



SCRIPTURE:

Nehemiah 2

SERMON:

Alright TJC, let me catch you up if you weren't here last week. As a church we are taking 5 weeks to consider where God is leading us. God has blessed our church, and with that blessing comes a responsibility. We are building additional buildings and parking here on campus. We are looking at starting a school. We want to plant and revitalize churches locally. We want to fund missionaries on the ground long-term.

I'm also challenging each of us personally on that front, to consider where God has blessed you, and what He wants you to do with it. Our first goal is 100% participation from everyone. Our second goal is to raise the money. This is going to require everyone not only giving, but giving in a way that goes beyond our normal contributions. We want to give sacrificially. We want to give by faith. Take the commitment card as a family and determine what that looks like for you and your family.

Have you ever been in a situation or circumstance where you had little to no expectations of something, only to be completely blown away? Perhaps it was a new restaurant you were trying. Or maybe it was a movie you were going to see. For some, it may be going to see a band or a show you didn't want to see, only to be stunned by how much you enjoyed it. Let's be honest, for some of you here, that was your experience with coming to TJC. You got invited, you had no expectations of anything meaningful because it was a church named "The Journey Church" and then you were shook to discover substance and depth.

Many of us, even though we confess God is a God of power and that He is active in the world today, often have little to no expectation about what He can do in our lives and how He can use us in the world. So we often go through the motions each day with our eyes closed to divine opportunities. Or if we CAN see the opportunity, we're scared to act on it.

Life is filled with divine opportunities. There are divine opportunities embedded in each day. There are seasons of opportunity.

When we see stories in Scripture of divine opportunities seized, they inspire us and move us, because we want our own lives to be counted toward things that matter. We want to know our contribution moved the need and made a difference.

Throughout Scripture we see these kinds of windows of divine opportunity seized.

- Rahab hides the spies (Joshua 2)
- Jonathan and his armor bearer (1 Samuel 14)
- Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4)
- Paul speaking in Athens (Acts 17)

Last week we started the book of Nehemiah. The story of Nehemiah is incredibly compelling and it reflects a parallel of our own lives. We see Nehemiah discovered the condition of his people and city and is broken. He is distraught with what he hears. He is then propelled into prayer. We spoke about prayer last week. But this week we are going to look at the reality that we need to be prepared to take action.

So today we are going to talk about seizing those divine opportunities.

Exegesis: Nehemiah 2:1-20

We learned in last week's passage that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king. He had access and direct contact with the king of Persia.

1 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. 2 And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid.

An occasion pops up when Nehemiah is before the king and he is serving him wine. The king notices that Nehemiah's countenance is down. The king has spent significant time with Nehemiah and has seen him. He knew his personality and his mannerisms. So the king notices something out of the ordinary, Nehemiah is not chipper or happy-go-lucky, but instead, is somber. The king asks Nehemiah if he is sick. But he then quickly realizes that Nehemiah is crushed to the heart. The king's observation and questioning scares Nehemiah.

Why was Nehemiah afraid? Because he knew a situation was developing that presented an opportunity to share the burden of his heart. He knew a divine opportunity was unfolding.

3 I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” 4 Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.

So Nehemiah collects himself and declares a royal salute to the king, and then lays out his heart about his people and his city. So the king asks him straightforwardly, “What are you requesting?” In other words, “okay, where are you going with this.” Notice what happens next, Nehemiah says a short prayer, an opportunity seizing prayer. He knows this is a moment. He knows God is opening the door. But he asks the LORD, briefly and silently, to give him favor.

5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” 6 And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. 7 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me 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 of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

So he begins to lay out to the king his desire to go back to his homeland and to rebuild the city and his people. He then asks the king for help with his passage through other lands and for provisions for the actual building of the city. And notice what the last verse says, it says “and the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.”

Nehemiah takes his broken heart over the condition of the city and he goes to the Lord in prayer. But after praying, he is looking for the moment to act. He is looking for the open door, the window of opportunity to do something about it. When he sees it, he seizes it. We have to develop a mentality and disposition: when we see it, we seize it. Every day is filled with divine opportunities.

We need to have an inclination towards action. We need to go until we get a no. We need to work from “go” and wait for the “stop.” Not the opposite. Understand that the mission gives us permission. You cannot advance the kingdom of God as people who are in retreat. We all want God to bless our lives and use us for the kingdom, but then we often play it safe. Our neighbors can’t afford for us to play it safe. The students in class with you can’t afford for you to play it safe. Your co-workers can’t afford for you to play it safe. Your family members can’t wait for you to play it safe.

Do you know why Nehemiah said that “opportunity seizing prayer” prior to speaking to the king, because he knew there was danger in exposing his heart. This could be looked at as an act of rebellion or insurrection. There was danger involved. For us, if we want to step into divine opportunities that are happening all around us, there may be some risk. It is not always safe to walk through the doors God opens. Yes, following Jesus and sharing your faith in some places can be a risk to your life. Here in our context, it is not our life we are risking, but possibly a friendship or a reputation. We fear losing favor or status or offending someone. We fear rejection. I’m not saying that we are bad for fearing these things, what I am saying is that some things are more important than our fears. We fail to see divine moments when all we see is danger and risk of failure.

Some of life’s greatest opportunities are not behind doors or windows, but behind walls. They require genuine effort. But here is what we need to remember: Whenever we seize a divine moment, we magnify the presence of God. Simply being willing to walk across the room and have a conversation can be used of God. One of the things that drives me nuts in the Church today and amongst Christians is we have a loser’s mentality. What I mean by that is you would think we haven’t read our Bibles. Yes, the world is in bad shape, but we live as if we don’t know how the story is going to end. We live as if we don’t have promises that God’s kingdom is advancing. We live as if Christ isn’t currently reigning in glory as the cosmic ruler of the universe. We act as if the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead doesn’t live in us!

