

The Hand of God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading. We're reading in the Old Testament in the book of Nehemiah. If you don't have a Bible with you, there's church Bibles around the place at the sides, at the back.

Don't be embarrassed. Put your hand up or go and try and grab one. Somebody will find one for you. And I think, I can't remember what the page is, but it's after the book of Ezra and before the book of Job.

So you'll find it eventually if you fiddle around. And we're in chapter 2 of Nehemiah. Paul Brennan was preaching through the previous book, which is the first part of the same story.

It's all the same book in the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and then Nehemiah. Last week we were in chapter 1, and I'm picking up at the beginning then of chapter 2. And this is Nehemiah, who's speaking, who you'll see at the end of chapter 1 tells us he was a cupbearer to the king, a very senior position in the royal house.

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

[1 : 1 1] The king said to me, why is your face sad, seeing that you're not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart. And then I was very much afraid.

I said to the king, let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's graves, lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

Then the king said to me, what are you requesting? So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said to the king, if it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it.

And the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, how long will you be gone, and when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

And I said to the king, if it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province beyond the river, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah. And a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.

[2 : 3 4] And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. Then I came to the governors of the province beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters.

Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the good of the people of Israel.

So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I rose in the night, and I had a few men with me, and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.

There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the valley gate to the dragon spring and to the dung gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

Then I went on to the fountain gate and to the king's pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the valley gate and so returned.

[3 : 49] And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

Then I said to them, you see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned.

Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision. And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

And they said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, what is this thing that you're doing?

Are you rebelling against the king? And then I replied to them, the God of heaven will make us prosper, and we, his servants, will arise and build.

[5 : 02] But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word, and open its message to us this evening.

Well, good evening, please have Nehemiah chapter 2 open in front of you, as we spend a few moments together thinking about this chapter and the implications for us today.

Now, we saw last time in Nehemiah chapter 1 about Nehemiah receiving the news. Nehemiah is there in Susa, the center of the Persian Empire. And he receives news from Jerusalem that the walls are broken down, the gates are burned with fire.

He's deeply moved. We saw that last time. He prays and seeking what the Lord will have him do. And this chapter, we see what happens next. And we ask, what was it that so moved Nehemiah?

What was it that he was seeking to do upon his return to Jerusalem? Why travel all that way, over a thousand miles by foot? Why endure all the opposition that we're about to read about, not just in this chapter, but the chapters that follow?

[6 : 26] What was so important for Nehemiah to do all that, to travel all that way, to put up with other opposition? Well, as we'll see, it was to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

That was his mission. But why? What is the significance of the walls of Jerusalem? Well, remember, Jerusalem was God's place for his people.

Not that there was anything mystical about that particular place. There was nothing particularly special about the stones themselves. But this place, those stones, they were the material reality pointing to a deeper spiritual reality.

Jerusalem pointed beyond itself to an everlasting city, to an eternal heavenly city. And Nehemiah knew that.

He knew the significance of God's place and God's people. And it was Nehemiah's clarity in understanding the true purpose of God and the place of Jerusalem that that had in God's greater purposes, is the fact Nehemiah knew that, that moved him to do what he does.

[7 : 44] The fact Nehemiah knew the significance of Jerusalem moved him to go back and to rebuild. Nehemiah cared for the unseen reality of the kingdom of God, and so he also cared for the seen, present reality of it, Jerusalem.

In the same way that we today, we are building for what is, at the moment, unseen. The church. God's kingdom. We don't see the fullness of the reality yet, do we?

But we do see something. We see the present manifestation of it, the gathered church, small as we are. And we care about that, don't we?

As Nehemiah cared about Jerusalem, we care about the present reality of God's kingdom here now, don't we? We care about the visible church. And so Nehemiah cared for the visible expression of God's promises of a people and a place way back then, which for him was the Jews in Jerusalem.

And he was deeply moved when he heard the news. He was moved to do something. And what we see in this chapter is a truly exciting adventure.

[8 : 58] At the start, Nehemiah's in the court of the king at the center of the empire. By the end, he's galvanized the Jews into action to rebuilding the wall.

A lot happens in this chapter. And what an extraordinary man that he can do that. They can travel all that way and motivate God's people to get up and rebuild the walls.

There's much for us to learn about Nehemiah, about how to lead and strategy and all that kind of thing. But the deeper reality that explains these extraordinary events is, of course, the Lord God himself.

