Casting Vision in the Night Nehemiah 2:11-20 1-21-18

 Have you ever seen a place that has been devastated? The aftermath of Katrina, the pile of rubble at the twin towers, a town flattened by tornados, or completely burned by fires. We have to see those places to appreciate what the tv screen shows. Over and over, people who visit sites of tragedy, say things like.

“I thought it was bad, but I really had no idea until I saw it”. In 360 degree panorama, the sounds, the smells, the vastness of ruin. It is a long process for a community that has faced disaster to recover from what they experienced.

Nehemiah was about to enter a community that had experienced devastation

 A Four month journey. 9-10 miles a day, rugged country. Dangerous roads.

Aching legs. The king is far away….. and there it is! His homecoming. For the first time Nehemiah lays eyes on Jerusalem. It is in ruins, just like he heard. Tired.

Like Ezra the priest, who had come to rebuilt the temple, Nehemiah rests 3 days.

As he lays and sleeps, the stress of the journey is over. The restlessness and worry of responsibility are there though. What am I doing here? Who do I think I am?

How is this going to work? The love for God and God’s purposes, isn’t a cake-walk. A passion for the things God cares for took Nehemiah on an exciting, but overwhelming trip. Nehemiah felt alone, far from anything familiar. He was now responsible for something huge…. What did I get myself into?

 I have become more and more amazed at people who get things done.

Small business owners. Figure out how to get started, how to advertise, maintain a storefront, make a profit, employ people, figure out taxes. Friday Karen and I went out on a date to Aubree’s. On dates sometimes we dream a little or think through decisions we need to make. Karen mistakenly started trying to explain how deductions work. My eyes immediately glossed over and I had to ask her to stop. I really appreciate that you understand the taxes….don’t ever die. A touching date night.

 What overwhelms you? What has God called you to do? It could be something as simple as loving your spouse. Or, getting the laundry done, meals prepared, dishes done, helping with homework, answering e-mails, paying bills, and fixing the broken furnace. Forget being a missionary, the calling you have in your family is just as important….and difficult. Whatever our calling. We find ourselves asking: How can I make it through this week? This day? Who am I Lord? I am small and weak. What were you thinking God, when you called me to this? This job, to parenting, to being a disciple of Jesus… Like Nehemiah, it’s a 4 month hike through danger, and then we find ever bigger tasks and callings. Scripture, right for the start reminds us, That life is toil. The tilling of the soil, the constant pulling of new weeds. The strange ways we seek affirmation. The pain of bearing new life, which should be joy. These are signs and reminders, that we are in a fallen world and that we are fallen people. Brokenness follows us, and is in us

 What does Nehemiah do after limping into Jerusalem? Nehemiah finds more than just toil in his calling. Nehemiah finds hope. A deep residing hope. It burns in him, that burning, living hope spreads. Others are caught in Nehemiah’s hope. As he and his group arrive he is stiff lipped about why he is there. After 3 days, he goes with a few trusted companions. They walk the ruined walls. A twisted path, weaving around the city. This wasn’t a prayer walk. Nehemiah wasn’t in tears.

Nehemiah wasn’t fasting. He was examining. Looking. Calculating, listing.

We need to totally redo this part. This section looks a little, better, but the gate will be difficult. Wow, look at that, I can’t even tell what this originally looked like! Nehemiah takes in the breadth and scope of the destruction -- not to be overwhelmed, but to see what God will do. Because Nehemiah doesn’t just pray to God about trouble. He believes that God is actually going to work through him and the people. Nehemiah trusts God. When he trusts in God’s power and God’s will. Nehemiah is able to move forward. We see this in his speech. “I told them about the gracious hand of God on me.” He is saying God’s hand is in this.

God gave me the tears. God gave me the prayers. God gave me the strength to go before a king. God brought me on this long voyage. God sees these broken walls. God wants to restore. We also see how Nehemiah trusts God’s power when there is opposition. When Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem come. They say “What is this you are doing?” This is a phrase, that is meant to challenge Nehemiah. It’s like when you say to someone “What were you thinking?”

