

Hope to Disappointment: Maintain Your Faith and Purpose

Nehemiah 4:14-15

Introduction:

What are men and women full of passion and love for God to do when things move them from hope to disappointment?

Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were men full of passion and love for God, doing everything in their power to lead the Israelites into a new era of devotion to their God, but their efforts...did not work.

Ezra chapters 1-6 tell of Zerubbabel and Joshua leading the first wave of exiles back from Babylon and rebuilding the Temple.

Ezra chapters 7-10 detail Ezra's attempt to lead Spiritual revival among the returned exiles which renewed their commitment to the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament—the Law.

Nehemiah chapters 1-7 describe his leadership and organizational ability to rebuild the Jerusalem city wall.

Chapters 8-10 show how Ezra and Nehemiah staged a revival in Jerusalem.

The revival fails, chapters 11-13, and the historical account ends with Nehemiah's anger and disappointment on full display.

From hope to disappointment, these leaders had to maintain their faith and their purpose.

Ezra and Nehemiah are made up of three parallel accounts wherein a Persian King (Cyrus or Artaxerxes) allows an Israelite leader (Zerubbabel, Ezra, or Nehemiah) to return to Jerusalem with assistance, and attempt to restore the Temple, commitment to the Torah, or the city wall.

Each leader had hopes and dreams for their nation, each one did their part to develop faithfulness, and each one led the people closer to God for a while.

By the time we read Nehemiah, we should be asking, "Why do these great beginnings keep concluding with mixed results?"

From hope to disappointment, a Christian should maintain his/her faith and purpose.

I. Remember, God Steps in When We Step Up.

The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and taken many of the Jews captive in 587/6 BC (2 Kings 25:2-12).

Some of the Jews were left in Judah, but they were in distress and reproach.

The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:1-4).

Nehemiah "sat down and wept and mourned for days."

He was deeply concerned for his people.

He was sensitive to what they faced, though he was in Persia, and they were in Judah.

While Nehemiah mourned, he fasted and prayed "before the God of heaven."

Nine prayers of Nehemiah are recorded in this book; some quite short, others long, like this one which displays a deep understanding of God and knowledge of God's Word.

In this prayer of Nehemiah 1:4-11, He prayed to the LORD about Israel's plight, God's promise, and Nehemiah's petition.

He acknowledged the disobedience of God's people and the just penalty they were suffering.

Next, he asked God to keep His promise to restore them if they repented.

Then, he prayed that the LORD would cause the king to grant the request to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

The king witnessed the sadness of Nehemiah and concluded he did not look sad because of sickness but because of sorrow in his heart (2:2).

So, the king sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem with officers of the army and horsemen, with letters to the governors of the regions for safe passage, and a letter to the keeper of the king's forest to provide timber needed for the project (2:7-9).

Nehemiah explained this response of the king when he said at the end of 2:8, "the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me."

According to 2:10 it "was very displeasing to [some] that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel."

When Nehemiah and a few men made known their purpose for being there, they were immediately met with opposition.

The people mocked them and despised them (2:19) saying, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 tell how Nehemiah and his workers were ridiculed, threatened, and discouraged; furthermore, how they faced extortion, compromise, slander, and treachery.

But in the end, when the wall was completed in fifty-two days, all their enemies and surrounding nations saw the completed wall, and "they lost their confidence [were very disheartened (NKJV), were much cast down in their own eyes (KJV), were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem (ESV), or lost their self-confidence (NIV)]; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God," Nehemiah reported (6:16).

When we allow God to work through us, we will see that God steps in when we step up.

No outside influence can stop God's work.

We have seen this firsthand, time and again, during the last 20 months and 9 days.

II. Add Something to What You Are Already Doing.

Nehemiah was thankful for the king's blessings, so he called a meeting with the Jewish leaders and urged them to begin the task of rebuilding the wall.

"[Nehemiah] told them (2:17-18) how the hand of [his] God had been favorable to [him] and also about the king's words which he had spoken to [him]. Then [the Jewish leaders] said, 'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work."

Sanballat, Tobiah, and an Arab named Geshem scoffed at the plans, but Nehemiah knew according to 2:20 that "The God of heaven will give us success."

Nevertheless, success would require the people to carry out the work, so he said, "Therefore, we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

Those who had a mind to work built the wall (4:6), while they prayed to God and set a guard against the opposers (4:9).

The people were placed "in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and...stationed...in families with their swords, spears, and bows" (4:13).

Nehemiah instructed the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses” (v. 14).

Listen now to Nehemiah 4:15-20.

The people were already working to rebuild the wall.

They added protection and defense; with one hand they did the work and with the other, they held a weapon.

When your hope gives in to disappointment, maintain your faith and purpose, and add something to what you are already doing.

Many want to be recipients of the efforts of others, but they do not want to do what is necessary to accomplish the task.

This brings disappointment when things are not done the way the recipient wants them done.

We need to put our hands to the work.

III. Remember, To Work or Not to Work is Contagious.

The people had a mind to work (Nehemiah 4:6), which means they had the spirit of involvement (2:17 and 18).

Interest and enthusiasm are contagious commodities as are their opposites, stagnation and non-involvement.

Leaders can lead, urge, encourage, request, ask, beg, plead, and provide an example but until people gain interest and zeal there is little else leaders can do.

One of the problems the church faces today is the spectator mentality.

Older individuals are quick to point this out in younger generations, but in the church, they seem to be leading by example; more adults choose not to work in the church than there are who do work in the church.

Make no mistake, 100% are willing—10% are willing to work and 90% are willing to let them.

The spirit of involvement, or the mind to work, comes from everyone feeling the **need** to be involved, everyone willing to do his **part** in the work, and everyone realizing the **seriousness** of his task.