The base note of God's sovereignty rings throughout this whole chapter. Did you notice that little phrase repeated?

The hand of God. It's there in verse 8. For the good hand of my God is upon me. And again, verse 18. Nehemiah testified to the good hand of my God that's been upon me for good.

[10 : 02] And that is the great source of hope for Nehemiah. And for those who first read this account in the decades afterwards. And for us today. They, like us, as we've sung, walk, not by sight, but by faith.

Trusting in the hidden hand of God. What Nehemiah saw with his eyes was deeply discouraging. What we see as we look around, our nation, our city is deeply discouraging.

But even in the midst of trials and hardship and opposition and discouragement, there is this deeper reality. The hand of the Lord is upon his people for good.

That's the base reality of this chapter. It's God's hand. Even in moments of despair, there is hope. Because we belong to the God of hope.

The God who has acted in the past for the salvation of his people. The God in whom we can trust for the future. We share the same God that Nehemiah has. Remember the words from Paul in Romans 15, where he reminds us about why these stories are in the Bible.

[11 : 18] What is the purpose of a chapter like this? Well, Paul says, for whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction.

That through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. That we might have hope. That's why this and other stories are in our Bibles, to give us hope.

And Nehemiah too gives us hope. Hope that God's hand is with us. And that gives us the hope, the perseverance to endure, as Nehemiah did.

But as the world is reminding us of this great truth about God's sovereignty, his hand with his people. This chapter also shows us very clearly the necessity alongside that of human responsibility.

Yes, God is sovereign. But we are also responsible. God's responsibility, God's sovereignty, never undercuts the need for us as his servants to exercise wisdom.

[12 : 25] To exercise our responsibility. Both those things are true at the same time. God's hand is at work. And so we strengthen our hands to be at work.

That's the reality. God's sovereignty ought not to render his servants passive. Quite the contrary. And Nehemiah is an excellent example of confident action in the knowledge that God is sovereign.

So we're going to consider the story and Nehemiah's role. Three things to note. Nehemiah's wise preparation. His winsome persuasion.

None of which can avoid Nehemiah's wicked persecution that he has to endure. And it's a twice repeated pattern in this chapter. First in terms of his encounter with the king, verses 1 to 9.

And then again with the Jews in Jerusalem. That same pattern. There's careful preparation. There's winsome persuasion. Followed by persecution. So we'll take it in two halves.

[13 : 28] We'll look first at Nehemiah before the king. This is verses 1 to 9. And these verses describe Nehemiah's audience with the king. And then what takes place after that.

As we'll see, Nehemiah acts wisely in the situation he finds himself in. But over and above what Nehemiah does is the good hand of the Lord upon him.

Helping him. Bringing things to a good end for Nehemiah. Now remember who it is that Nehemiah stands before. He is before King Artaxerxes.

Now the histories tell us that he was on the less autocratic, less severe, less ruthless end of the spectrum. In terms of the emperors of the era. But still he was a fearsome man.

Massively powerful. A man to be feared. Years before he had ordered the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem to be stopped. He brought it to an end.

[14 : 26] We saw that in Ezra chapter 4. What chances that Artaxerxes suddenly reverses that policy? Why would he?

He feared rebellion in the empire. He wanted to squash down any sense that people were rising up at any corner of his empire. He couldn't risk letting the walls of Jerusalem being rebuilt.

And why would he even countenance for a second a request from a Jewish exile who serves in his court as a cupbearer on a matter of foreign policy? What chance that he listens to Nehemiah?

It would be like someone managing the prime minister's logistics. Weighing in on matters of the Middle East or Ukraine. Might not actually be helpful, but anyway. It's unlikely that's going to go very far.

From the outside, it seems extremely unlikely that Nehemiah will have any success in persuading the king that he's going to be going back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.

[15 : 30] But remember he's prayed, hasn't he? Chapter 1. Nehemiah prayed to the sovereign Lord of the universe. And he's asked that the Lord give him success.

And the Lord does, as we'll see. But we also note, as well as God's sovereignty behind the scenes, we note Nehemiah's actions. And he was wisely prepared.

Nehemiah didn't rush into making this request. Nehemiah's not going to be asked. As we see from the date marker there in verse 1, it's the month of Nisan. Four months have gone by since he first received the news in chapter 1.

Four months. Nehemiah's been patiently praying, persistent in prayer. And he didn't know when the time would come. Nehemiah didn't know that Nisan was the month when he would have his opportunity with the king.

