

## Hard choices—Committing to work Nehemiah 2:1-10

**Intro:** In our study of the first chapter of Nehemiah we saw two important principles essential to rebuilding—carrying a burden for God’s work and relying upon the Lord. Nehemiah’s care for His people and His trust in God made him the ideal prospect for leading the people of Jerusalem. However, he was hundreds of miles away and engaged in the service of king Artaxerxes. If the work was to be done Nehemiah had to make a commitment to the work. This commitment brought Nehemiah face to face with some hard personal choices.

Let’s consider today another essential to spiritual rebuilding, making the hard choices in order to commit to the work (2:1-10).

### The choice to accept responsibility

*Why should a cup-bearer for the king feel responsible to rebuild a city hundreds of miles away?*

Nehemiah could have said, “It’s someone else’s problem”.

Some people would rather not know what’s going on because knowledge will lead to obligation. So they say, “Don’t tell me. I don’t want to know!” But Nehemiah cared enough to ask, and then he cared enough to cry over the answer! And someone has said, “his tears watered the seeds of providence”. Nehemiah’s great disappointments became the occasion for one of God’s greatest appointments!

In addition, Nehemiah had been praying about this for over 4 months! What a tribute to the inner power that prayer can give us! What kind of transformation was prayer making in the heart of Nehemiah during these four long months!? What Nehemiah learned was that he was the man he had been praying for! Be careful about praying for the work of God; you may end up with the job!

But instead he said, “It’s my problem; because these are my people!” And in 1:11 we see that Nehemiah had a plan to do something about the sad situation in Jerusalem. He planned to go to the king and ask for permission to go to Jerusalem. He accepted responsibility!

*All of us would rather enjoy the fruit of someone else’s work. Go to a church someone else built with great crowds, enthusiasm, where you have to do nothing but receive the benefits. All you have to do is just show up and enjoy the sunshine! But how have we grown by such experiences?*

### The choice to take risks

*One of the things a leader has to do is to use the leverage he has to get something done. God had given Nehemiah a place of influence. He could either use it or neglect or abuse it. A shovel is a great lever. It can move the earth, dig up a rock if we use it! And it is possible to abuse it and you end up with a broken handle. So when you use leverage there is always risk! There was risk in his request.*

There was a chance the king would take his request personally.

Remember Kidner's suggestion that the king had already given an order to halt action (if we presume that it is this Artaxerxes that is mentioned in Ezra 4:6-23). How would the king respond to a request to reverse a previous decision? Would this change of face not make him appear weak or manipulable?

There was a chance the king would say no! Maybe he thought Nehemiah too valuable to give him a leave of absence.

*Nehemiah handled his fears by praying one more time before opening his mouth! And this is what we sometimes need to do—ask God to give us the courage to do what needs to be done without fear of the consequences.*

*And then Nehemiah responded with great skill.*

He broached the issue, like Esther had before him, as a personal one rather than a political one.

His words were brief and respectful of the king, showing consideration for the well-being of his kingship.

*And then we all wait to hear how the king will respond.*

Ever have one of those moments when you've asked a question of someone and you know the answer is of great significance and it seems like an eternity goes back as you wait for an answer?

The king shows his interest by asking, "How long will you be gone?"

*What Nehemiah teaches us is that great leaders have to take risks, they have to venture to go where others would not go. And sometimes they may fail; but they keep trying. Today we need Christians who will not assess every prospect of rebuilding with fear and resignation to status quo; but Christians who will take risks, invest themselves even with the possibility that failure may occur.*

### **The choice to sacrifice**

*Here I mean sacrifice in the sense of doing more than is expected, to be inconvenienced, to experience lifestyle interruptions. Nehemiah's sacrifices arose from three more specific choices:*

*The choice to change*

We all might wish we knew more about Nehemiah's background. It is very unlikely that he had ever even seen the city of Jerusalem. He had what appears to be an important and influential job. He had been entrusted with a job close to the king indicating a great deal of respect and confidence.

Here's what we know about cupbearers. They were close servants of the king. It was their job to supply the king's drink and to prove that it had not been poisoned by drinking some of it in his presence. It may have involved supervision of other servants. This trusted job also gave the servant special access to the king and some influence as a trusted servant. One would assume that Nehemiah lived comfortably, the reward of his faithful service.

But now all that is to change! He is to leave his home and the familiar surroundings to experience uncertainty. We only have to look within ourselves to see how discomfited we are when someone asks us to sacrifice for the Lord and his work. We like our routines, the sense of security we have when life is predictable and usual. But God's work often calls upon us to make uncomfortable and even drastic changes. I remember a brother in AL who one night confessed to the church. I knew that if I was ever to grow I would have to get out of my "comfort zone". Imagine the challenge that Jesus' command gave the disciples: Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Can you hear it? "Give up our jobs? But what about our families? We're not educated properly? What will we do with all this equipment we've invest in? etc."

*There was a time investment*

The journey itself was to take several months.

God's work often calls upon us to be working when other people are playing. It calls upon us to give up time off or substitute good works for recreation. We do that because we appreciate the limited time we have the evil world in which we live.

Cf. Eph. 5: 15-16

*There was a work investment*

Today people live by the philosophy—I want to the greatest return for the least amount of effort.

How much are we willing to invest in other people who are untaught or weak in their commitment? If you can't change them in one phone call or one two minutes conversation, are you ready to give up on them?

Let's put this all into perspective. How much did Jesus Christ invest in you and me?

Knowing this is the answer to all the hard choices we have to make to do God's work!

The choice to seek the welfare of others rather than oneself

*Note Neh. 2:10*

*It would be an interesting discussion I think to ponder why these two men were displeased with Nehemiah's coming.*

They harbored past resentments against God's people who rejected them because of unfaithfulness.

**They saw an end to power they held over others for selfish purposes.**

***But Nehemiah came with a totally different mindset.***

**It was not “Here I come to save the day!”**

**It was, “I want what’s best for God’s people!”**

**Even as Nehemiah writes his own story, it is not for his glory! The final sentence of the book says everything, “Remember me, Oh my God, for good!”**

**It was not power, personal praise, prestige or any other self-serving purpose that brought Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Only this, that he might by doing good please God and receive His reward!**

***What do we seek from our service to God? Whose welfare do we seek? Is it important that we be acknowledge, that our contributions be noticed?***