

* These notes are provided for personal devotional and study purposes only. They may not be published, distributed, or disseminated to others without the permission of the author.

Nehemiah's Ordination

Nehemiah 1.4

August 29, 2021

Ordination Message for Jim Clark Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Senior Pastor

- I. Introduction
 - A. This is a rather unusual sermon for me to preach
 - 1. It is probably unusual for any preacher who has ever preached an ordination sermon
 - 2. That's because every time I come up to this pulpit God has given me a message
 - a. A message from the scriptures
 - b. A message of edification, exhortation and consolation (1 Corinthians 14)
 - 3. But I never know who the message is for, specifically
 - a. I assume that it's relevant for the majority of people who come to worship at this church
 - b. I assume that somebody who is present in the service will receive that message – just as if it were designed precisely for them
 - 4. I just don't know who that person is
 - B. I've had many occasions in which members of my congregation (both here in and in my prior church) would come up to me and say, "You know, you don't have to feel like you need to preach just to me"
 - 1. I really wasn't – but that's the way they took it
 - a. As if God had given me a message just for them, and only for them
 - 2. But normally, I'm preaching to a whole slew of people, and I have no idea who that message is meant for, specifically
 - C. Except for today
 - 1. Today I have a message for one person
 - a. God gave me a message for Jim Clark
 - 2. And that's what's unusual about preaching in an ordination service
 - a. We know exactly to whom we're preaching
 - D. What are the rest of you supposed to do?
 - 1. You get to eaves drop on the little private conversation I'm about to have with Jim Clark
 - 2. You'll learn something too, I'm sure
 - a. Sometimes we learn the most profound things from messages that are meant for someone else
 - E. Jim, when I think of you, it occurs to me that the ministry to which you are called – The Director of Employee Ministries at Shell Point – is a rather unusual, even unique ministry

1. I can't think of another ministry quite like it
 2. Most of us in pastoral ministry have had some advantages when we were called to ministry
 - a. We've been in churches
 - b. We've all had pastors
 - c. We've had the opportunity observe what pastors do
 - d. We've had the advantage of having participated in the common practices of pastoral ministry
 - e. We're accustomed to the traditions that have guided the life of the Church for literally centuries
 3. But the way Martin has described your ministry – the vision of the employee ministries at Shell Point – doesn't exactly give you a road map for getting to your destination
 - a. Doesn't come with a text book on employee ministries
 - b. Isn't built on the foundation a great deal of prior ministry
 - c. I know we've had an employee chaplain before
 - d. But the vision for your position goes well beyond what we think of when we imagine employee chaplains
 - e. There's no blueprint to follow
 - f. No operations manual
 - g. You can't even get any help from YouTube
 4. You have to make it up as you go
- F. So I want to answer two questions this evening
1. **What kind of person does God call to a unique ministry, to a ministry that's never been done before?**
 2. **What kind of ministry is God calling you to fulfill?**
- G. When I thought of how unique your ministry is, I thought of Nehemiah
1. Because he too, was called to a unique ministry
 - a. One that had never been done before
 - b. But one that was integral to the welfare of a multitude of people
 2. We'll try to answer those questions through the life of Nehemiah
- II. **The Story of Nehemiah**
- A. Nehemiah was a Jewish man who lived in the 5th Century BCE
1. He was part of the Jewish diaspora
 - a. His family, and perhaps he himself as a young man, was part of the Babylonian exile
 2. But by this time Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians
 - a. And some in the Jewish community were able to find significant positions in the Persian government
 3. Nehemiah was among them
 4. He had risen to a position in the Persian court
 - a. Even had access to the king of Persia
 - b. He was his cupbearer
 - c. Which seems like a menial task
 - d. But one which only someone trustworthy could perform

