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Next Sunday, we shall conclude our study of Nehemiah, having started on 2 September, wanting to learn how he prayed, what he prayed for, and what happened when he prayed. We joined this chapter of Nehemiah's life-story when the Spirit of God first burdened him with the emotional needs of the people in Jerusalem, those who were not taken into exile, living with a sense of shame and disgrace, as their city walls lay in ruin and they felt defenceless, extremely vulnerable and weak.

Every stage of Nehemiah's journey in Jerusalem was filled with adventure, and at each stage Nehemiah prayed for wisdom, for advice and counsel, for protection for people working on the wall and from those who were against it. At each stage Nehemiah went to God in prayer.

Finally, against all odds, when the wall around Jerusalem was completed it was time to celebrate. Over the past two Sundays, we read their prayers of celebration¹, first, *"May Your glorious name be praised! May it be exalted above all blessing and praise!"*, and then we read about the priests dedicating the wall², with **gladness**, with **thanksgiving**, and with **singing** according to the worship rules set up by David,³ starting with the reading of God's Word and organising special choirs to sing praises to God.

We are told, God made them (sent His Spirit to help them) rejoice with (even) greater joy; not only the men, but the women and children too! And the noise of their rejoicing went far beyond the newly rebuilt walls of the City.⁴

It is interesting to note, when we decide to follow God's law, when we start honouring God in our lives, He empowers us through His Spirit, to

¹ Nehemiah 9:5 and 11:17

² Numbers 7 (ver 10 in particular)

³ 12:24 (referring to 1 Chronicles 25) and 12:27

⁴ 12:43

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enjoy what we are doing, and that enjoyment becomes infectious and spreads, to bring joy and happiness to others around us.

The final chapter (13) offers lessons for all generations. Having finished what he set out to do, Nehemiah returned to his duties as Cupbearer to the King.⁵ On a return visit, thought to be 10-12 years later, Nehemiah was shocked, dismayed and angry to find corrupt practices had set in.

The old enemy Tobias had cornered a priest and asked that provisions be stored for him in a separate room in the Temple, depriving the Levites and priests, access to food, and oil and wine to perform sacrifices, they all had returned to their homes in the provinces and farmed the land.

Nehemiah was so incensed, he took control and appointed Treasurers to make sure the whole tithe, of grain, wine, and oil came into the Temple coffers for the exclusive use of priests and the Levites as God had ordained, that they might have enough to live on and carry out their duties. He also banished and threatened foreign traders, who knew Jews would not work on the Sabbath, from entering the Temple courtyard on the Sabbath and plying their trade! The Sabbath was "Holy unto the Lord", and Nehemiah was intent on recovering the Sabbath worship of God.

As he brought this chapter of his life to a close, Nehemiah's final words were, *Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided the wood offering at appointed times, and for the first fruits.* It was now up to the people to carry on and look after themselves.

IN this concluding chapter (13), Nehemiah prays four prayers, asking God to **remember**.

⁵ 13:8

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Our first reaction to these four prayers would be to presume either: **a)** Nehemiah has a lesser view of God, that He might have a lapse of memory and therefore implores Him to **remember...**, which does not seem likely given Nehemiah's relationship with God, or **b)** Nehemiah is blowing his own trumpet, asking God to **remember** all the great things he achieved!

In reality it is neither; the phrase **remember me...** represents one of those quirks of culture, translating into words.

Psalm 7 and 17, help us understand this enigma. The Psalmist pleads his righteousness in the context of praise, which means, he is praising God for what has been done and thanking God for enabling him to do it!

In Psalm 17 for example, David is pleading with God to, *Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit* - David has confessed his wrong, his unclean motives, his errors in judgment, and has experienced God's forgiveness; he therefore can declare his lips free of deceit. He can, therefore, plead with God, *Keep me as the apple of your eye*, ending his prayer with the words, *I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness*.

The question is, do we need to **remind** God of what we have done? How we accomplished His work in and through our lives? We most certainly don't, but we need to remind ourselves, who accomplished the work given to us, and its significance in eternity.

The first **Remember** prayer in chapter 13 is about the restoration of the House of God, the Temple, *Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.*⁶

⁶ 13:14

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The second **Remember** prayer is about the restoration of the Holiness of Sabbath (Worship), *Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.*⁷

The third **Remember** prayer is for divine justice specifically against those who defiled the priestly office, *Remember them, my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.*⁸

The final **Remember** prayer we find in the last line of the book, is about the restoration of worship in the Temple, *I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the first-fruits. Remember me with favour, my God.*⁹

As he brings this chapter of his life to a close, not once does Nehemiah pray, ***Remember me for having restored the wall around Jerusalem against greatest of difficulties!***

One of the enduring lessons on prayer we learn from Nehemiah is this: our lives are transient, and it is in this transience that we find significance; some want to leave a legacy of fame, power and wealth, others, especially those who have a committed relationship with the Father who dwells in Heaven, want to ensure their life's legacy is God's glory, not their's.

In Psalm 90, Moses prays, *The days of our years are threescore years and ten (seventy years)—or even, if we are healthy, fourscore years (eighty years), but*

⁷ 13:22

⁸ 13:29

⁹ 13:31

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even our best years bring trouble and sorrow. Suddenly our time is up, and we disappear.¹⁰

On the face of it, this transient life does not to make sense for some people, but for those who have faith in a loving and caring God, for whom everything is purposeful, we can pray like Moses, *When morning comes, let your love satisfy all our needs. Then we can celebrate and be glad for what time we have left. Make us happy for as long as you caused us trouble and sorrow. Do wonderful things for us, your servants, and show your mighty power to our children. Our Lord and our God, treat us with kindness, and let all go well for us. Please let all go well!*¹¹

After considering everything he could about the purpose and meaning of life, King Solomon, the man who asked God for wisdom and lived by it said, *Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God, worship Him and obey his commands, for this is the duty of everyone who ever lives on this earth.*¹²

If we could extract one lesson from the given narrative of Nehemiah's life, it would be this: ***what we do in obedience to God's instructions is not as important as, what we do for the glory of God. What we do for God to be honoured (defending His Law, protecting and practicing worship, taking personal care of those in need), is the most important thing we can do in our lives, and it is for this we will be remembered.***

AMEN.

¹⁰ Numbers 14:26-35

¹¹ Psalm 90:14-17

¹² Ecclesiastes 12:13