



In 1998 many people were shocked as the President of the United States of America said these famous words, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” I was a senior in high school at the time of that announcement and although I didn’t care for politics, I knew this behavior was inappropriate. As time progressed, the almost 18-month affair was uncovered which led to the impeachment of President Bill Clinton. Clinton isn’t the only president to ever fail the American people. Before Clinton, there were the issues with Nixon and the Watergate scandal.

We all know leadership failures aren’t only reserved for politicians. Small and large businesses have been destroyed by leadership failure. Churches have also had their fair share of disheartening failures. It doesn’t even stop there; leadership failures happen in professional sports down to Pee-Wee football coaches who can’t control their anger. What causes failure like this to happen? What is the cause of the demise of a leader? We see young passionate leaders who are motivated to advance a cause, promote a product, or change the world and years later we read about their failure in our Facebook newsfeed.

Let me ask a better question: What is it that Godly leaders do? We know not all leaders fail. Thankfully there are leaders who are committed to God. We’re currently in a series titled Rebuilding Your Broken World where we’re studying the leadership of Nehemiah. If you’re joining us for the first time, let me quickly catch you up. Nehemiah is an Israelite who was born in Persia and was living in the capital city of Susa. He was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, the ruler of the known world around 450 B.C. and he was living about 800 miles from the city of his ancestors. One day a bad report about Jerusalem was brought to Susa. Nehemiah was heartbroken at the report. He committed to praying for his people, and one day God opened a door for Nehemiah to ask the king for permission to return to his people and help them. Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah’s request, and this is where we will re-enter the story. Open your Bible to Nehemiah 2:9.

Action and Opposition

When we left Nehemiah last week, he had received permission from the king to rebuild the city of his ancestors. Now we see that Nehemiah has made the journey to Judah.

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.

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites (verses 9–10).

The length of the journey gets lost in “So I went...” In ancient terms we’re talking about a four month journey full of danger and potential for disaster. So this is no small deal to travel for four months on horseback. Nehemiah didn’t fly first class because he worked for the king. We don’t see anywhere that Nehemiah specifically asked for a horse or for army officers to escort him to Jerusalem. The escort is confirmation of God’s hand on Nehemiah and the amount of support he had received from the king.

Nehemiah presents the letters he asked for, back in verse 7, to the governors of the area. At this point the writer introduces two new characters to the story: Sanballat and Tobiah. Spoiler alert: these men are the bad guys in the story. The Bible tells us “They were very much disturbed” by Nehemiah’s arrival. We translate this from the Hebrew. It has a meaning of “there was a great disturbance” or “to be greatly disturbed.” It’s a long translation involving the Hebrew word “evil.” How come they were so disturbed by the visitor from Susa?

Let’s look at some of the reasons they could be disturbed and be an opposition to Nehemiah’s plan. Sanballat the Horonite probably was from one of the Beth-horon, a Samaritan town about 18 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Sanballat was governor of Samaria in 408 B.C. His name is Babylonian and suggests his ancestors were probably among those foreign people who were settled in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites who were taken captive. Tobiah was one of Sanballat’s close working colleagues. It’s generally thought he was a governor from the region, possibly the Ammonite territory. His name means “Yahweh is good” and some scholars think he was an Israelite who returned with Ezra but wasn’t able to find his family listed in the genealogical records so he became bitter. Both Sanballat and Tobiah probably felt threatened by Nehemiah.

A Secret Mission

Thankfully Nehemiah acquired the necessary letters from the king. After checking in with the governors, he headed for Jerusalem.

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days,... (v. 11).

Let me pause here. This is the first time Nehemiah has ever seen the city of Jerusalem, ever! He is an Israelite but he has never been to the city of his ancestors. I think Nehemiah takes these three days to rest. Nehemiah's physical need was rest. The four month journey would have taken its toll. The journey involved traveling through rough territory, covering 9-10 miles a day, camping at different location each night, and moving out before the sun's intense rays scored their faces. Rest was needed most at this point. He could have been following Ezra's example, who "rested three days" when he arrived in Jerusalem (Ezra 8:32).

There is an old acronym: HALT. It stands for: Hungry, Anxious, Lonely or Tired. If you ever find yourself being hungry, anxious, lonely or tired it's a good sign that you need rest. When we experience these symptoms in our life, we are more susceptible to being harsh with our children for not getting the grade we think they should have in school. There is a higher probability of being short with our waiter for not getting our order right at dinner. It might even get so bad we begin cursing at random people while we're stuck in traffic. Now I know you've never done any of these things, but I'm just making some examples of what other people do! Raymond Brown says: "Physically exhausted people are not likely to achieve as much as they desire." While he rested physically, I think Nehemiah was also connecting with God spiritually.

Then in verse 12 we see that he takes a small group of men and heads out at night to examine the wall.

I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

Why do people do things at night? Normally it's because they don't want to be seen. Think about this. Israel was discouraged. The Israelites had already tried to rebuild the wall without success because King Artaxerxes had shut the project down, claiming the city was a threat to his kingdom. Imagine how horrible it could have been if Nehemiah barged into the city proclaiming "God has sent me here to rebuild this place. Let's rebuild now!". Nehemiah needed to act tactfully and walk softly. Secondly, he didn't even know what condition the wall was currently in. Scholars estimate the wall was 1.5-2 miles in circumference. This wasn't like putting up a garden fence or a small fence around your yard. This was a huge building endeavor. Here are just two reasons why Nehemiah went out at night.

