm still praying about it"

The King would have said "Well, great. drink some wine! and let's get forget it",

So he says

Give me some time off, give me protection, give me the resources I need to get the job done.

And the King says...v8, "yes all right!"

*And the king granted me what I asked for."*

This is a miracle!

This is God doing his stuff!

The burden (the passion) when combined with a plan forged in prayer leads to God getting involved in our life

And when God gets involved in our life miracles happen

God didn't go "hey presto" and "lo and behold Jerusalem was rebuilt"

God gives Nehemiah the resources he needs and

Nehemiah's faith in God grows!

This life is an adventure with God as he gets us to do stuff that makes an eternal difference in people's lives!

You say "well I'm just a regular person" – nothing spectacular about me!

Well, Nehemiah is a very normal man – noting spectacular about him!

We're reading his diary about himself and he says,

"I was scared to death, I prayed a ton, and God did a miracle."

He's not a pastor, he's not a priest, he's not a religious professional.

He's a slave.

But he's a slave that is willing to use his life for God, and

God uses him to pull off something that hasn't been accomplished despite 141 years of failed efforts.

I would hope that all of us here this morning

aspire to do things with our life that make an eternal difference,

that takes us on an adventure with God

that has us seeing his miracles in our life!

I hope we all pray for success and influence and to make a difference

Not so that we can think we have done 'great things', but that we might help the broken and the lost find God

Not so that people would think we're amazing, but so people would learn that God is amazing

and how he can work through even simple, regular, humble ordinary people like us, and them and Nehemiah.

look

Nothing is too big for God.

Nothing is too hard for God.

What are your hopes for this town?

What are your hopes for this congregation?

What are your hopes for your life?

Join us, be part of us, find your place among us

pray and look for God's plan in your life

And let the adventure begin so that you can see the miracles that he will do  
through you and in you for others – to the glory of his name.

Amen.