

Positioned for Such a Time as This

Noble Cedar Series Week 3

Nehemiah 1:11-2:9

2/12/17

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week three in our Noble Cedar series and if you're new let me get you up to speed

As a church we're in a season that is full to the brim with possibilities and opportunities as we're tackling two things at the same time:

We're launching our Pittsboro service on March 5th, super-excited about that

We're also getting ready to buy 10.5 acres of land just down Andrews Store Rd. that will one day be the site of our permanent facility

In order to purchase that land, we're asking everyone to be praying and thinking about how you might be able to give financially over the course of the next two years to help us purchase that piece of property

And, if you can't or don't want to give financially, that's fine, nobody's going to know it, there will be no hazing process for those who can't give or don't want to give

But we are asking everyone to be willing to at least pray and ask the question, "God would you have me to give, what would you have me to give"

And two weeks ago we looked at this promise that God gave to Israel when they were an over-run, beat-down nation in exile—God said he was going to take this little vulnerable twig that was Israel and here's what he's going to do:

I myself will plant it... that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.

This magnificent promise of God taking a run-down, vulnerable people and making them majestic, noble, strong, fruitful, and all the people around them will come, from all around the known world will find shelter and rest under their strength

And we've been talking last week about this vision of becoming a Noble Cedar kind of a church.

What if we were a noble cedar, with branches that reached out all across Chatham County, and what if we were noble enough for all kinds of people to take their nest and find their rest here?

And week 1 we put names of people and organizations that we're praying might be blessed by our noble cedar church and hung them up on this tree:

On here we've got people who are hurting and people who are proud, believers and skeptics and cynics and prodigals, Republicans and Democrats, churched and never-churched, many different races and ethnicities, people who have been in Chatham for decades and people who just moved to town recently

and we've got all kinds of organizations that we're asking God to bless through us: addiction recovery groups, World Vision, educational non-profits and on and on

What if we were a hospitable enough community where everyone was welcome here because Jesus is at the center of it all, and Jesus welcomed and hung out with all sorts of people, didn't he?

We are asking you to consider making a financial commitment to the noble cedar campaign because a building gives us deeper roots in this place where God has planted us

AND it gives us broader branches and more branches for more different kinds of birds to make their nest right here with us.

We cast that vision 2 weeks ago

And then last week we started the story of Nehemiah, which is about 150 years after that promise in Ezekiel to re-build the nation, and Nehemiah is going to be one of the people that God is going to deliver on that promise through to restore and re-build Israel

Nehemiah is living in Susa, the capital of Persia and the Persians are the super-power in charge now

And Nehemiah finds out that Jerusalem is a disaster, the city is still in ruins, the wall around the city is still in ruins, STILL! 150 years later, and Nehemiah is heartbroken about this, he weeps and mourns and fasts and prays for many days

And this morning we're going to pick right back up there as Nehemiah has concluded his time of fasting and praying

If you've got a Bible you can turn with me to Nehemiah 1, if not, it'll be on the screen behind me

Nehemiah's going to take a big risk, but before he takes this step, Nehemiah sets the stage for us a little bit. He's been in this period of praying and fasting and crying out to God

And to start with, let's review from last week the last line that Nehemiah records from his prayer at the end of Nehemiah chapter one, Nehemiah prays:

"Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

And then he gives us this delightful little detail: ***I was cupbearer to the king.*** -

Nehemiah 1:11b

This is one of the greatest lines in the entire Bible, let me explain

Nehemiah is a servant of the king of Persia, the most powerful man in the whole world. His job was a cupbearer

The cupbearer's job was very simple: you drank the wine before the king did. If you didn't die, the king could then drink the wine

The king has lots of enemies, poison was a common way to assassinate back in the good old days, so the king has to be careful, so he has someone expendable, a slave, who tastes the wine first before it is given to the king

So Nehemiah is regularly in the king's presence, eating and drinking to make sure he doesn't die

And we'll talk about what Nehemiah will do in a minute but first I want us to see that even though it might not have looked like it before, God has positioned Nehemiah PERFECTLY

Because Nehemiah is physically and geographically FAR from the work that HE wants to do and that GOD wants him to do—**here's a map, here's Susa, here's Jerusalem**, HUNDREDS of miles away from the people and the issue that's breaking Nehemiah's heart

But POSITIONALLY, he's in the best place he could possibly be.

