

I you were here last week you got a good look at the roll out of our vision as a church. If you were not here you can get caught up by watching the message on line or by reading the latest issue of the Concourse. I want to follow up this morning by examining the life of a visionary.

Like so many of his ancestors before him, Nehemiah grew up in captivity. It is the year 445 B.C. ("the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes" 1:1). The northern kingdom of Israel was carted away by the Assyrians in 722 and the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians in 586. The Jews are now living under Persian rule. Nehemiah and his fellow Jews have never lived as free men yet Nehemiah had a passion burning in his heart that no captivity could extinguish; to see the promise of God fulfilled. He knew that no human king could thwart the plan and purpose of God. He knew that earthly kingdoms come and go but the Kingdom of God is forever. Even though his people were involuntary immigrants, Nehemiah knew that one day God would intervene and establish His kingdom on the earth. He was a man with a dream. But how does a dream become a reality? How does a good idea become a lasting work for God? We're going to find out over the next eight weeks. Nehemiah is a guide book on how to launch a great work for God.

For today, let's consider four qualities in Nehemiah that make him a man worth studying:

1. Nehemiah was a man of vision. When we think of the word "visionary" we often think of someone who has the ability to see what is not yet there - like Walt Disney. By the time Disney World opened Disney was dead. At the ribbon cutting ceremony a Disney executive turned to Disney's widow and said, "I wish Walt could have seen this." She said, "Walt DID see this. That's why it's here." That's the kind of person we think of when we hear the word "visionary." By that standard there are not many visionaries among us. Most of us have never thought up some grand, new, successful enterprise and brought it to pass. Nehemiah didn't either.

What Nehemiah did do was to grasp the importance of what mattered most and pursue it for all he was worth. And what is it that matters most? The worship of God. Building walls was not Nehemiah's objective. Worshiping God was. The fact that the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins would have been of little concern to Nehemiah except that those walls protected the city and the city protected the people of God and the people protected the temple and the temple was the center for the worship of the One True God. When the worship of God is lost then so is civilization. The mission of God will be ignored. One writer observes, "When Nehemiah gazed at the broken walls of Jerusalem, it wasn't the physical devastation alone that broke his heart. The stony rubble signified that God's people were not being protected and released to carry out God's mission in the world." (Mancini, p. 41). We are the light of the world. When the light goes out the darkness prevails. Those who bear the light of Christ bring hope and healing to the world.

Visionaries never lose sight of the big picture. If you would have interviewed four different workers in Jerusalem and asked, "What are you doing?" you would have heard:

1. "We're picking up rocks."
2. "We're building a big wall," suggests a little more understanding.
3. "We're protecting the city and our temple," is almost right.
4. "We're securing the worship of God for future generations," is how a visionary sees it.

Here's how that might play out in the church today if you ask four people, "Why are you here?":

1. I'm going to church.
2. I'm going to church to worship God and pray that someone gets saved.
3. I want to help, "lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ."
4. I want to play my part in ***transferring the Gospel from person to person and generation to generation through community transformation and new church development.***

We have a divine calling, a holy responsibility, to be stewards of the knowledge of God. We aren't called to simply sit here on Sunday mornings singing worn-out feel-good songs and telling heart-warming tales about the good old days so that we will have just enough courage to go back out into this big bad world and survive for another week. We are called to spread the love of Christ to every person, neighborhood, city and country in the world. That is why we are launching Fellowship White Rock next week...

2. Nehemiah was a man of faith. He was faith-full, full of faith. He didn't just believe "in God" he believed God. Nehemiah did what he did based on what He knew to be true of God. This knowledge propelled him to work as an act of worship to the God He loved and served.

Nehemiah's faith is revealed through his prayers. He prays often as we shall see but let's look at his prayer in 1:7-11. His prayer reveals that he knew the word of God. He knew the grand narrative. He knew what God was up to in the world. And he possessed the full assurance that God's will would be accomplished. He knows God is at work in history using what is evil to accomplish what is good. Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Artaxerxes, all powerful kings used by God to serve His purpose concerning the well-being of His people. God uses unbelievers to serve the greater good of His people. The will of God will not be thwarted by an unbelieving ruler no matter how powerful or how godless. When you fear the future, remember that and have faith.

3. Nehemiah was a man of influence. Influence is the irreducible minimum of leadership. Leaders are men and women who influence others toward a noble goal. Influential people are in great demand. Nehemiah's influence led to his position as "cupbearer to the king." 1:11. He worked for Artaxerxes, the king of the Persian Empire. The cupbearer to the king was not just a servant who brought the king his meals. The cupbearer was a highly trusted and intimate counselor. In captivity Nehemiah distinguished himself and God elevated him to a position of great influence within the empire.

You never know where God is going to place you or when God is going to use you. I have a friend who was a youth pastor in Baton Rouge. He had a young man from an Indian family come to faith in his youth group. He began discipling this very bright teenager. I am glad he did since that young man, Bobby Jindal, is now the governor of Louisiana! You never know where God is going to place you and how God is going to use you but you can be sure of this; God will see to it that you will leave here today and be in a strategic position to influence someone for Christ.

4. Nehemiah was a reviver. The book of Nehemiah is the diary of a reviver. There are two kinds of responses to the darkness and despair which is the experience of so many people in our world today: you can be a survivor or a reviver. Survivors hunker down. They live in a constant

state of fear believing that our best days are behind us. A survivor does the best he or she can “under the circumstances.” I know I’m in survival mode when...

I spend more time complaining about the government than I do praying for our elected officials. I spend more time reminiscing about the way things used to be than dreaming about the way things could be.

I assume someone will do something about the mess we’re in rather than doing something myself.

I spend more money consuming the stuff of this world than I do planting the seed of the Gospel for a future harvest.

Revivers don’t live “under the circumstances,” they rise above them by faith believing in a God who is sovereign over all circumstances. Revivers believe that what was surrendered can be redeemed; what was broken can be repaired; what was lost can be regained; what is old can be renewed; and what is dead can be reborn. Revivers are not people who have mastered the art of positive thinking they are men and women who have become convinced that whatever God promises He is fully able to perform. Like old man Abraham, they are not perfect but, “with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised He was able to perform.” Ro. 4:20-21. Revivers are people who keep planting seeds in every kind of season believing God for a harvest. Revivers attempt great things for a great God.

God places before us a choice: We may survive if we don’t take risks, play it safe, just go through life suckin’ air and eatin’ groceries for as long as we can. Live like that and some day they will have a nice service in your honor and a guy like me will stand up and tell everyone how long you were able to survive as well as the names of those who were able to survive you.

OR...we can be revivers. Go for it, take some risks, invest your life in the things that matter most and when the end comes, you will leave this earth knowing that you have left something valuable behind – a legacy of souls that can follow your footprints all the way to heaven.

If you want to be a reviver let’s get started. There are a couple of things I want to invite you to do. During the offering sign up for a Community Group where we will be discussing this book each time we gather using the sermon-aligned curriculum which will be provided in the worship guide. Secondly, we are going to take communion together. As we do I want you to remember that Nehemiah prefigured the ultimate visionary, Jesus Christ. Jesus offered a vision for the future that has fueled the efforts of faithful saints down through the centuries. He modeled the way for us giving His life to establish a work that will last into eternity.