

COME, LET US REBUILD THE WALL

Nehemiah 1:1-2:20

Key Verse: 2:17

“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” ”

In His redemptive History, God had raised leaders to carry out His work salvation. When we see Israel’s history from the bird’s-eye-view, the time of Nehemiah was the time of despair. In such time God had raised Nehemiah as a Leader to display the glory of God by rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and by restoring his people to be God’s people. The book of Nehemiah delivers the message of the Hope of God that the promise of God will be fully realized - Israel will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation just as God promised to Abraham.

The Lecture 1 covers Ch1~Ch2. It is about How Nehemiah come back to Jerusalem and prepare for the rebuilding the wall. In this passage, we can learn His broken heart, His prayer and faith based on God’s promise, and His vision to rebuild the wall. Especially, we want to learn His Leadership. He was the one who understand the important of the wall of Jerusalem; He was the one who hold the promise of God; he was the one who inspired and empowered the hopeless people to start the work - “Come, Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” In this sinful and adulterous generation, God truly needs Spiritual Leaders like Nehemiah who can rebuild the Spiritual Wall and restore his people to be a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation.

First, Nehemiah prayed before the God of Heaven (1-11)

Look at 1:1-3. “The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa.” To understand the circumstances, we need to brush up a bit of Israel’s history.

The time of King David and Solomon was the golden age in Israel’s history. Toward the end of Solomon’s life, he fell into idol worship because of his gentile wives. God judged Solomon and the nation by dividing the kingdom in two; Northern kingdom called Israel and Southern kingdom called Judah. (1Kings11:11-12) Out of his mercy, God had sent his prophets but they killed the prophets and despised his words until God’s wrath came upon them. The Northern kingdom Israel was destroyed by Assyrians in 722 B.C. The Southern Judah was invaded by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. It was the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. At that time, Daniel and his three friends were taken as one of the exile. Though Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiakim(605BC–2Chr 36:4) and then Zedekiah (597BC-2Chr36:9-13) as King, but each rebelled against Babylon. Finally in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed Jerusalem; burned the Temple, tore down the wall, and set fire to all the buildings. He took all the temple articles and the royal treasures to Babylon together with the remnant of Israel. (Jre52:28-30) So since then the land was desolated for 70 years as God had prophesied through prophet Jeremiah (Jer25:8-12)

When the 70 years was fulfilled, God punished Babylon through Cyrus King of Persia in 539 BC. It was the end of 70 years captivity and the beginning of the book of Ezra. God moved the heart of Cyrus to make the decree to allow Israelites to go back to Jerusalem to build the temple of the Lord. The first group of the exiles around 50,000 returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. They completed the temple rebuilding and dedicated it to the Lord with joyful celebration. This is described in Ezra chapters 1-6. Under King Artaxerxes, the second group of the exiles around 5,000 returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra in 458 B.C. And then, here is the year 445 B.C -13 years later, where the beginning of Nehemiah takes place.

It was the month of Kislev which is in our calendar November. At that time, Nehemiah was in the citadel of Susa, the capital city of the Persian. Who was Nehemiah? He was the son of Hakaliah. He was not a prince like Zerubbabel, nor a priest like Ezra. He was just one of the exile. At the end of Ch1, it tells that he was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, the most powerful man in the world. Though “Cupbearer” sounds silly, it was important position where the king’s life was in its hand. His basic duty was to taste the wine before the king drank to check if it was poisoned. Since the king relied upon him to keep himself safe, it was very high station, an influential political position. Though he was a foreign slave, Nehemiah might live luxurious and comfortable life in the palace, as cupbearer.

