

Ark 05.05.2024 - Pastor Stephen Eaves

Developing Kingdom Culture

Our culture is different! We often say that we need to be counter-cultural and swim against the tide (Romans 12:2)

Jesus taught us to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. He said to be first you need to put yourself last, to be top you must become the servant of everyone...

This is the upside down kingdom and leads to behaviours that are contrary to everyday life around us.

Ark has its own culture, which defines how we are and may be different from other churches you may have been part of. A culture is: The unique blend of shared beliefs, values, practices and behaviours that characterise a community. What would you say characterises Ark?

Friendliness, kindness, generosity, caring, energy? Those can be found in lots of organisations or charities. What about our priorities of relationship with God, prayer, worship, teaching the Bible, Holy Spirit ministry, tithing?

We want to talk about some of these over the coming weeks because they are key to creating the kind of church environment that we want here. To help consider some of these topics, we will spend some time looking at Nehemiah

Nehemiah Chapters 1 and 2

The kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrian Empire and the people taken into exile in northern Iraq

Later, the kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonian Empire, the people exiled to southern Iraq and Iran

Jerusalem was plundered, the Temple and walls destroyed and only a small remnant left behind

Why had all this happened to God's people? Because they had rebelled against him and turned to other gods

Since then, two groups of exiles had already been allowed to return:

First, Zerubbabel had led a group who laid the foundations of the temple

Secondly, Ezra returned and completed the rebuilding of the temple

Then we read of Nehemiah, a man who had grown up in Babylon and never seen Jerusalem

But he meets people who have recently visited Jerusalem and his life is about to change forever...

Chapter 1

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. **2** Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem.

3 They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

4 When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

Then he prayed a powerful prayer of repentance and ended with...

11 O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honouring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favourable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me."

In those days I was the king's cup-bearer.

Chapter 2

A few months later... I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. **2** So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled."

Then I was terrified, **3** but I replied, “Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

4 The king asked, “Well, how can I help you?”

With a prayer to the God of heaven, **5** I replied, “If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.”

He then asked for supplies, army officers, horsemen and letters allowing him safe passage...

And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.

10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel.

Behaviours we want to develop at Ark:

1. Enquiring Mind

Nehemiah wanted to know more, so he asked questions

Questions are good, they dig down into the facts and help understanding

At this church you are encouraged to ask questions

We do not want you to be uninformed and we don't want to keep secrets

2. Emotional Heart

The news from Jerusalem impacted Nehemiah

We need to be moved emotionally, to show that we care about the things God cares about

We need to become stirred up! We need passion not passivity, dynamic people not dying people

We need to be tender hearted and motivated to action!

Ark has often been regarded as a passionate group of people who impact the community around us

3. Engaging Words

Nehemiah started by speaking to God. He cried out to him in prayer and fasted

Nehemiah's first response to his distress was to pray and fast (would ours be?)

Then, he waited a few months for the right time, a specific moment

Finally, he took his chance when the opportunity arose

He showed great courage, but could have lost his job or even worse, his life!

4. Expectation - God's Power

Nehemiah walked by faith and not by sight - he expected God to move in power

The king responded favourably to his request - Nehemiah had the favour of the king!

God's hand was on him therefore the king granted his request (Nehemiah 2:8)

He received provision for everything needed (food, transport, army protection), safe travel, legal documents

Do we expect God to move and work among us? We should! He responds when we act in faith

**** What might happen if we all arrived on Sunday expecting God to move in power???

5. Expectation - Enemy Schemes

There was an immediate response to Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem

The enemies of God's people were 'very much disturbed' by his plans (Nehemiah 2:10)

In the days ahead, they would try to undermine, hinder and destroy all that he was doing

Their response did not deter him. He was on a mission for God and was determined to succeed

We should expect our enemy to be hopping mad when we are living to please God. He hates it!

We must understand that we are in a battle, but the battle has already been won

Nehemiah was a waiter for the king of Babylon, but he didn't allow his status to limit him. He stepped out of obscurity into the work God had assigned for him. We can all learn much from his attitudes and behaviours