He didn't know that. He hadn't been given that sort of insight. I imagine this is the sort of thing he would have liked to have known. He would have liked to have known which month am I going to have my opportunity before the king.

[16 : 36] It's the sort of thing we like, isn't it? When we're facing a significant moment, the difficult things on our horizon. We want precise guidance from the Lord. We want to know the precise steps that we need to take if we're to do God's will.

But that's not how faith works, is it? The Lord doesn't tell us who to marry or what job to take or what school to send our children to.

But he does give us his word. He does give us the framework through which we are to make such decisions. We're to obey him and then trust him.

Trust him to provide what we need when we need it. And that is what Nehemiah does. When the moment came, he was ready, wasn't he? Nehemiah was prepared.

He was in the court bringing wine to the king. That was his job. He was the cupbearer. And the king notices something about him this time. He notices something about Nehemiah.

[17 : 41] The end of verse 1 makes clear that Nehemiah had not been sad in the presence of the king. Even with all that's been weighing on his mind those past four months, he was careful not to be sad before the king.

That was a big no-no. When you're working before the king, you look cheerful. Even if you're sad, you make sure your face doesn't show it. Imagine if you and I were suddenly working before the king.

I think we would do our best to look a bit chipper. Even with our bosses. Even with our bosses. We tend to look like we're enjoying ourselves. But the king that day notices something about Nehemiah.

Look at verse 2. Why, Nehemiah, is your face sad? Now, this was not done. If you were looking sad before the king, you were out.

But the king inquires after him and asks, how are you doing? The king is perhaps in a good mood, feeling generous towards his servant that day. And this is again perhaps a subtle nod to the hidden hand of the Lord.

[18 : 51] The Lord had disposed this king to be favorable towards Nehemiah that day. Maybe there are two things present that perhaps disposed the king towards that end. He's got wine in his hand and his wife at his side.

He's in a good mood. You hear that detail there in verse 6, don't you, about his queen sat beside him. Maybe she's the one who knows something about Nehemiah. Maybe Artaxerxes was slow on the uptake in terms of emotional intelligence.

None of the men in this room can relate to that because we've got high IQ, you know, intelligence, emotional intelligence. But she sees. She digs him in the ribs. Nehemiah, is he all right?

And Nehemiah, look at his response. He's very much afraid, verse 2. The king's spotted. I'm not well. He thinks, I'm sad.

This is a disaster. I'm fearful. It just wasn't done to be sad before the king. But even in the midst of his fear, he's prepared to speak.

[19 : 53] This is perhaps the moment the Lord has been preparing him for. This might well be the answer to Nehemiah's prayers. There were no neon lights saying, this is the moment, Nehemiah.

He had to discern it. And so he speaks. And this is the moment of real courage, isn't it? In his fear, in his trembling, he speaks anyway. And that's courage. It's not so much the absence of fear, is it?

But faithfulness in spite of fear. That keeps speaking, keep trusting the Lord. That he will give us the words we need in moments like this. Jesus says to his disciples in Mark 13.

Do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say. But say whatever is given you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. That's something of what Nehemiah experiences here at this moment.

Perhaps you've known that yourself. An opportunity to say something about the Lord has come up with friends. Something at work.

[20 : 56] You get an opportunity. Your heart's pounding. Beating away. Starting to sweat a bit. You fear how people might respond to what you will say. But you remember the Lord is with you.

You remember that there's more to this world than what we see. You remember the greatest need in our world. There's not what happens now, but what happens next. There's an eternity. There's heaven. There's hell. You remember those things.

You remember the hope of the gospel. And so you speak. You say something. That's courage, isn't it? When the heart's pounding, you speak anyway.

And that's what Nehemiah does. He's fearful. But he speaks, verse 3. And he speaks with respect. He makes his requests with careful respect.

Let the king live forever. And he doesn't divulge more than he needs to, at least initially. He keeps it quite vague. He says, the city. Doesn't name which one.

[21 : 58] But it says, the city. The place of my father's, where my father's grave lies. It's in ruins. Its gates are destroyed by fire. Nehemiah's pouring out his heart to the king.

And Nehemiah's grief would have been understood by the king. His hometown's in ruins. The gravesite of his family, it's in ruins. The king wants to know more. See, Nehemiah's been wisely persuasive here, hasn't he?

He's thought about this. He's thought about, what will happen if I get an opportunity? What might I say? He's rehearsed this beforehand, you suspect. He's ready.