- B. Nearly a century earlier the king of Persia – Cyrus – issued a decree that Jews would be allowed to return to Jerusalem
 - 1. About 50,000 did return; though most of the Jews in Babylon did not
 - a. Eventually they were able to rebuild a temple
 - b. A temple which was a mere shadow of the former magnificent temple of Solomon
- C. At the time of Nehemiah, Jews in Persia would receive reports from their kinsmen who had returned
 - 1. The reports were not encouraging
- D. When Nehemiah heard of the decrepit condition of Jerusalem
 - 1. That the people were in distress and the objects of reproach
 - 2. And that the walls of the city were broken down and its gates burned with fire
 - a. He was moved himself to return and help lead the effort to rebuild Jerusalem
 - b. And along with Ezra, to revitalize the spiritual and moral foundations of Israel
- E. Nehemiah spends much time in prayer and fasting over the issue
 - 1. And when the time was right, he presented himself to the king – Artaxerxes I presumably
 - a. And secures his release to go to Jerusalem
 - b. And he secures as well the permissions and resources to lead the rebuilding effort
- F. He returns to Jerusalem
 - 1. Inspects the condition of the walls
 - a. Recruits and motivates the Jews living in Jerusalem to participate in the rebuilding project
 - 2. Plans and implements the construction
 - 3. And does so in spite of some local opposition
 - a. Opposition in the form of ridicule and disparagement
 - b. As well as political maneuvering to block permissions and resources
 - c. And even a plot to violently do away with Nehemiah
- G. The result was that the walls of Jerusalem were successfully rebuilt
 - 1. Which then led to a spiritual renewal
 - a. Corporate confession of sin
 - b. A renewed embrace of the covenant
 - c. A restoration of the prescribed feasts
 - d. A return to Sabbath keeping
 - e. Discipline of those violating aspects of the covenant
- H. Nehemiah is usually seen as a wonderful illustration of godly leadership
 - 1. Leadership – in this instance – in a task that had never before been accomplished
 - 2. Leadership where there was no blueprint
 - a. No roadmap
 - b. No prior experience

- c. No history of tradition to guide the task
- 3. An illustration of the kind of man and ministry God calls to a person, like you, Jim
 - a. Who is engaged in an unusual, unique ministry
 - b. But who nevertheless is called by God
 - c. To the gospel ministry in general
 - d. And to this time and this place and this purpose

III. **What Kind of Man?**

- A. **A God-centered Man** – A man who knew God
 - 1. Not a God of his own imagination
 - a. Which is so common today
 - b. Human beings routinely manufacture of god in their own image
 - 2. No – a man who knew the God of the Bible
 - a. Seen in the nature of his praying
 - b. **Nehemiah 1:5** (NASB95) — 5 I said, “I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments”
 - 3. **God who is transcendent**
 - a. LORD God of heaven
 - b. Agrees with the psalmist: Psalm 115:3 (NASB95) — 3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.
 - c. God is above His creation
 - 4. **God who is all-powerful**
 - a. A “great and awesome God” (Nehemiah 1.5)
 - b. Not the kind of awesome which is common in the way the word is used in popular culture to represent something a bit out of the ordinary
 - c. “Awesome” which might have meant “cool” in another generation
 - d. No – awesome in the sense if you really knew who you were encountering you would fall on your face in abject humiliation
 - e. That kind of great and awesome
 - 5. **God who is faithful to the covenant**
 - a. Nehemiah 1:5 (NASB95) — 5 “who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments...”
 - b. God who keeps His promises
 - c. God who is trustworthy, reliable
 - 6. That’s the God of Nehemiah
 - a. The biblical God
 - b. The only God worth worshiping
 - 7. Is that the kind of God you worship and serve?
 - a. That kind of God is the one who called you!
- B. **A Man of Compassion**
 - 1. **Nehemiah 1:2–4** (NASB95) —