When people work together, they grow together.

True revival can be prevented by people who choose not to work.

Which one brings hope, working or not working?

Which one brings disappointment?

IV. Remember, Transformation of the Heart and Disposition are Needed.

Nehemiah 8 tells how Ezra read before the assembly from the Book of the Law.

Verse 3 says, “He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.”

This was done at the request of the people (v. 1).

The people wanted to hear the words of the law and the words brought about transformation.

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated for seven days, and Ezra read “daily, from the first day to the last day” (8:18).

Chapter 9:1 and 2 reveal how the children “of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them...separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.”

Verse 3 brings to light that “they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.”

Transformation of the heart and disposition comes with a movement of repentance and the seeking of forgiveness.

V. Desire to Do Right, Then Do It.

Nehemiah was concerned about the welfare of his brethren, so he wept, fasted, prayed, and worked.

There is no way to overemphasize the power that God can exercise through one man who cares that much and is willing to be personally involved.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41.

Paul ceased not to admonish/warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:31).

Caring for souls is not for the weak, inconsistent, or unaffected.

Prayer must show our earnest care, as Nehemiah expressed to God, “let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which **We** have sinned against You; I and my father’s house have sinned” (1:6).

Then he said, “We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses” (1:7).

Is there a sin we need to confess?

What correction do we intend to make?

Nehemiah desired to do right and sprang into action.

VI. Be Specific with Sin and Correction.

The less specific we are about our sins the less specific we will be about correcting our sins.

Nehemiah prayed, “O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who **delight to revere Your name**, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man [the king].’ Now I was the cupbearer to the king” (v. 11).

The heart’s desire is emphasized in scripture because that is where the desire to do right comes from.

Jesus said, “The things that proceed...from the heart...defile the man,” (Matthew 15:18).

Obedience starts in the heart (Romans 6:17).

“Doing the will of God” is a matter which comes from the heart (Ephesians 6:6).

Thus, God “looks at the heart” when evaluating a person’s character, ability, willingness, and service (1 Samuel 16:7).

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” Jesus said in Matthew 5:8.

The desire of the heart will be one of the things God will consider in His final judgment.

Psalm 94:15 declares, “For judgment will again be righteous, And all the upright in heart will follow it.”

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 11:9, “Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. [In other words, Live life to the hilt. Enjoy your youth.] Yet [the verse continues] know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things;” keep in mind that someday you must account to God for everything you do.

God judges “the feelings and the heart” (Jeremiah 11:20), while the “unrepentant heart” stores “up wrath for [themselves] in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5), wherein God will “disclose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

It is the spoken and written “word of God [that] is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Faithful Christians repent and pray for the sins of which they are aware (Acts 8:22).

Be specific with sin and correction.

VII. Be Accounted For.

Nehemiah chapter 3 is an extensive list of the wall builders.

They were rulers, common men, priests, goldsmiths, people of Jerusalem and families from the surrounding towns and villages, both men and women with their sons and daughters.

All of them came together to work on this great project.

Notice now Nehemiah 3:5.

Tekoa was a city southeast of Bethlehem and home to the prophet Amos.

Whatever their reason or excuse, the nobles of the Tekoites did not support the work.

NKJV says they “did not put their shoulders to the work.”

ESV renders it “their nobles would not stoop to serve.”

KJV states, “their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.”

When the time came for the work to be done, they were absent.

We have a responsibility to be working in the kingdom of the Lord (John 9:4; James 1:25).

The Lord’s church is made of servants and workmen (Matthew 20:1-16, 27-28).

There is a need for more hands and hearts willing to devote themselves to the task.

There will never be too many workers in the kingdom of God, but there are often far fewer than there should be.

Application:

After the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt and dedicated, Nehemiah took a business trip to visit Artaxerxes king of Babylon.

When he came back to Jerusalem he returned to a neglected and defiled Temple (a reversal of Zerubbabel's work), people violating the Sabbath command (a rejection of Ezra's work), and compromised marriages (a rebuff from their renewed commitment under Ezra and Nehemiah).

The Book of Nehemiah teaches us how to maintain our faith and purpose when hope seems gone and disappointment surrounds us.

Take courage in God (2:20).

Pray and work hard (4:4-6).

Pray and be watchful (4:9).

Maintain faith and steadfast courage (4:13 and 14).

Rebuke when necessary and self-sacrifice (5:16 and 17).

Sternly refuse to be distracted or compromise (6:1-14).

Read the Word of God (8:1-8).

Publicly confess sins and correct them (chapters 9-13).

Frank J. Dunn concluded about The Book of Nehemiah, "Work, prayer, reverence for God, humble obedience, and vigilance are essential to success in our service to God and to our salvation and everlasting happiness in Christ."¹

Conclusion:

The Word of God is His power at work in us and the world to bring about change and accomplish His purpose (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 19:7).

We need God's grace, and we need to keep growing in faithfulness and devotion.

Is our heart fully devoted to loving God and our neighbor?

Do our expectations match reality?

Are we compromising the standard of godly living?

Are we handicapping ourselves by our decisions?

It is time to come to Jesus Christ who is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1).

To be saved by Jesus, we must listen to Him (Luke 10:16), believe in Him (John 11:25), repent of sin (Mark 1:15), confess Him (Matthew 10:32), be baptized in Him (Mark 16:16; Acts 19:5), and live faithfully to Him (Galatians 2:20).

To be restored we must repent and pray, asking for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 8:22).

May all who need to be saved or restored come to the front as we stand and sing.

¹ Frank J. Dunn, Know Your Bible: Analysis of Every Book in the Bible, Firm Foundation Publishing House Inc., Damon, TX, 1996, Pg. 168.

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