But even though he's done that, he's totally dependent on the Lord. Look at verse 5, or end of verse 4. He prayed to the God of heaven.

Even in that moment, he's conscious that he needs to depend on the Lord for what he's about to say. And having prayed, he speaks. He makes his request. And his request to the king is a bold one, isn't it?

[23 : 06] He says, let me return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. He's asking the king to reverse his policy on Jerusalem. Not only that, but he's asking to be released from his present duties to go and do that job.

It's a big ask. And amazingly, the king is favorable to considering the request. Perhaps that is due to the aforementioned wine and wife. He's in a good mood that day.

And the king wants to know, how long will you be gone? Verse 6. And again, Nehemiah is prepared. He's thought it through.

He knows what he would need should the king grant his request. Look at verse 7. It just spills out. If it please the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the province beyond the river, that they may let me pass through until I come to Jerusalem.

Not only that, but he also asked that letters be given in order to get the required building materials that he's going to need to rebuild the walls and the gates. Nehemiah has wisely prepared for this conversation.

[24 : 17] He knew what the plan was. Should the opportunity arrive, he was ready to go. He had a plan. I remember Willie preaching on these chapters about 10 years ago almost.

And I made a note in the margin. And I said this, Nehemiah was a man of great and effective strategy precisely because he knew the sovereign God of heaven.

He knew God was sovereign and so he planned. The fact that God is sovereign is the grounds for our strategic planning, careful thoughts.

And Nehemiah demonstrates that for us so vividly, doesn't it? So clearly he was prepared. Four months of thinking and praying. What will I say if the opportunity arises?

He made wise preparation. He was winsome in his persuasion. And all of that arises out of a confidence in the sovereignty of God.

[25 : 25] And we too, confident in the sovereign hand of God, must plan and pray. We must think about the situations that we find ourselves in, that God has placed us in. And not just passively hope for the best, it'll all work out.

No, no, we've got to work, we've got to plan, we've got to think. We need to look at our circumstances through the lens of gospel priorities and make plans so as to be ready to jump into action when needs arise and opportunities present themselves.

And for Nehemiah, he was able, end of verse 8, to testify that the king has granted me what I asked for, for the good hands of my God was upon me.

So yes, Nehemiah planned, prioritized, he thought about it, but the glory goes to God.

Now we get no details about the journey apart from what we see in verse 9 there, that he was sent with a bit of an army, a forceman and so forth. But then we get a but in verse 10.

[26 : 29] Yes, Nehemiah knew the hand of God was upon him. Yes, he planned and prepared, but none of that means that God's servants can avoid wicked persecution. Verse 10 is an indication that from the outset, things will not be easy for Nehemiah, a man who was seeking the welfare of God's people, end of verse 10.

Such a man, a man like that, will always be a target for the enemy. And it is the great enemy that stands behind these two men that we read about here, Sambalat and Tobiah.

There is an unseen enemy, the one who's been raging war against God and his people since chapter 3 of Genesis. The great enemy himself.

And a man like Nehemiah, who cares for the welfare of God's people, will always be a target. Now we're going to bump into these two charlatans in many points through this book.

I'm not going to say too much about them, but just a few things. As we introduce these characters, they appear frequently. Sambalat was governor of Samaria. He seems to have dabbled in the worship of the Lord.

[27 : 43] His daughters were given Jewish names. And one of them married into the family of a high priest. We see that in chapter 13. Listen to what Nehemiah says about him.

It's from chapter 13. And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was son-in-law of Sambalat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me.

Sambalat's son-in-law, I chased him away. That's a flavor of the kind of man that Sambalat was. He didn't want him anywhere near you. And we'll see why Nehemiah does that in chapter 13 in the intervening chapters.

Tobiah, likewise, he's got a Jewish name. He's possibly Sambalat's lackey. Always there lurking around Sambalat. But that was a toxic mix, politics and religion.

That really hardened them to real gospel work. They did not like Nehemiah or what he was doing one little bit. Note their attitudes there, end of verse 10.

[28 : 51] It displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel. Sambalat and Tobiah sought to destroy the welfare of God's people.

How dare Nehemiah come and seek their welfare? They are opposed to any effort to champion the welfare of God's people.

Their attitude was God's people must not thrive. We will stamp down any effort to seek the good of God's people. Any threat to their own power must be crushed.

And we'll see more about what they're like in the coming chapters. But just note, note their existence. Right from the very start. And the existence of such people, the existence of Sambalat and Tobiah, is not confined to this little period of history.

