

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**September 27, 2009**

**Nehemiah: A Motivator for the People**

**Nehemiah 2:5, 11-20**

**Key verse: “I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, ‘Let us start building!’” (Nehemiah 2:18)**

For me, one of the great heroes of the Bible is Nehemiah. He’s a hero because he became a difference maker for God. Nehemiah was not content to see great need. He set out to meet the need and make a difference with God’s help.

Nehemiah lived in Persia around 450 B.C., about a hundred years after the Jewish people had been exiled there. Nehemiah served in the Persian government, as the cupbearer to the king of Persia. Nehemiah’s job was to taste wine before it was given to the king, to make sure that the wine had not been poisoned.

That may sound like a pretty lousy job, especially since the way the cupbearer tested the king’s wine for poison was to put his own life at risk by tasting the wine himself! However, the cupbearer was someone the king trusted, and who had a lot of access to the king. It was an important job.

Things were going well for Nehemiah until one day a group that included one of his brothers returned from Judah and brought this sad news about the city of Jerusalem: “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire” (Nehemiah 1:3).

In that day, the lack of a city wall meant that the people of the city were defenseless against their enemies. Even worse, the devastation of the holy city of Jerusalem was a shame and a disgrace to the Jewish

people. Worst of all, it meant that God's work in the world through Israel—God's covenant, God's promise, God's intention of blessing the world through Israel—all was at risk.

Today's text, Nehemiah 2:5, 11-20, tells how Nehemiah responded to this great need. Having gained the Persian king's permission and authority, Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem, assessed the state of the city (2:11-16), then rallied the people to begin the great work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (2:17-20).

Nehemiah's heroism inspires me to want to make a difference for God. And his story provides some important insights about how each of us can become difference makers for God. One of the most significant of those insights is this one....

*It all starts with a burden and a prayer.* When Nehemiah hears the news of Jerusalem's desolation, his heart feels a tremendous burden. The Bible says that when Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem, he "sat down and wept" (Nehemiah 1:4a).

People who make a difference in this world for God usually are people who are willing to let God place a burden in their hearts for the needs of a broken world. That was true of Nehemiah.

Bob Pierce founded World Vision out of a deep burden for the physical and spiritual needs of the world. But before Pierce ever founded World Vision, he traveled to China and, seeing the need there, wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible: "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God."

Are you willing to pray that prayer? Becoming a difference maker for God starts with a burden. And it starts with a prayer....

You see, when Nehemiah heard the news of Jerusalem's desolation, he also "mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4b). Nehemiah didn't *just* pray. He eventually took decisive action. But He did nothing without first praying. Most of Nehemiah chapter 1 is a record of his amazing prayer, the prayer he prays in response to his deep burden about the sorry state of Jerusalem.

We see the results of that prayer as God gives Nehemiah favor with the Persian king, who gives his authority and support to Nehemiah's mission. We see the results of Nehemiah's prayer when he arrives in

Jerusalem, presents the challenge of rebuilding the walls, and the people respond by saying, "Let us start building!" (Nehemiah 2:18).

As you study Nehemiah this week, will you join me in praying that God will make us difference makers for Him? Our prayer might start with something like this....

*Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; losing sight of the land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."*

*- Sir Francis Drake, naval explorer*

(Contact Michael at [msigler@fumcfwb.com](mailto:msigler@fumcfwb.com).)