GEOGRAPHICALLY he's hundreds of miles away

but POSITIONALLY there are IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES that could not be gained any other way except by being a cupbearer to the king

For years, maybe for decades, Nehemiah has been far from his home land and far from his people and seemingly unable to help them in any way because he's so far away in exile

BUT in God's grace and sovereignty, in his power, he has positioned Nehemiah to be EXACTLY WHERE HE WANTS HIM in order to do the work he has for him to do.

Last fall we talked about '***such a time as this moments***'—***that's when God's positioning OF you meets God's purposes FOR you.*** Nehemiah is having a such a time as this moment.

In almost every work that God has for us to do, God puts us in a specific place to launch that work, God is at work to position us to do the work that he wants us to do

EVEN and ESPECIALLY when it doesn't look like it.

This is good news, isn't it? Because for all of us there are stretches of time, sometimes long stretches, when we're not sure why we're here, what we're doing here

And if you're a Jesus-follower you might be wondering why God has you in this place, in this job, in this neighborhood or this community, because you can't seem to see any particular purpose for you right there

Nehemiah was in captivity, a servant to the king, which was a trusted position but also very vulnerable and very expendable

And maybe he's been there for years, maybe he's there for decades, and so far as he can tell his only real meaning in life is to be the guy who dies first before the king does

But God has something bigger, something better, something far more important for him to do.

If you and I are open to God breaking our hearts, like we talked about last week, if we're engaged, if we're awake and not just sleep-walking through our lives spiritually

then there are no wasted experiences, there are no wasted days, there are no wasted mistakes, there is no wasted anything—God will do something to put us to a work that is good, redemptive, life-giving, hope-bringing

The only time or reason there are chapters in our lives that are wasted or lost is if we're closed off to the God who is Lord over those seasons

Our work in the dull or confusing days is to remain open to the God who is always working in our lives to either orchestrate our steps or redeem our mis-steps in the larger purposes he has for our lives and for his purposes in the world

God has positioned Nehemiah for such a time as this—to be the person who will lead the charge to re-build Jerusalem and eventually with that to rebuild the whole nation into a noble cedar community where all the birds of the air might find their rest and make their nest

If you're wondering what on earth you're doing at your job or in your family or in this community I want to encourage you to live with eyes wide open, hearts wide open, and hands wide open before the God of the universe

who loves to put us in the STRANGEST places sometimes in order to be a part of HIS work in HIS way, in ways that we could never have asked for or imagined or dreamed of

Nehemiah is cup-bearer to the king, positioned perfectly to do something that no one else in the world could do, watch what he does:

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes [that's 4 months between the time he first got the news about Jerusalem at the beginning of chapter 1 to when this conversation takes place. And we know that Nehemiah's been praying that whole time, but it turns out that he's been doing a whole lot more here, too, as we'll see], when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, ² so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."

If you're a king, you don't want your wine-taster to look sad or miserable or disconsolate in any way, right? Nehemiah, unless you're dying, your job is to look happy!

But it's also likely that Nehemiah was one of his most trusted servants, and so it's likely that the king genuinely wants to know what's wrong

And so he does what Nehemiah did in chapter 1: he asks a genuinely engaged question, he's not ducking the obvious, someone around him is sad, he wants to know what's wrong

Here's Nehemiah's big opportunity, and here's what he does with it:

I was very much afraid, ³ but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

Pause here: Nehemiah is a rock star. If you don't know this story, never read it before, you should go home and read all of the story

And he's such a rock star that he could write his own story as if he was a man that never struggled with the stuff that you and I struggle with

But he tells us right here, that **he's scared**. He's human, just like the rest of us, thank goodness.

If the king doesn't like his request he could easily have him imprisoned or executed

"I was very much afraid"—this isn't the tragedy, this is reality. The tragedy would have been this: if he didn't get to **the 'but.'**

Thank God for the wonderful 'but's' in the Bible! This is one of those great, big old but's that changes history forever and reminds us to push through fear to something greater

Because here's the reality: I've been at points in my life where I've had a sense that I needed to do something, that God had given me something to do, and I was very much afraid and I stopped there. I never got to the "but"

And so I, didn't do what I was supposed to do. And almost every time I did that, I've regretted it.

Living a life where fear calls the shots is a recipe for a life full of regrets.