You don’t really want to know what they were thinking. You are in effect saying, “I don’t think you were thinking” Sanballat, who has a Persian Name. His name means “the moon God has given life” Sanballat had administrative responsibilities in Samaria under Artaxerxes. As he feels Nehemiah taking his political strength he says “What is this you are doing?” Tobiah-who is religiously compromised. His name means “Yahweh is Good”, but he is not interested in the welfare of God’s people. As Tobiah feels Nehemiah challenging his religious commitment he says “What is this you are doing? There is Sanballat and Tobiah to the north and East of Jerusalem. And then to the south-- Geshem, a man with trade interests, who makes money in the areas of Moab, Edom, and Arabia.

Geshem feels the squeeze that a restored Judah and Jerusalem will have on his materialistic interests. Geshem says “What is this you are doing?” How does Nehemiah respond to these challenges? These three men press him geographically as they surround him, and they also surround him in the political, religious, economic realms. Again, Nehemiah trusts God and God’s power. Verse 20 “The God of Heaven will give us success” In fact he is so sure that God will accomplish his will in Jerusalem; that he invites others to join him. Nehemiah casts vision. He doesn’t want to go at it alone. He says Come join me. Build with me. We see in his language, that even though this is his first time in Jerusalem

; it is now US and We. Nehemiah says “You see the trouble WE are in” He says, “Let US rebuild the Wall”. Nehemiah is joining the people who are in trouble.

He has left the palace of King Artaxerxes and has jumped into the fire. Nehemiah has entered the dark place. And now, even though it is still dark. He is speaking light. He is dreaming light. He is casting vision in the darkness. That is key to casting vision. You start with the problem or the need. You start by looking hard realities in the face. This kind of faithful trust in God is what we are called to also.

We need to see how bad it is. WE need, like the people of Judah to hear

“You see the trouble we are in” That’s how the speech starts. It’s a sober realistic view of our present reality. Seeing the darkness. Writing down the weaknesses in our marriage. Realizing the parts of our character that hurt others. Noticing the things in life that bring fear…apathy….pride. Where do the walls need repairing in my own dark heart? As we enter a time of evaluating our church. It will be good to be honest about weaknesses. It’s ok to say we are failing in areas. We inspect the wall in the dark. But the good news is that -- even in the night we can get excited. We can get excited because of God. Because God is good. God is loving, he is strong, he is able. He can repair our sinful hearts. He can restore our families. He can restore our church. He can lead us to the place he has for us to be a blessing in Marquette County. We don’t just pray and fast and weep. WE get to hear God…Like Nehemiah, welcome us. God says to you this morning, “Come, Let us rebuild!” “You will not be in disgrace any longer”. I need to hear that. We need to hear God welcome us. Because, I know I can’t do anything on my own. And if I can’t do anything to help myself-- then someone else has to do the work in me. And there is no-one else who loves me more. There is no one who loves you more. Than the God who came…came down into the dark night. Jesus said to Peter come follow me…Jesus said to James come follow me….I don’t have a home, You will suffer for my name… But, come follow me. Learn from me, take my yoke. Jesus Came into the dark night. But Jesus, turned the light on. We can see, we can feel, we can live, we can breathe. Do you need to welcome Jesus into a part of your life today? Is there a dark place? A fallen wall? Don’t try to fix it on your own. Don’t trust others to try to fix you. And, Don’t give up on being fixed. Simply fall to your knees before Jesus… welcome Jesus to build .

Prayer

Lord, we are not able to fix ourselves. You are the great physician. You know exactly what we need. You see the sin we need to lay down. You, by the Holy Spirit can come into that place in our dark heart and shed light. You can give us unselfish love. Thank you for inviting us today to knell before you. Lord, be with us through the process of evaluating our church. Help us to see areas where we are weak. Remind us of the hope we have in you. That you will accomplish your purposes in our church. Thank you, you are good. Amen