

NEHEMIAH 2

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE

When Nehemiah had prayed for the relief of his countrymen – perhaps even using David’s words in Psalm 51: “Build thou the walls of Jerusalem” – he did not sit still and say, “Let God now do his own work, for I have no more to do.” Rather, he determined to see what could be done. Nearly four months passed before he asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem – perhaps because it was not until then that his month of service as the royal cupbearer came around. Thankfully, we are not limited to particular moments for our prayers to the King of kings; we have liberty of access to Him, at the throne of grace, at all times.

Up to this point, Nehemiah had never been sad in the king’s presence; he had conformed to the rules of the court, which allowed no sorrows. But there is a time for all things (Ecc. 3:4); and because of the miseries of Jerusalem, Nehemiah saw a just reason for being sad. King Artaxerxes took notice of Nehemiah’s sorrow, and he made a kind enquiry into the cause of it. With all the meekness and respect due to his kingly master, Nehemiah replied, “Let the king live for ever.” Then he modestly asked, “Why should not my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste?” All the grievances of the Church (but especially its desolations) are and ought to be a matter of grief and sadness to all those who have a concern for God’s honor, and who are living members of Christ’s Body.

The king gave Nehemiah permission to tell his mind; and thereupon, Nehemiah prayed in his heart to God. He had been afraid to speak, but this gave him boldness! And surely the invitation which Christ has given us to pray will enable us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Nehemiah immediately prayed to the God of heaven that he would give him wisdom to ask properly, and also to incline the king’s heart to grant him his request. Those who wish to find favor with kings must first secure the favor of the King of kings. This was not a formal, solemn prayer (for Nehemiah had no opportunity for that at this time); but he secretly lifted up his heart to God, Who understands the language of the heart. Wherever we are, and whatever we are doing – we have a way open heaven-ward! O what blessed privileges are ours! Having a throne of grace to fly to, a Propitiation always set forth, and an advocate to always plead on our behalf – how can we fail to be successful in all our supplications, when we ask in the name of Jesus, according to the mind and will of God?

When he had encouragement to speak, Nehemiah presented his petition very modestly, and with submission to the king’s wisdom – but very specifically.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Nehemiah receives permission to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls – verses 1-8*
- ❖ *His midnight ride around the walls of the city – verses 9-16*
- ❖ *He convinces his people to lend a hand in his great undertaking – verses 17-18*
- ❖ *His answer to the enemies who laughed at him – verses 19-20*

He asked for a commission to go as governor to Judah, to build the wall of Jerusalem, and to stay there for a specified time. He also asked for a convoy; as well as for an order upon the governors to not only permit him to pass through their respective provinces, but also to supply him with what he had need of. He requested another order for the keeper of the forest of Lebanon to give him timber for the work that he intended to do. The king showed great favor to Nehemiah, and let him have his specific requests. Here was an immediate answer to his prayer, for the people of God never seek Him in vain!



When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, the Jews and their friends took little notice of him. He was at Jerusalem for three days; and although the king sent horsemen to attend him, it does not appear that any of the great men of the city came to congratulate him upon his arrival. But although they took little notice of him, he took great notice of them and their condition. He arose in the middle of the night and viewed the ruins of the walls by moon-light, so that he might see what was to be done and what method it was to be done in.

After Nehemiah disclosed his intentions to the rulers and people, they cheerfully concurred with him. When he had viewed and considered the matter, he told the rulers and people what the Lord had put into his heart – namely, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. He produced the king’s commission and told them how readily it was granted, and how eager the king was to favor his request – in which he saw the hand of his God working for good. This encouraged both him and them to proceed in an undertaking which Jehovah had so remarkably smiled upon. “Let us rise up and build!” they said.

But in the midst of all this, we read of those who wished ill to the Jews. Sanballat and Tobiah – the former a Moabite by birth, and the latter an Ammonite – saw someone coming armed with a commission from the king, to do service to the Jews. And they were exceedingly grieved that all their crafty attempts to weaken Israel were about to be baffled and frustrated by a fair, noble, and generous project to strengthen God’s people. When Nehemiah began to act, they resolved to hinder him – but in vain. They attempted to discourage him by representing his undertaking as a silly thing; they laughed at him and his helpers, and despised them as foolish builders who could not finish what they had begun. But Nehemiah and his people remembered that they were the servants of the God of heaven, and that they were acting for Him in what they did; and therefore, they knew that He would sustain them and prosper them, even though the heathen raged! (Ps. 2:1)

Lord, we beseech You to raise up many Godly men to be Nehemiahs – leaders in enterprises which serve for the good of the Church, the furtherance of Christ’s Kingdom, and the blessing of Your people! Amen.