Faith is not the absence of fear. Faith is getting to the but on the other side of the fear: "I was greatly afraid BUT I said to the king" "I was greatly afraid BUT I had that difficult conversation with my boss, my spouse, my kids, my mom, my neighbor. I was greatly afraid BUT I did what I knew I needed to do anyway"

Faith refuses to give fear the power to dictate what we will or will not do. And sometimes, faith just has to say to fear, "fear, I see you, I hear you, you make sense in a certain way. This thing I'm about to do is scary, it's risky.

BUT, fear, I'm not letting you call the shots on this one. Faith is driving the bus of my life, not fear, and so I'm going to bring fear along for the ride while I step out in faith, trusting

that God is at work here in some way that I might not fully know or understand but I know that this is what I need to do.”

Nehemiah refuses to stop at the fear he feels, he pushes through to the but, and it’s what changes his life and world history forever

And the next words from the king will decide if Nehemiah goes to the dungeon, goes to the gallows, or if he goes to Jerusalem to change history forever. Here’s what the king says:

4 The king said to me, “What is it you want?”

Aha! Sweet relief! Nehemiah has been praying for 4 months that God would control outcomes that he himself cannot control.

And the king’s generous-hearted response is one of the ways that God’s hand is moving in response to four months of Nehemiah’s prayer—and he keeps praying!

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, [again, we see Nehemiah sort of taking a deep breath, pushing through fear, and this time deliberately shooting up one more prayer flare before making his big request] 5 and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

6 Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

Now at this point, if I were Nehemiah, I’d be done. I’ve gotten what I wanted, I’m doing a jig, I still have my head attached to my shoulders, I’m tagging out

But Nehemiah is on a roll, and he decides to continue to push it, because he’s been doing a lot of thinking while he’s been praying, and he knows what it’s going to take to do the job that he has been burdened by God to do

7 I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?8 And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?”

This is so audacious—“King, not only am I asking you for an extended leave of absence, I’d also like for you to resource this huge renovation project for one of your conquered peoples”

I’m surprised he didn’t say, “And the queen’s got a lovely scarf on today, I’d love to bring that with me too.”

But Nehemiah knows what he needs and he’s not afraid to ask for it in part because he’s been praying like crazy BUT ALSO because he’s been planning like crazy.

And what I find is that most of us are either planners or prayers, and very few of us are good at both.

Most of us lean in one direction of either looking to God to do it all, or ignoring God altogether and just rolling up our sleeves and doing it ourselves

But Nehemiah here shows us the power of doing BOTH! And I want to challenge you to embrace both sides of this. If you're a pray-er, we love you! God delights in your prayers! But planning can be just as holy an activity if you're willing to both pray and plan

And if you're a planner or a do-er, and prayer doesn't come as naturally to you, I want to call you to take a look at what Nehemiah does and watch how God answers his prayers for the stuff that he can't control, can't generate, can't manufacture

And I want to propose to you that all the really important outcomes, all the most eternal, all the most deep and the most challenging and the most earth-changing things are outside of our ability to do in our own strength

And I want to call you to embrace the wonderful disciplines of prayer, deep, engaged, wrestling with God, crying out to God kind of prayer.

Here's the results of Nehemiah's prayer and planning:

And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. ⁹ So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

God has positioned Nehemiah for such a time as this—to set his people on a trajectory to becoming that noble cedar he promised he would grow them into

And Nehemiah prays AND he plans, and when the window of opportunity opens up, he acts, he risks, pushing past fear to get to the but so that he might fulfill his destiny and participate in God's plan for his life and for the life of the nation

Because Nehemiah has been positioned by God for this such a time as this moment

And as we head into mid-February, 2017, I want to invite everyone to step back and take stock of the fact that we are here, as a church community, for such a time as this here in this place

I told you last week, Chatham County is the 2nd fastest growing county in the entire state, most of that growth is currently happening in the Northern Part of the county

6 years ago, where did position us as a church to meet on Sunday mornings? Right here in the middle of it!

As a result, we've grown a good bit over the past 4 years—how many of you here are new to town in the past 4 years? My friends, **We are here, for such a time as this**—repeat that with me?

In a few weeks, we're going to launch our **Pittsboro campus**.

We've got a tremendous crew of people who have already told us they're on board to get this new service started-AWESOME to watch it come together.