There have always been and will always be enemies to the gospel like this. And many of them will wear religious clothes, like Sambalat, like Tobiah.

[29 : 57] So don't be surprised when such people strike out at you because you care for the welfare of God's people. Do not be surprised if your work, seeking to help people in addiction, is struck by people like this.

Or your work, seeking to protect the unborn child, is struck by people like this. Do not be surprised as you hold out the gospel of life to those in our city that people will attack you. Do not be surprised if you seek the welfare of God's people, enemies will come.

People like Nehemiah will be a target. So there's Nehemiah before the king. Wise preparation, wince and persuasion, persecution.

Same pattern when he gets to Jerusalem, verses 10 to the end. Nehemiah before the people. Same pattern. Now Nehemiah is very clear, isn't he, about what he's there to do.

He's there to rebuild the walls. The question now is how? How's it going to get done? How will he mobilize the people to build the walls?

[31 : 09] Now we see that he's successful. Look at verse 18. End of verse 18. They said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

How has he done that? How has Nehemiah, who's rocked up in Jerusalem, managed to get the people on board, motivated and willing to lift their hands to build the walls? How did he manage it?

Well, again, God's hand was upon him. Nehemiah was wise in his preparation and winsome in his persuasion. Look at how he wisely prepares for the task.

Verse 12. I arose in the night. I and a few men with me. Look on to verse 16. And the officials did not know where I'd gone, what I was doing. I'd not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials and the rest who were to do the work.

Nehemiah went by night. He told no one. He inspected the walls. Why the secrecy? Why the lack of transparency, Nehemiah?

[32 : 15] Well, Nehemiah needs to undertake a proper appraisal of the situation. He needs to see it for himself. He needs to see the walls firsthand and without what I'm sure would have been really helpful input from the locals.

He does not need 50 people around him helping him to assess the situation and coming with ideas. That is not what he needs. No, he's got to see it for himself, hasn't he?

He's got to make his own assessment before he goes public with a plan. And that's very often necessary in church life. There will be times when the leadership will need to take time to assess, to observe, to think, to consider before going public with plans.

whether those be plans for building projects or ministry plans or wherever it is. And that can be frustrating, can't it? If you're not in on the know, you want to know.

I know I do. I want to be in on the know on everything. But there is a time for quiet planning and assessments. The time for public sharing comes, of course, but not before the plan has been carefully formulated.

[33 : 29] Nehemiah also knows the reality of opposition. Sambalat, Tobiah, he does not want word getting out before it's time about what he's planning.

He's perhaps wary of leaks, of confidentiality being breached. Nehemiah wasn't born yesterday. He's wise. He knows people. He's realistic.

He knows the reality of opposition. And so having carefully observed the situation, having gone around at night looking, checking out the walls, he devised a plan.

And now, he's got to motivate and mobilize the people. And that is no easy task. But he achieves it.

Notice how Nehemiah goes about his wince and persuasion. It's from verse 17. He speaks to the people. And there's a few things we need to know. He's clear about the reality.

[34 : 28] He's clear about God's abundant grace. And he's clear about what they must now do. He puts before them a very clear objective. We must rebuild the walls so that we no longer suffer derision.

There was absolutely no doubt in his mind about what needed to be done. His conviction arose from his months of prayerful preparation, his careful analysis of the situation in Jerusalem. He knew the place that Jerusalem had in God's plans and God's purposes.

He cared deeply about God's place and God's people. And so the next step was clear. The walls must be rebuilt. But it's one thing for the leader to be clear.

How does a leader motivate a whole people? How does a leader, clear on the gospel, clear on what he's done, move a church to rise up and build? Well, it's not by simply telling them to do it.

That isn't what Nehemiah does. Rather, he is clear about the reality of God's judgments. But he's also equally clear on the reality of God's grace and of God's help and of God's sovereign hand.

[35 : 39] And grasping those two things will motivate a church. It will move God's people to sacrificially serve the purposes of Christ's kingdom.

So the first thing is the reality of God's judgments. He addresses the broken walls, verse 17. You see the trouble we're in. He helps the people see the reality of the situation.

Perhaps they have become so used to walking over the rubble. They no longer saw the problem. They didn't even notice the walls were down. But Nehemiah says to them, look again.

Look again. See what's happened to God's place. Do you see that we're sitting under the judgment of God? This is meant to be the place where he dwells.