Then, what happen to him? Look at verses 2-3. “Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” Though Nehemiah was born and grew up here in Persia and he had never been Jerusalem which was a thousand miles away, his heart was in Jerusalem, the city he always long to go like home. To the Jews, Jerusalem has been the center of their lives for centuries; where there was the temple; where men should come before God at least 3 times a year. (Dt16:16) Since Ezra returned to Jerusalem 13 years before, he really want to know what is happening in Jerusalem. But, he heard the heartbreaking news. “The people are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

What was Nehemiah’s immediate response? Look at verse 4. “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” He had to sit down and wept because he could not take it. It was not the news of the death of his loved one, but the wall. Who care about the broken wall a thousand miles way? Surprisingly though, he was personally, and deeply affected so that he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. Why was his heart broken this much?

Since he loved God and his people, he took what happened a thousand miles away as his own matter. The city of Jerusalem was the holy city where all the people of the world could see God’s glory; where his people should live for the glory of God. However, the reality was the opposite. Since the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates had been burned with fire, the city became vulnerable and disgraced. The enemies and thieves had freely come in and out as if it were their own home. Some of them mingled with the holy people and led them to idol worship and sexual immorality. As a result, the holy had lost their identity and mission and

became godless. The glory of God was taken away. Also even the Temple was unprotected and humiliated.

Although Nehemiah was a layman, he could not ignore the suffering people in Jerusalem. He took the broken wall as his own responsibility. He was truly compelled to do something practically. This is just like Jesus' compassionated heart for the crowd who were like sheep without a shepherd. He wept in anguish, mourned, fasted and prayed before God not for days, but for 4 months from the month of Kislev(November) to the day he went before the king at the month of Nissan (March). In the time of despair, God needs a shepherd like him who had compassion and even willing to sacrifice himself for the suffering. Then, God put his wonderful vision for Israel and for Jerusalem in his heart (Ne 2:12), and raised him as a Leader.

The people in Jerusalem were in great trouble and in disgrace for the broken wall problem. The broken walls are very much like their undefended hearts without the word of truth. Since the wall was broken down, any enemy such as Humanism, relativism, materialism, individualism, gender neutralism, evolutionism freely come into their hearts and destroys the image of God. Especially humanism comes into their hearts and lead them to first seek not God, but themselves; honor human right or privacy rather than God; seek family centered like rather than mission centered life; seek humanity rather than Holiness of God. Eventually humanism takes away their identity and mission. Then, they become emotional baggers; petty desire seekers; eventually enemies of God.

When there is no wall, the word of God in our hearts, we are in danger to be just like people of the world. In fact, the world forces us to put down the wall saying "You should not be exclusive. You should accept everyone and all religions." If there is no wall, we cannot protect our identify; we cannot defend what we believe. We should protect our faith; our mission; our identity as the kingdom of priest and holy nation. To protect my family; my children, we need the wall, the wall of the words of truth.

In our ministry, we are always under the attack by Humanism. UBF has absolute God's calling. It is not just for fellowship, but it is to raise up disciples of all nations. It is "Disciple-Making" Ministry. I am not sure since when we are accused by teaching "Self Denial," "Repentance," "Cross," "obedience," and "Spiritual Training." Jesus clearly said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me." (Mt10:26) "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."(Mt28:18-19) Under the influence of Humanism, we come to afraid to teach the truth of God. We truly need to rebuild the wall, the word of God. Thank God for Spiritual legacy "Go, Back to the Bible." Let go, back to the Bible. It does not mean to just read, but accept and obey it as the absolute the words of God. Let us rebuild the wall of the Word of Truth. Let us protect our ministry, protect our children, and protect this generation.

In reality, what could one man do for the broken wall? It seems like there is nothing he could do. Yet, he did not despair, but prayed. In his prayer, he depended on God. Indeed, prayer is the first step of overcoming the problems and experiencing God's power. How did he pray? Let us learn Nehemiah's prayer which led him to the victorious life of mission.

Firstly, he acknowledged God, who is great and awesome, Look at verse 5. Then I said: “Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,” He acknowledged that Only God could help him in this impossible situation for God is great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love. This shows his humility and complete dependence on God.