We're going to Pittsboro because we love Pittsboro and because we love **Chatham County** and because we know that for some people we're just too far to really be a community church for them

So if some people can't or won't come to us, we're going to go to them, just like Jesus did, to serve and love the people who are already there—say it with me: ***we are here for such a time as this***

And at the same time, **Chatham Park is in motion**—here's the rough master plan, **the first houses should go up in the next 12 months** right there that will be the beginnings of what is planned to be the 5th largest community development in the entire country since WW II—read that on the internet, so it must be true.

And if and as houses and neighborhoods go up around here, our church site in Pittsboro will have been positioned right here to connect new and old Pittsboro folks with God and with each other

And God will have positioned us perfectly to serve Pittsboro present and future. We are here for such a time as this. Would you **say it with me**? We are here, for such a time as this

A couple of months ago, we signed a contract on **10.5 acres right** around the corner from here. A couple of weeks after we signed that contract, we found out that not only is **Woods** Charter school right here, and not only **Pollard Middle** School right here

But we found out that Willow Oak Montessori school, which is a public charter like Woods is, is building a building **somewhere around** here AND we found out a week or so after that, that the Chatham County school board just approved a new elementary school going in **right across the street from** Pollard in the next few years!

There are so few hubs of community in Northern Chatham county—the schools are one of them. And by 2020 or so, there will be HUNDREDS of families driving up and down Andrews Store road all the time for school activities

And God will have positioned us perfectly to be right in the middle of all of that traffic **Would you say it with** me again? We are here for such a time as this.

Such a time as this moments don't happen every day. They happen just a few times in a lifetime, sometimes just once or twice in a lifetime or in the life of a community

And as a leadership team, as we've been watching God position us for this such a time as this moment, we've been praying and praying and praying

AND we've been planning. How do we step into this such a time as this moment in a strategic, responsible God-honoring, people-honoring way? We've all got our own little fears, but we're trying to push through to faith-filled action on the other side of that fear

The Pittsboro plan is in motion, things are moving, renovation on the space is happening, we're on the countdown clock to March 5th with lots of things to get done but that plan is moving

The land purchase has required it's own planning, especially because we want to avoid getting into too much debt.

So here's what we're doing: we're breaking this whole land and building process into two phases.

Phase 1: is a **two-year capital campaign** for the land purchase: March 2017 through March 2019, the land costs us \$250,000 for 10.5 acres, we feel great about that price and cost and then any other work we can afford

Phase 2: this will be a **SECOND 2 year capital campaign** to pay for the construction of our facility and at the earliest it would start in Fall of 2019—total cost for this is still in process but we're looking at \$2.5-3 million range.

And it will all depend on how this capital campaign goes and how much we think we can raise—because this part of the project is going to be much more expensive

Now, if anyone here has a million dollars or two that they'd like to donate, we can expedite this whole process and get started in 6 months!

But barring that, we'll be going with this process. And **our goal for this our very first capital campaign is \$300,000 over the next 2 years**

If we raise that, we'll pay for the land and cover the costs for the capital campaign, including a consultant that we've been using to help coach us through this process

HOWEVER, every bit over that will go towards expediting the process and getting things teed up and ready for us to be able to build much more quickly.

These are only very very very approximate costs, but here's what happens if we raise more funds:

\$320,000 would get us site evaluation/survey work: siting of buildings and right of ways and access points, site mapping and the like

\$390,000 would get us that PLUS site architecture and an engineering master plan for the building

\$450,000 would get us all of that plus get us going on the septic system that we'll need to have: design, engineering, and permitting

All of these things get us one step closer to being in a permanent facility. But again, if we don't get to those higher numbers but we raise the \$300k, that would be fine.

Here's a breakdown of how we might raise at least the \$300k over the next 2 years, all of this is outlined in this little packet of information, if you haven't gotten one of these yet, please pick one up on your way out

\$300,000 looks like:

- 1 Donor at \$75k
- 1 Donor at \$50k
- 1 Donor at \$25k
- 2 at \$20k
- 2 at \$15k
- 4 at \$10k
- 4 at \$5k
- 5 at \$2k (\$85/month for 24 months)
- 6 at \$1k (\$42/month for 24 months)
- 8 at \$500 (\$21/month for 24 months)

Remember: **could be 1-time** gifts OR monthly over 24 months, or quarterly or annually

And just for reference, a **\$5,000 gift over 2 years** is roughly \$209/month, we've broken down more giving levels into monthly installments in this packet

I'm already hearing stories of how people are arranging and re-arranging some financial commitments in order to free up money to give generously.