This is his city. This place is meant to be a light to the nations, pointing to the glory of God. And now it's a mess. Do you see it? Sometimes we need to be shaken again by the reality of our situation.

[36 : 51] As a nation, we have rapidly abandoned the gospel. Our city, which once had the motto, let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of your word and the praising of your name, is not flourishing.

Largely because it does not value the preaching of God's word or the praising of his name. Now we are greatly encouraged, aren't we, gathering here tonight?

What a joy to meet together. Church is the highlight of the week. But remember what is outside our walls. Remember our city.

The tens of thousands who don't yet know Jesus. We need to see the reality. To see the needs. To see the trouble our city is in.

We've got a job to do. We have a gospel to proclaim. There are friends and family and contacts that we need to speak to, to bring them along, to hear the message. And what Nehemiah is doing here is reminding God's people of the reality.

[38 : 00] Do you see reality? Do we see reality? The reality of God's judgment on our city. The great need. There is nothing more important, is there, than the gospel being held out to those who are dead in sin.

And what Nehemiah is doing here is exactly what we were doing together on Wednesday evening. As we look back, as we look forward on Wednesday nights, we were a reminder, weren't we, of the great need across our nation for the gospel.

We need that reminder, don't we? And so Nehemiah pressed home here, verse 17, you see the trouble we're in. How Jerusalem lies and ruins with its gates burned.

Nehemiah presses home the reality again. But he also proclaims God's wonderful grace. Look at verse 18.

And I told them of the hand of my God that have been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. As Nehemiah sets out the problem, the walls are broken.

[39 : 14] It seems too big. This is an impossible task. But Nehemiah points the people to the God of all grace, the one who is sovereign, even over the kings of the world, even over Artaxerxes.

Proverbs 22, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he wills. Nehemiah's reminding them of that reality. Look at what the Lord has done so far this now.

Look at what he's done. Be encouraged. Can you believe that Artaxerxes gave me permission to come and do this? Can you believe it? Can you believe he sent me with these letters to gain passage to get all this material to build the walls?

Can you believe it? Well, you had better because God is sovereign. He's the Lord. You can trust him. And as they looked at the walls, they saw an impossible task.

But Nehemiah says, the Lord is with us. His hand is upon us. And as we consider our task, as we thought about our city, let alone our nation, think about our city, the great need.

[40 : 27] It seems impossible. But God is not done with our city. It wasn't encouraging last Sunday to see folk being baptized, professing faith in the Lord Jesus. People once dead in sin now alive in Christ.

It wasn't encouraging on Wednesday evening to be a reminder of God's abundant provision. To see all that's happened in the recent years for the cause of the gospel in this nation and the whole realm of spheres. Yes, the task is huge if we're to reach Scotland.

But God has been so good, hasn't he? God can do the impossible. We can trust him as we go about that task of gospel proclamation, of telling men and women the good news of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, a message of salvation and eternity.

It was clarity on the reality and clarity on God's grace and help in the task that motivated God's people then to rise up. Look at their response as Nehemiah speaks these words, they say, let us rise up and build.

Let's go to it. Our hands are strengthened. Let's get to the task. That is what motivated those people. A reminder of the reality but also a reminder of God's great grace.

[41 : 50] His hand is with us for good. And when the opposition arises, it surely will, as it did here, whenever God's people are rising to build God's kingdom, there will always be opposition.

But in the face of that, God's people can persevere. Note Nehemiah's response to the jeering from Sambalat and Company, verse 20. The God of heaven will make us prosper and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no right or claim in Jerusalem.

The knowledge that God is with us will give us boldness and courage to stand in the face of bullies like that. You've no rights. You've got no claim.

The God of heaven will make us prosper. Jesus is building his church. The gates of hell themselves will not prevail against us. There are many adversaries, but the gospel opportunities abound.

God's gospel kingdom is growing. There's nothing that can stop it. The God of heaven will make us prosper. His hand is with us as we work wisely for his glory.

[43 : 08] That's the message of Nehemiah 2. Let me pray and then we'll sing as we close our time together. Father, we are often so weak and feeble.

We trust our eyes and what we can see. But Lord, help us to trust your word more so. To be a people that live by faith, not by sight.

And so let us hear the encouragement of your word as we are called to go and tell of the great gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in our city and beyond. Give us courage in that task and help us to remember that you are with us.

your hand strengthens us and our hope is in nothing else but you. So please send us from this place encouraged because you're our God and your hand is with us.

Help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.