

Saint Timothy Lutheran

Edmonds, WA

January 24, 2010 – Rev. Craig A. Patterson

“The Joy Of The LORD Is Your Strength.”

(Text: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10)

Context: While serving as the cupbearer in the court of Persian King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah was greatly saddened to hear of the distress that the remnant of Jews left in Jerusalem were experiencing. The reports told of the wall of Jerusalem being broken down and the gates having been burned with fire ((Neh. 1:3). Nehemiah mourned for days. He then prayed to God for help. As he served the king, the king inquired as to why Nehemiah was so downcast. Nehemiah told him of the terrible state of his homeland and its capital city. The king then asked Nehemiah, “What would you request?” Nehemiah asked to be sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. The king granted it with along with his assistance. Nehemiah led a group of Hebrews back to their homeland and rebuilt the city of Jerusalem. They faced their enemies and their fears. In spite of all these hurdles, God blessed them. At the conclusion of this task Nehemiah assembled everyone and had Ezra, the priest and scribe, read the book of the Law of Moses to the people. At first, they grieved as the Law revealed their sins. Still, as the Word of God was further explained they took heart. Nehemiah reminded them that it was time to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (to celebrate the harvest with thanksgiving to God). And so they did. And they rejoiced.

I. Our Enemies And Our Fears Attempt To Destroy Us.

- A. Nehemiah, after being granted King Artaxerxes’ blessing and help in order to rebuild Jerusalem, faced Sanballat, governor of Samaria, and others who did not want him to be successful in rebuilding Jerusalem. (Sanballat viewed Nehemiah as a threat to him.)
 - 1. Sanballat spread false rumors to make Nehemiah and the returning Hebrews afraid.
 - a. Lies were told to the Hebrews and about the Hebrews.
 - b. A priest by the name of Shemaiah invited Nehemiah to “meet together in the house of God,...and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you...(Neh. 6:10). Soon, Nehemiah “perceived that Shemaiah did not come from God but said this as he was hired by Sanballat and Tobiah.
- B. Like Nehemiah and the returning Hebrews, we, too, face enemies who would lead us away from trusting in a good and almighty God who truly loves us.
 - 1. Lies are told to us and about us, also.
 - a. We are told that one god is as good as any god.
 - b. We are told that there is no such thing as truth that does not change.
 - c. We are told that there is no God who really hears and responds to our prayers.
 - 2. Talk of our imminent destruction is circulated by cynics and critics.
 - 3. We are invited to fear people and turn our back on God.

II. The One True God Does Hear Our Pleas, Does Protect, And Does Bless Us.

- A. God heard Nehemiah’s pleas and led the King Artaxerxes to grant his request.
 - 1. “And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me” (2:8).
 - 2. To the re-builders Nehemiah said, “The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build...” (2:20).
- B. In the midst of the enemies’ threats Nehemiah writes, “But we prayed to our God..” (4:9).
 - 1. We, also, no matter our enemies and our fears can ‘pray to our God.’
 - 2. God indeed does hear our prayers and answers in the best way and best time.
 - a. God frustrated the plan of Nehemiah’s enemies. (See Neh. 4:15)
 - 3. Nehemiah reminded the Hebrews, “Our God will fight for us.” (4:20)
- C. Upon completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the names of all rebuilders was recorded.
 - 1. ‘Then God put into my heart to assemble the nobles, officials, and all the people to be enrolled by genealogies. These were the ones taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar and now have returned to Jerusalem and Judah...’ (Neh. 7:5-6).
 - 2. God works through real people (with strengths and weaknesses).
 - a. Even people like us.
- D. Like the Hebrews then, we listen to God’s Word, we grieve over our sin, but then rejoice in the God of our deliverance, the God of our rebuilding. Alleluia! Amen!