- a. 4 When I heard these words [words that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the people were in great distress and reproach], I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.
- 2. Nehemiah didn't receive the news the way we watch the news
 - a. It affects him
 - b. The misfortune of others makes him weep
 - c. He empathizes with them; he can see himself in their place
- 3. It was Nehemiah's compassion that drove him
 - a. First to his knees
 - b. Then to give up his cushy job in the king's palace
 - c. Then to Jerusalem, to roll up his sleeves and get to work
- 4. The calling you have received is a calling to a man of compassion
 - a. You are faced with needy people all day
 - b. They may not appear needy; they often put on a good face
 - c. But the more you get to know them, and the more they get to know you – you will discover their wounds, their heartaches
 - d. Whether it's Haitian employees worried about the welfare of their families following the earthquake
 - e. Or the spouse going through a divorce
 - f. Or the worker with a child going through cancer treatment
 - g. Or the employee who's husband is in jail
- 5. You are called because these are not clinical cases
 - a. These are people
 - b. People for whom Christ died
 - c. People loved by God enough to send His only Son
 - d. You are called to be a man of compassion

C. **A Man of Prayer**

- 1. **Nehemiah 1:5–11** (NASB95) —
 - a. 5 I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, 6 let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.
 - b. 7 "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.
 - c. 8 "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; 9 but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and

will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.’

- d. 10 “They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.
- e. 11 “O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.” Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

2. **History of persistent, practiced prayer**

- a. Prayer like that doesn’t just come out of the blue
- b. This is a prayer coming from a man accustomed to prayer, practiced in prayer
- c. Every kind of element is included
- d. His address to the LORD God of heaven
- e. His plea that God would hear the prayer of His servant
- f. His persistence in pleading with God day and night
- g. His intercession on behalf of His kinsmen
- h. His confession of his own sins, as well as the corporate sins of his people
- i. The specificity of his confession – calling attention to the violations of statutes and ordinances of Moses
- j. His placing his petitions in the context of God covenant promises, asking for God’s mercy in returning favor for those who are truly repentant
- k. His reminder that these are God’s people, redeemed by God’s great power and strong hand
- l. His plea that his request of this pagan king would be evidence of the compassion of God

3. God calls a man of prayer; God calls a man to be a man of prayer

- a. I’m humbled by prayers like that; no – worse; I’m humiliated by prayers like that
- b. I wish I prayed that way

4. That’s what God calls me to do; that’s what God calls you to do

- a. That’s who He wants us to be
- b. Persistent and practiced at God-centered, compassion-driven, covenant-focused prayer

5. **Prepared for extemporaneous, momentary prayer**

- a. But that’s not the only way He prays
- b. When you pray like that for regular times of devotions, it prepares you to pray on your feet
- c. It prepares you to pray continually – as if you’re having a regular conversation with your companion who just happens to be the God of all creation
- d. Extemporaneous prayer

- e. Puritans used to call it ejaculatory prayer
- 6. **Nehemiah 2:4** (NASB95) — 4 Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.
 - a. Right then and there; he’s having a conversation with the king
 - b. But he stops, and before anything comes out of his mouth, out of his heart comes a prayer
- 7. Other examples of this kind of immediate, extemporaneous praying
- 8. You are called to be a man of prayer
 - a. You will need to be able at a moment’s notice to bring your brothers, sisters, friends, colleagues before the throne of grace
- 9. For God calls a man of prayer; He calls a man to be a man of prayer
- D. **A Man of Vision**
 - 1. Nehemiah has prepared himself through prayer
 - a. But he given a great deal of thought to the mission
 - b. Long before he has a conversation with the king
 - 2. **Nehemiah 2:4–5** (NASB95) —
 - a. 4 Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.
 - b. 5 I said to the king, “If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”
 - 3. **Nehemiah 2:7–8** (NASB95) —
 - a. 7 And I said to the king, “If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, 8 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 which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go.” And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me.
 - 4. Nehemiah was ready when the opportunity arose, when the king inquired about his countenance
 - a. He had the plan laid out – as much as could be laid out in those moments
 - 5. God calls men of vision
 - a. And he calls you to have vision
 - b. Martin has laid out the broad framework for the vision
 - c. But God has called you to flesh out that vision
 - d. To put muscles onto those bones
 - e. To give the train a track to run on
 - 6. God calls you to be a man of a sanctified imagination
 - a. To be able to see how God will respond to your requests to act on behalf of the welfare of the Shell Point employee community
 - 7. God calls you to be a man of vision
- E. **A Man of Leadership**

1. Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem, collects a few men, leaders in the community, no doubt
 2. God has given him a vision; he's told no one
 - a. But they explore the ruined walls
 - b. They examine the nature of the work before them
 3. **Nehemiah 2:17–18** (NASB95) —
 - a. 17 Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.”
 - b. 18 I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.
 4. Do you fashion yourself as a leader?
 - a. How do you know if you are one?
 - b. Well, look behind you!
 - c. If you are a leader, there will be followers
 5. Nehemiah was able to develop a group of people who would help him carry out the mission
 - a. He was a man of leadership
 6. God calls you to be a man of leadership
 - a. See the vision
 - b. Set the course
 - c. Find people who will go with you
- F. **A Man of Courage**
1. Nehemiah faced opposition
 - a. As all men in ministry do from time to time
 2. But ministry requires courage
 - a. In the face of ridicule – he wasn’t discouraged
 - b. In the face of personal attacks – he responded in prayer
 - c. In the face of violent threats – he made provisions for defense
 3. But he never buckled under the pressure
 - a. He was no snowflake
- G. **A Man of Integrity**
1. Nehemiah did all of these things without sacrificing his integrity
 2. That’s the problem with so many leaders today – even Christian leaders
 - a. Who have developed significant ministries
 - b. But who believe they deserve a pass for their moral indiscretions
 3. Not Nehemiah
 4. **Nehemiah 5:14–16** (NASB95) —
 - a. 14 Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor’s food allowance.

- b. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.
 - c. 16 I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.
 - 5. There would be nothing about Nehemiah’s ministry that would call into question the character of the God he served
 - 6. God calls men of integrity
 - a. He calls you to be a man of integrity
 - H. That’s the kind of man God calls; the kind of man God ordains
 - 1. God-centered
 - 2. Compassion
 - 3. Prayer
 - 4. Vision
 - 5. Leadership
 - 6. Courage
 - 7. Integrity
- IV. **What Kind of Ministry?**
 - A. Nehemiah – wall building
 - 1. What’s that got to do with Jim Clark
 - a. More likely to relate to Adam Hinds!
 - B. No Jim – you’re called to build walls, too
 - 1. Not physical walls, but spiritual walls
 - C. Because you’re ministering to a people
 - 1. A wide variety of people
 - a. From administrators to nurses to managers to housekeepers to drivers to CNAs to landscapers
 - 2. All of whom are living in the culture of the USA in the 21st Century
 - a. A culture awash in relativism
 - b. A culture overwhelmed in dysfunction and moral disintegration
 - c. A culture of selfishness and instant gratification
 - d. A culture of materialism
 - e. A culture of addiction
 - f. A culture of family chaos and collapse
 - 3. The foundations of our culture
 - a. Which just a generation ago seemed so strong and biblically informed
 - b. “are in great distress and reproach... broken down and its gates burned with fire” (Nehemiah 1.3)
 - 4. **Psalm 11:3** (NASB95) — 3 “If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?”
 - 5. What the righteous can do is hire Jim Clark
 - D. You’re ministry is really the same as Nehemiah’s
 - 1. You’re helping a community of people rebuild the walls

- a. Brick by brick
 - b. One godly decision at a time
 - c. One biblical commitment at a time
 - 2. So you, Jim Clark, are ordained today to help your brothers and sisters, friends and colleagues to rebuild the walls of God
 - a. Built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets
 - b. A new temple, a holy dwelling place of God
 - 3. Built with living stones
 - a. On the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- E. That's the call the church affirms today
 - 1. You have been called by God
 - 2. The Church of Jesus Christ affirms your call
 - 3. You are being ordained today for the gospel ministry
 - a. A ministry unique in its time and place
 - 4. And you are the man God has called for such a time as this