

Pillar Passage – Neh. 2 pt 5 (v.5-8)
Jed Brown
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Welcome to another addition of Pillar Passages. Today we want to look at the second part of Nehemiah's pray and request in Nehemiah 2. We've already looked at Nehemiah 1 and his first prayer and Nehemiah 2 and I invite you to go back and look at those.

Now, we come to the point where Nehemiah makes his request to the king, King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah is the cupbearer to the king. Nehemiah is in a very privileged place. The cupbearer was very important to the life of the king and his wife. That is because the cupbearer was not just in charge of serving the king, but making sure that all the food and the wine that came to the king was tasty, and that it was pure and of high quality, and lastly that it was safe—that it was not poisoned. So, the cupbearer to the king was very, very important.

Nehemiah has come before him, as we saw in a previous video, and the king knows that he is wanting to request something. So Nehemiah prayed, essentially, 'Help me, God. Geronimo! Amen,' and he jumps in with his request here. Though it is made to the king, I think we can see here principles for praying to God because the king is an agent of God in the world. As we will see, Nehemiah is looking for the hand of God upon him; the blessing of God upon him, in his request.

There are four things I want to observe about Nehemiah's request.

First off, that it was prepared. In fact, we could say that Nehemiah was preparing for this moment for his whole life. But we first see that the king is very pleased when Nehemiah tells him of when he will return; that Nehemiah had already come up with a time that the king would know that he would return. This just goes to demonstrate just how valued and trusted Nehemiah had become to the king at this time. He has been preparing for this his whole life. The king and his wife, they trust him. Nehemiah was good at his secular work, which granted him a basis for success in his life ministry. Had he not been good at his work; had he not led and trained up others to be just as trustworthy as him while he was gone, he never would have been able to go. He would have never been able to step out and do the great things we will read about in this book.

Nehemiah is prepared. One of the ways he is prepared is by the excellence of his—we might say—his secular life. Though we see here that his secular life was in no way secular for it led directly to his success in glorifying God.

Secondly, we see Nehemiah is living with a wartime mindset. What do I mean by that? Note what he requests. He doesn't request glory and honor and wealth. He asks for a letter that he be given safe passage. Then he asks for a letter for timber; timber for the gates of the fortress of the city, for the temple and the wall of the city, and for a house to live in. That's what he asks for.

He asks for; that which is necessary to the success of his mission. This is a wartime mindset. In wartime it is crucial to move quickly, to not over pack, and to provide just as much for and material as what you need to succeed.

Nehemiah wants to succeed, that's for sure. He's not being overly humble here, but he's not asking for the world. But he is asking for what is needed to succeed.

This reminds me of D. A. Carson's story of one of his parents overhearing a conversation on the bus during WWII. One of woman said she couldn't wait for the war to end and the second woman said, "Oh no, I never want it to end." The first woman said, "Well, why?" The second woman said, "My husband is making money hand over fist supplying widgets to the army."

D. A. Carson notes how this woman had lost the plot. The purpose—the plot—of the war was not to make money. The plot is to win the war.

Nehemiah is out to succeed so he only asks for what he needs to succeed.

The third thing I want to observe here, is that Nehemiah is spending his privilege. What do I mean by that? He has succeeded. He is the top dog. He is the cupbearer to the king. He—as we say in our modern times—is very privileged. He had risen to the top. He had succeeded in the eyes of the world, but this privilege was not something (#1) that he felt guilty about and that he needed to surrender in guilt and shame. That's the first ditch here. The second ditch is, on the other hand it was not—his privilege was not something that he would spend on himself. He took his privilege—and this is the Christian path; this is the way—he took his privilege and he spent it in love for his country, and love for his brothers, and love—most of all—for his God.

If he had driven into either ditch, of guilty surrender or selfish gluttony, he never would have led the people of God to rebuild the city. He never would have risked his whole career and his livelihood, his life, for the sake of the glory of God. He never—in short—would have been a man of love. He spent his privilege.

Lastly, we should note here, the answer to his question is yes. He got what he asked. Why? Because King Artaxerxes said yes. Well that true, but the real answer is, 'the good hand of God' was upon Nehemiah. The good hand of God—the God of heaven who is over every king. Nehemiah knew that his success came from God.

This is our greatest need. No matter the obstacle we face; no matter the enemy who is against us—as Paul says in Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" If the good hand of God is upon our shoulders success is assured.

So, we pray, pray, pray confident. Why would we be confident of this. Why would we be confident like Nehemiah was confident here? Because we have even more assurance than Nehemiah did. As Paul also said in Romans 8, "He who gave us his own Son—gave Him up for us all on the cross, how will He also with Him not also graciously give us all things. We can have even greater confidence that even Nehemiah did. God is for us, so we pray, pray, pray, and

then we pray. God help me! Geronimo! Amen. And then we move, and we risk, betting everything on the Lord. Moving toward love—love of God, and love of neighbor.

This is not the exceptional heroic Christian life. What we're seeing here in Nehemiah and Romans 8, that the *normal* Christian life. There is no other Christian life. Dear friend, are you living it? Are you walking by faith in the future grace of God prove to us by His giving up His Son for us on the cross?