Secondly, he confessed the sins of Israel including himself. Look at verses 6-7. He knew that the root cause of the ruined city of Jerusalem was Israel’s sins before God. He did not blame others, nor God for what had happened. Admitting and Repenting of his sins, he acknowledged God’s faithfulness and trustworthy.

Thirdly, He claimed God’s promises in his prayer. Though he knew he is not worthy to ask, he did so based on God’s covenant of love. Look at verses 8-9. “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.” Nehemiah reminded God of his gracious promise. Based on his promised, he acknowledged that Israel now scattered among the nations for they rebelled against God. It was the consequence of their sins. Then, also he claimed God’s promise “God may bring his people back to Home no matter how far they had been scattered if they turned back to him and obey his command. He calls on God to act as he promised he would. Based on the promise, he decided to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and to restore his people to be God’s people by obeying the law of God beginning with himself. Then, he was sure that God who made the covenant of love; who was faithful will bring all his people back to Jerusalem. That is why Nehemiah asks to be successful in bringing his request before King Artaxerxes. In God’s promise, he found God’s vision to restore Israel to be a kingdom of priests. In God’s promise and his faithfulness, he came to have faith that God will make his people a blessing for all nations as he promised to Abraham.

Second. Let us rebuild the wall (2:1-20)

Nehemiah had wrestled with God in his prayer for four month since he heard the news. In his prayer, he was waiting for God’s time. Finally God’s time came to Nehemiah when he took the wine and gave it to the king in the month of Nissan. He walked into the king’s presence with his broken heart obvious on his face. The king noticed this immediately and asked him. Look at 2:2. “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” Nehemiah was very much afraid. That was really honest confession for he had seen many executed for saying something wrong in front of the king. Though this was a moment of danger, it was also a great opportunity given from God. Nehemiah answered in verse 3-4a, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “What is it you want?” Overcoming the fear, he grasped the opportunity and took action. He could do so for he had prayed for this moment. Otherwise, he might just lose the opportunity out of fear or hesitation. When the king asked, “What is it you want?” Nehemiah knew that it was God who just opened the door. Then what did he do? “Then, I prayed to God of heaven.” He was truly a man of prayer, depending on God every moment.

What did he request to the King? Look at verse 5-8. He made 3 requests right away. The first one was to send him to rebuild the city. According to verse 12 “I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem,” this mission was given from God and he wholeheartedly received it through his 4 months prayer struggle. To do this, he also asked for the leave of absence for 12 years. Secondly, the letters for safe conduct to the governments of Trans-Euphrates. Thirdly, A letter to Asaph to get timber to make beams. Wow! What a request! He was a man of prayer and man of faith. Though he was a slave without any authority, he made the requests to the king the most powerful man by depending on the authority from God. Amazingly the king granted all things he had requested. In addition, the king provided him the army escort to Jerusalem. When he challenged the impossible through his prayer and faith, he experienced God’s grace. Then he testified God’s grace, “Because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.” (8b)

What really strikes me is his precise requests to the King. Acting in faith is not acting in ignorance. He knew exactly how long it would take, what materials he needs, and what else he needs. For 4 month he has been praying and also planning. Prayer and planning go together. It is like faith and action. Some people have really great prayer topics. But when asked “What is your plan?” they just say “I am praying about it” or “ I just trust the Lord.” That means they do not pray nor plan. Prayer is good, but prayer should lead to a plan. Otherwise, when the king asks “What is it you want?” we would not able to make any request. Praying is not passive, but active and productive time of preparation. That is what Nehemiah had done – prayer – prepare – through meditating on the word of God, God’s promise. So, in God’s time and in God’s way we will be ready to move as God leads us.

Look at verse 11. Finally, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem after many days of journey – almost 4 months – 1000 miles. Nehemiah not only came with a full military escort, but also with the full authority of the throne of Persia. What did he first do upon arriving Jerusalem? In Jerusalem he took time to recover from his journey and then began to examine the extent of the problem he faced. He arose at night and with a few trusted companions inspected the wall. Verses 12-16 describe his thorough inspection during the night. He saw for himself what needed to be done. The examination must be thorough and honest if we want to fix problems. We can never rebuild unless we acknowledge our problems and weakness.

