

Nehemiah 1:3-6; 2:17-18

A CHRISTIAN CARES FOR THE COUNTRY IN NEED

#11

August 18, 2024

**Greeting:** Let requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone and for all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. Amen.

**Text:** 3) They said to me, "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." 4) When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. 5) Then I said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands. 6) Let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer Your servant is praying before You day and night for Your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house have committed against You. . . . 17) Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace. 18) I also told them about the gracious hand of God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this work.

**Introduction:** The country was in crisis. The protective walls of the city were still piles of rubble. Any recovery reconstruction had come to a grinding halt. The bitter enemies of God's people had been emboldened. The wise, courageous leadership needed was sorely lacking. It was 450 B.C. in Jerusalem, already 85 years after God's captive people began to return to the Holy Land from exile in Babylon. The people of Israel were demoralized and feeling ashamed and disgraced. Far away, in the capital of the Persian empire, a Jewish man named Nehemiah cared about his country in crisis.

His story is a timely and helpful one for us today. It is clear that our country, the United States of America, is also a country in crisis. This year our nation celebrated its 248th birthday. It is no longer a baby country as it was in 1776. Much time has passed. Many things have taken place. Our union has aged and faced numerous challenges. Some important things, like the ruined walls of Jerusalem, are breaking down. Greed, corruption, selfishness are on prominent display. Conflicts, crime and scams abound. Violence, murder and abortion are part and parcel of the culture. A sizable number of citizens are addicted to gambling, drugs and unhealthy lifestyles. In too many places, the work ethic is weak and the welfare mentality is strong. Political tensions are high. Our enemies are numerous. Effective, courageous leadership that responds to the needs of the time seems to be the great need of the day. What is a concerned Christian citizen to do? Nehemiah, who faced his country's crisis almost 2,500 years ago, provides some answers for us. He was a believer who cared for his country in crisis. He did it with passionate tears and prayers and by productive words and actions.

### 1. With Passionate Tears And Prayers

When Nehemiah received the bad news of what was going wrong in Judea, he began to weep over the sad state of affairs. He took the news to heart. He grieved for days. It made him sick. As the cupbearer to the powerful Persian king, Artaxerxes, Nehemiah enjoyed a position of great trust and honor. He was responsible for the king's protection against poisoning and was very good at his job. For this he enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle. He was doing very well personally, but Nehemiah could not and would not be happy content if his fellow countrymen were in danger and distress.

Do we care deeply about our country and our people as Nehemiah did? Do we cry over its damaged condition? Our God has placed us in this land and given us responsibility to look after its welfare. We should not be indifferent to what is happening in our country and unmoved by the conditions our fellow citizens, including our fellow Christians, face. You and I do not have to look too hard to see souls in peril – people who give in to evil and who are afflicted by evils; the abusing and the abused, criminals and victims, the loveless and the unloved. We see many making foolish, self-destructive choices, mispending their lives, missing out on God and the good things He would give them. We should be bothered by these things, probably much more than we often are. Like Nehemiah, our spirits have much to weep over and cry out for.

Along with his passionate tears, Nehemiah also offered his passionate prayers. He not only cried. He also cried out to God. Listen to part of his prayer: I said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands. 6) Let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer Your servant is praying before You day and night for Your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house have committed against You.

In his prayer, Nehemiah had a confession to make, not only for the sins of his countrymen and the sins of his family members, but also for his own. He admitted the wrongs that he and others had done and He pleaded for God's forgiving mercy on them. A Christian who cares for the country in crisis offers passionate prayers. Our fellow citizens have their sins to confess. We have things to confess also. We may have to confess that at times we have been so immersed in our own selves that we haven't paid proper attention to others or that we have been indifferent to them or lacked courage and conviction to help. We may have to admit that we have been so consumed with affluence that we have lost the will to make meaningful sacrifice<sup>s</sup> so people could be properly cared for in soul and body. We may have to grant that we have had such a good time enjoying our ease and freedoms that we have been reluctant to bear burdens and accept responsibilities. May God lead us to offer these important prayers of confession. May He grant us His pardoning mercy and help restore and strengthen a loving, spiritual focus for our hearts.

## 2. By Productive Words And Actions

Nehemiah wept and Nehemiah prayed. But he did more than weep and pray. He also spoke up and took action. He followed up his good intentions with tangible efforts to help in the crisis. He asked his king for a leave of absence so he could move to Judea and use His abilities to help the troubled people. We notice that Nehemiah spoke productive words



to the discouraged. After inspecting the situation, he gathered the people and said: "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace. 18) I also told them about the gracious hand of God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." Nehemiah reached out to others in concern. He talked with them about the problems they faced. He helped them find solutions. He offered inspiring encouragements.

Some people think that words are just empty sounds. While they can be, they don't have to be. Words can convey truth and love. They can offer strength and help. We can help others in their challenges with our words. It is most helpful for us to get involved with our neighbors, friends and others in the community. Our conversations give us an opportunity to express our concern, to build understanding, to develop relationships, to open the important path between our minds and hearts and the minds and hearts of others. As believers in Jesus Christ, who know God's saving love for sinners and His marvelous plans for people, we have the most important words to share, the words of God Himself; the words that are spirit and life; the words by which souls can be restored to God and live forever. God help us to care for our countrymen in crisis by sharing productive, blessing-filled words with others.

Nehemiah also met the needs of his country in crisis by taking productive action. One great need the people of Judea had was to rebuild the ruined walls of Jerusalem. The enemies of the Jews wanted the city to remain vulnerable and improperly defended. So they opposed the rebuilding effort fiercely. Nehemiah provided important leadership to guide the rebuilding effort and helped the people succeed in this mission. Chapters 3 -6 of the book of Nehemiah tell the story of this interesting venture. You may want to read them later today. After the wall was rebuilt, Nehemiah helped the people tackle other important social problems to help the people survive and have a stronger community.

We live at a time when our country needs some rebuilding. Certain walls of society and security have been breached and need to be restored. As Christian citizens, we can't be letting our country fall apart by our inaction. As Christ's people, we are primarily citizens of heaven whose primary loyalty is to God and His kingdom. But as Christ's people, we are also citizens of an earthly country and have civic duties to fulfill as part of our Christian calling. There are any number of things we can do to help: donate blood, visit nursing homes, help seniors, be concerned about the children in your neighborhood, take part in a neighborhood watch group, volunteer at your local school or civic improvement organization, join a pro-life group, participate politically as an informed, principled voter, as an active supporter of a candidate or as a candidate for public office yourself. It was Edmund Burke who spoke the well-known and often repeated phrase: All it takes for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing. As God's people, we do not want evil to triumph to defeat God's purposes for the spiritual and earthly lives of people. Instead we want good conditions so that the gospel of peace may spread widely and well to transform the hearts and lives of others. As we celebrate another birthday for our beloved country, make God help us be a blessing to it. May He help us be Christians who care for our

country in crisis with passionate tears and prayers and by productive words and actions.  
Amen.