I inherited some stock many years ago from my grandparents. We can only sell that once, we're doing so and giving it here to this campaign

My family and I have made the biggest financial commitment we've ever made to anything because we believe in what's happening here

Another family told me that they're putting off some travel plans in order to be able to give.

One family told me that they're earmarking their tax return and a chunk of their annual bonuses at work for the capital campaign

One way to give might be that you've got a car payment ending soon, or a student loan payment wrapping up or a credit card that you're paying off

Maybe when that's finished in six months, you could transfer some portion of that monthly commitment to the capital campaign

I was asking someone about giving stories at other churches and in one church recently a couple sold their Harley Davidson motorcycle in order to give—serious sacrifice right there!

Many of us don't just have a stockpile of cash that we can write a large check out of, but there might be ways that you can free up some money in creative ways

Or give monthly in ways that add up

I'm asking you to be talking and thinking and praying about all of this because in two weeks, we're going to invite you to make a commitment by filling out this card

These are available today in the back on your way out if you want one.

In this example card, the couple Jay and Robin Enthusiastic who live on Birds of the Air Way have enthusiastically joined the noble cedar campaign

They're committing to \$5,000 total over 2 years and they're breaking it up: \$3,000 one-time gift and then \$84/month over the next 24 months.

We believe that God has positioned us as a church for such a time as this, and that each of us has a role to play in us becoming the noble cedar kind of church that God wants to make us into in order that we might bless and serve our entire community

For some of you that WON'T include filling out this card

some of you just can't afford it, we get that, you're welcome here, we're glad you're here, and you are no less a part of this noble cedar vision because at the center of it all is not money but Jesus and a Jesus-fueled hospitality that each of us can be a part of creating.

some of you are brand, brand new here and are still figuring out if this is going to be your church home, we totally get that, you are welcome here, keep exploring, no worries

some of you aren't sure you believe any of this and are trying to figure where you are on your own faith journey—we are delighted that you're here, welcome, you honor us with your presence

Others of us, though, we're like Nehemiah when it comes to this card—we've got a sense that we're here to participate in a such a time as this moment, but we're very much afraid

Maybe very much afraid of making a financial commitment, period.

Maybe very much afraid of making a commitment that you can't follow through on, we totally understand that sometimes situations change and we promise we won't send a mafia hit man to collect on you

Maybe you're just afraid of how the money will or won't be spent, we're committed to a very transparent, open, and honest process, you can feel free to ask us any question and we'll answer to the best of our ability

Most of us just have the ‘what if there’s not enough’ fear, right? What if I give this money away and then what if I’m not taken care of because I don’t have what I need?

I want to invite you to go to God with that fear—it’s good, it’s legitimate, there just might be a “but” on the other side of that fear that’s worth getting to!

The Scriptures tell us and God’s people throughout history have experienced that the God who gives us the resources we have in the first place is always faithful to take care of us when we handle his resources in his way

I want to invite you to acknowledge the fear but to not stop there. I want to encourage you to pray and seek the Lord and let faith instead of fear drive the bus on what you actually do

Today as we close, I want to close with two questions for you to pray about and consider from our passage in Nehemiah—two wildly important take-homes for you to think about and pray about:

1. Where has God positioned you

[work/family/neighborhood/church/school/organizations/etc] and how open are you to a such a time as this moment?

Sometimes we get lulled into complacency, into settling, into being comfortable, or even just bored and disengaged and we miss a person that God would have us to care for, a situation he wants us to do something about

Take stock of where God has put you, and then I want to invite you to inhabit that space with eyes wide open and with a humble, prayerful expectancy and faithfulness:

“God I’m willing to serve you in this place no matter what happens, but I’m open to you doing something with me here that I might not anticipate or couldn’t imagine.”

2. What fears might threaten to keep you from stepping faith-fully into work that God has positioned you to do?

You might know you’ve got a fear of risk or rejection or of not having enough when in actuality you have plenty. Step one is to admit the problem, bring it out into the light, and start to acknowledge that before the Lord.

My friends, whether this is your first week here or you’ve been here for all 10 years, this is an exciting time to be a part of Chatham Community Church

And together everyone’s invited to be a part of building a church community that is a noble cedar, a place where all the people of Chatham County might make their nest.