After examining the wall, what did he do? Look at verses 17-18, “Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work.”

Since he came with the king’s letter, soldiers, and money, he could simply order the Jews to work with authority. But he didn’t do that. He understood that they had lived in disgrace and despair long years with full of sense of failure and defeat. Worst of all, they did not have the heart to build the wall. They were just like the hopeless paralyzed man for 38 years. How did he motivate them? How did he empower them to get up and start to rebuild the wall?

Nehemiah he reminded them of their identifies as God's people and planted God's vision and hope for the Israelites. "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace." Though currently Jerusalem was nothing but ruined city and it was in disgrace, but that was not what God's purpose for Jerusalem. God's purpose for you and for Jerusalem is very clear to display the glory of God; it is to make you kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Though currently you are powerless and hopeless, still God's promise stands; still God's purpose stands. Not because who you are not, but because what God had promised, you are the kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

"Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." He planted the vision that Jerusalem will be restored and reveal the glory of God. They will not live as a slave, but will live as the kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He appealed to them with his testimony that God had already helped them. He had moved the heart of the king, setting up the possibility of repair. Nehemiah's visionary message inspired the people who were like 38 year paralyzed man. They all came together and replied, "Let us start rebuilding!" Nehemiah's leadership brought the people together to be united; to be one for the great work.

Look at verse 19. When God's people started the rebuilding work, then the enemies mocked and ridiculed them, saying, "What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" Whenever God's work is going on, opposition will always come with force. What a true! When we started GELF to empower the young generation to be spiritual leaders, right away opposition arouse to stop the work of God. Somehow God allows it for it is good for us to have opposition. Opposition makes us dig in and fight through. It makes us strong. See the way Nehemiah handle the oppositions. "I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." (2:20) Nehemiah was not intimidated at all, but spoke the words of Faith. "the God of heaven will give us success!" "We are God's Servants! This great work of God is privilege given to His people only!" The God of heaven will give GLEF success! GLEF each members are God's servant. We have given this great privilege to the Work of God.

Here, Nehemiah's leadership reminds me of Dr. Samuel Lee's Leadership. His Leadership came from his broken heart for young campus students. In 1960's, young Korean students were in confusion and despair. Dr. Samuel invited them and feed them with the Word of God. He tried every possible way to feed them with the words of God. After he moved to Chicago U.S, he truly loved America campus students who were like Samaritan men and women. Studying John 4 again and again, out of broken hearts he plant the words of eternal life. I truly suppressed when tall American shepherds followed him like sheep followed a shepherd.

Second, He planted God's vision and God's hope for a sinner, for one campus, and for nation. He found God's hope for a sinner in the Word of God. For Korean students, He challenged them to overcome bagger mentality, but to live giving-life and to be a shepherd. "You give them something to eat!" Moreover, he declared the vision that Korea may be a missionary sending nation. Then such poor and hopeless students were raised and changed to be A Shepherd and bible teacher and Missionary. For American students, he planted God's vision "America to be a

kingdom of priest and a holy nation.” Students who were like Samaritans were changed into a shepherd and bible teacher with vision to be Kingdom of God.

In 21 Century, though it is very much developed society in many ways. However, there is no one or nothing can present the vision for the next generation. How can we motive or inspire this generation to join the great work of God? It is the Word of God. GLEF has goal and purpose to raise up spiritual leaders like Nehemiah among the next generation. Through GLEF, may God raise up many Nehemiah for this generation. We may rebuild the wall of our heart, our ministry. We may no longer be in disgrace. But We may display the glory of God by rebuilding the wall. “Go back to the Bible.” May God raise up Spiritual Leaders among us through Nehemiah Bible Study!

Let us rebuild the Wall! Let us start rebuilding!