

Thought for the Week 13th September 2020

Nehemiah 2: 11-20

When the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem and they attacked the city, they completely destroyed the walls and the Temple. The children of Israel were forced into exile. Those remaining in the city were suffering as a result of hunger and oppression by enemies around. Jerusalem was no longer safe as her wall had been destroyed. The walls once served as a source of refuge, security, protection and stability. But now they lay in ruins. There was nothing left in the once beautiful glorious city except broken dreams, long lost memories and shattered hopes. Jerusalem was a shadow of its former glory! That is, until Nehemiah showed up on the scene. He was not an expert builder, but God used him to restore the glory of the city because he had a willing heart. The reports on the condition of Jerusalem and its Temple broke his heart, so he inquired and was granted permission by King Artaxerxes to go back and start rebuilding. After making a thorough survey of the walls of the city at night, he rallied a team, and went to work. Despite various oppositions, Nehemiah and his team rebuilt the walls.

Just like in the days of Ezra, Zerubbabel, Haggai and Nehemiah, we're in the midst of a worldwide crisis. Many parts of the world are in lock-down! We've even seen some tightening of the relaxations herein BT29! The slump in the economy has affected everyone. People have had to work from home. Students have not able to attend school. Many city centres are abandoned as people stay indoors, either by choice or by government directive. Churches, offices, shops, theaters, restaurants and bars have had to close. Maybe you've been without a job or a source of income for months. Or perhaps the doctor's report isn't what you had hoped for - if, that is you've even managed to see a doctor!. The socio-economic effects of this pandemic are likely to be severe.

In many ways it must have felt like that for the people of Israel back in the days of Nehemiah. They had quite literally lost everything. Yet this story shows us that there is hope. Even the darkest night comes to an end. Or as David puts it in Psalm 30:5, " Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime. Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." Psalm 30:5.

The Old Testament character Job was living a very successful life. Then suddenly, it was all over. In one day he lost everything! Job is left bankrupt, homeless, and afflicted. But his story does not end there. The fortunes of Job were restored. The story ends in chapter 42 where it says: *And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.*" [Job 42:10.]

There's a comeback after a setback! Even if you're swept off your feet by the storms of life, you can come over the waters again. Listen to Job's words "For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. 8 Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, 9 Yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant." Job 14:7-9.

The hope of restoration of a tree is not in its leaves but in its root. The future may be uncertain, but we must remember that whatever happens, God will never abandon us.

Yes, there are troubles in this world. And Christians will be affected just like everyone else. No one including the righteous is immune from trouble. This should not be a surprise. Even a life of faith can go horribly wrong. But sometimes we allow the disappointments of the past to paralyze and stop us from taking fresh opportunities. We allow the feelings of failures, guilt, rejection, depression, doubt, bereavement, discouragement, disillusionment, defeat, despondency, despair, betrayal, setbacks and self pity, to overwhelm us to the point that it becomes difficult to move on.

It would be possible to feel like that after the relaxing of the coronavirus restrictions and now things seem to be slipping back again. When the circumstances of life come to push us down, we must shake it off. Even in the midst of all that is happening God is calling us to get up, to awaken, and to move upward!

I believe God is calling us to follow the example of Nehemiah who prayed to God in the midst of a tragic situation and then rose to the challenge God set him. He focused on the task, then he assessed what needed to be done. He was realistic that it wasn't going to be easy, so he organised the people to work together. When trouble and opposition came he faced it head on. Notice what he says to his enemies in verse 20: Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build."

We need to say the same thing as we have rebuilding to do after 6 months of shut-down in our churches. As always in anything we do to build up God's kingdom there will be opposition.

And finally if you read on in the book of Nehemiah in chapter 3 you will see the names of the people and what they did in the rebuilding process. Everyone fulfilled their own function - they all did their bit, might be another way of putting it. The principle at work here was not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice. I can't do what you can do. You can't do what I can do. But as you will notice here that everyone had a job. There was a principle that everybody was involved.

But guess what, not everybody that was there worked. Look at chapter 3:5 - "Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord." There are always some who just sit back and you say, "well, if they want to do it, just let them do it."

Written in this book it says that there were certain people, when there was a job to do, they didn't do it. I pray that will not be written of anyone. These are days of new opportunity to rebuild the church which we must not miss

Some little boys were sitting around being really quiet and that's unusual for some little boys. Then a man asked them what they were doing? One of them said, "we're playing war. The man said "Are you? Well you're awfully quite for playing war. The boy replied, "But, sir, we're all the generals."

We need generals, but we also need some soldiers and workers in the great task God has given us in these days of rebuilding.