You know, I love that my son was like that. I love that his desire to win was so strong. Here’s what I desire, here’s what I wish, I would love to see a church that had that strong of a desire to win. I believe the local church is the hope of the world. When the church is functioning as she’s intended to, there is nothing better. When we win, when we get it right: lost people get found, broken people find healing, marriages get restored, new believers grow to full maturity, students make commitments to serve Christ, children are

rooted in the gospel, gang, there's nothing like it. No institution or company in all the world can compete with the local church when she is going strong.

We have reached a place in our history as a church where we have to make a move. If we are going to be driven by our desire to see lost people found and to see found people grow to maturity, and if we really think that the church is for everyone, then we've reached a crossroads as to what we can currently do and adjustments have to be made.

Let's continue with Nehemiah's response upon seeing the city.

9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. 10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

He leaves Susa and heads towards Jerusalem. Some people were not happy to hear the news.

11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 15 Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

Nehemiah observes the landscape and condition of the city. He takes inventory of how things are. This gives him the ability to formulate a plan that he will take to the people. A vision is formulated when leaders observe the landscape and conditions and let what ought to be infuse a passion and desire for action.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for

good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

Nehemiah cast the vision of rebuilding the wall. He reminds them of God's favor and blessing on him to give him provisions, then he casts the vision. Notice his words "Let us rise up and build." Arise and build. This is the theme verse for our initiative. This is the heartbeat behind this vision we are casting. We see the landscape of the culture around us. We see the needs. And our hearts cry and passion is "let's arise and build." Let's do something about it.

Friends, it is amazing what God has been doing in our church the last several years. We are growing like crazy. We are seeing lives changed. Our leaders have been surveying the landscape for months now of our growth and where we are, we've watched the hand of our God upon us bring answers to prayers. But now we have to do something. Our Kids Area is slammed. Parking is full. Our Worship is quickly filling up. While I love it when it is full and it is exciting and full of energy, I'm reminded that there are countless thousands all around us that don't know Christ, and if they came to faith there is almost no room for them to join us. There is more lostness outside the building than there is room inside the building.

This is why we are rallying as a church to say "Let's ARISE and build."

BUILDING: We have a master plan of how to best utilize this property and maximize its usage.

THREE SERVICES: Before the buildings are completed, we will likely go to 3 services in order to continue reaching people. We will make adjustments in parking and kids space as long as we can, but we'll have 3 services at Easter and likely go to 3 services after summer.

Now here's an important question for us to answer: WHY? Why are we building more buildings and adding more services? Here's the answer: We don't care about being the biggest church in town or having a big number that makes us feel good...we want to see

lost people become found, found people walking with the Lord, strong families, develop children, see healthy churches formed, and see the nations bow the knee to King Jesus. That's what we want. We're building buildings and adding services so we can do that. We're starting a school so we can do that. We're planting and revitalizing churches so we can do that. We're sending missionaries to the field long-term so we can do that. Arise and build!

I want to remind everyone that if you are at TJC today, you are here because people said, "There needs to be a church running after the right things, committed to the church, and desirous to reach and grow people." And because of that you are here. Many of you have come here at different seasons in our church.

Started coming at:

- Hwy 109 when we started
- West Elementary/Providence
- Lighting Warehouse
- MJ Campus (West Wilson Middle)
- This facility

You see, along the way over the last 17 years, people stepped up and made adjustments so you could be here.

The story of the four friends lowering their paralytic friend to Jesus in Mark 2 is an incredible picture of what we are trying to do here. We want to be people holding the rope and doing everything we can to get people to Jesus.

Let's be a church that is hungry to take ground. We lament the culture that developed around us, but we're not content to simply complain. We want to herald the reign of the Risen Christ and call people to bow the knee to His Lordship.

What precedent do we have for doing this? What example are we following? Philippians 2. We are imitating Christ. Jesus personally embraced change and sacrificed in order to rescue and redeem us. He gave up the comforts of heaven. He gave up the joys of personal proximity to the Father. He gave up his omnipresence and took on flesh. He gave up his life and embraced death. For our sake. We want to imitate Jesus and give up comfort for the sake of other people's redemption. Are we willing?

REVIEW:

- ❖ Why was Nehemiah afraid (Neh. 2:2)?
- ❖ What specific requests of the king did Nehemiah make?

REFLECT:

- ❖ What can we learn from the way Nehemiah responded to his fear and to the king?
- ❖ What is Nehemiah leaving?

RESPOND:

- ❖ Fear is a natural reaction to uncertainty but how should a Christian respond to fear (Isaiah 12:2, 41:10, 2 Timothy 1:7, Psalm 34:4)?
- ❖ What aspects of following Jesus make you afraid?

MEDITATE:

- ❖ Nehemiah 2:5 - *And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it."*

MEMORIZE:

- ❖ Nehemiah 2:18 - *And 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's arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. (NASB2020)*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ❖ Pastor - **Nick Judd**
- ❖ Ministry - **Kids Ministry**
- ❖ Pray specifically about how you can participate in Arise. How can you support the vision? Who can you Build Up? Where can you go to be Sent Out?
- ❖ NAMB Church Planter - **Joseph Gaston** - Greenacres, FL - *Family Bible Church*
- ❖ IMB Partners - Jess & Wendy Jennings - The Philippines
- ❖ Unreached People Group (UPG): **Bengali Muslim Shaikh** in Bangladesh
 - Population: 132,871,999
 - Christian: 0.0%
 - Evangelical: 0.0%
 - Primary Religion: Islam
 - Primary Language: Bengali
 - Status: **Unreached**