Verses 13-15 give us an account of Nehemiah's examination of the wall. It's nighttime as he leaves the city through the Valley Gate. As he exits the city he heads south toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate. The Dung Gate is where the people would discard their waste. The entire time Nehemiah is examining the wall, my guess is he is thinking about what should be a priority in rebuilding.

After he examines the broken wall and sees the remnants of the gates that were burnt to the ground, he continues around the wall toward the Fountain Gate, making his way to the King's Pool. At this point in the inspection, the rubble was so thick Nehemiah was forced to dismount his horse and examine the wall on foot. We don't know exactly how far up the valley he went inspecting the wall or how much time he spent examining it. Eventually he turns around and returns by the way he started. This wasn't a grand opening tour; this was a secret mission.

The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work (v. 16).

Nehemiah couldn't reveal his plan yet. But after seeing the wall, he was probably able to know where to start.

Nehemiah teaches us a valuable lesson here. He is so well prepared. You could probably think of a time in your life where you worked on an important project. If the project was going to be successful it was going to need a detailed plan to accomplish it. This would mean lots of behind-the-scenes planning. You are excited about working on this project but unfortunately the leader in charge prematurely did something. Instead of ready-aim-fire it was a fire-ready-aim mistake. Will you take encouragement from Nehemiah? Nehemiah did his homework. Look at all the planning and preparation that goes on behind the scenes before anything is done on the outside. Too many leaders jump in and try to make an outward difference without waiting and inspecting the situation as Nehemiah did. The application could be summed up into, "do your homework and prepare before you share."

Invitation to Rebuild

I think at this point he didn't have the entire plan detailed, but he had enough information that he could finally share with the residents of Jerusalem,

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work (verses 17-18).

This seems like it was the following morning when Nehemiah addresses them. Let's look at his motivating factors. Nehemiah begins by explaining the trouble Israel was in. A city without a wall was defenseless. Then he brings up the seriousness of the situation. Do you see the wall? Do you see the gates that have been burned by fire? Sometimes when we live in a broken place for a period of time it just becomes normal. Nehemiah was committed to rebuilding their broken world together; he had a definitive action they could take. Finally, I want you to see his

motivating factor: the main motivation is to remove the disgrace they are living in.

At this point in his short speech, I imagine the people looking towards the ground. They begin twisting their feet in the dirt and tears slowly fall from their cheeks. Emotions are running high. Thoughts are racing. They know the wall is broken but they have been so hopeless they have done nothing about it. They know the gates are burned down but they are living in such despair they have no motivation to rebuild. They live in shame and guilt, but this stranger is offering hope. Their world is broken, but everything is about to change. Sometimes you have to remind people how bad things are before you can rebuild.

Nehemiah does a great job of creating a need to rebuild the wall, but there is also motivation in his language. Did you see how he presented it? Nehemiah used words like “we,” “us” and “we.” The stranger who just arrived is going to help. Nehemiah isn’t going to present a problem and then say, “I’ll be in my new house if you need me, good luck on this massive project.” No, Nehemiah has skin in the game. He starts rolling up his sleeves to help. At the end of last month, our North Campus moved their offices. We all know moving is a tough thing and it’s great to have extra help. I heard that in the move Sandy Hughes, our Student Ministry pastor, drove up to their new offices with her summer interns and said, “What can we do? We’re here to help!” She just showed up uninvited to help. Sandy didn’t have to take a day off to do this, but she did! This is what great leaders do, they help others rebuild.

At the end of verse 17, no one has committed to helping rebuild yet. This is when Nehemiah knows he needs to share his testimony. I think verse 18 reflects Nehemiah summarizing everything that took place in chapter 1 and the early part of chapter 2. He tells the people about his prayer life and how God opened the door for him to talk with King Artaxerxes. He shares how God provided all his needs and now today he is standing in front of them. I imagine him pulling out the letters and saying, “Look, I have letters right here giving us permission to rebuild and the king is footing the bill!” At this point the people’s hope is restored and they respond in unison, “Let’s rebuild!” They can lift their heads in honor. They are seeing God work right in front of their eyes! If you remember one thing from this message, remember this: Godly leaders shepherd people to a preferable future.

Just over three years ago our elders went away on a retreat. While on this retreat they began talking about what we currently know as Vision 2020. One aspect of Vision 2020 is reaching 5000 people for Christ. Although this series wasn’t a thought at the time, this series fits into Vision 2020. For Israel it was easy to identify what they needed to rebuild; the wall was sitting in rubble, but how can we rebuild our broken world? Before we can say “Let’s Rebuild” we must know what is broken. The

answer is people’s lives. Maybe this morning it’s your life that is broken. Recently you have become aware that you are a sinner and you’ve felt hopeless but someone told you about Jesus. Can I encourage you to place your trust in Christ and allow Him to begin rebuilding your broken world?

Maybe God has already rebuilt your broken world. It’s not perfect, but God has done some great things in you. Will you take a page from Nehemiah’s playbook and begin to share your story with others? Be like Nehemiah and share your story with careful planning and preparation. Ask God to open doors for you to share. It could be sharing your faith with a co-worker, a teammate on your softball team, someone you’re working with on a summer project or a classmate. We have so many Godly leaders in our church and you have the opportunity to shepherd people to a preferable future.

Facing Opposition

When we share our faith, there is no guarantee it will be received without opposition.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?”

I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it” (verses 19-20).

When the enemies of God can find nothing wrong, they resort to criticism. Look at how these men respond. Holding their heads up high, looking down their long noses, they scoff at the Jews. Then they resort to intimidation. These men once had jurisdiction over the area but Nehemiah is in charge now. I imagine Nehemiah tapping his front pocket and saying, “You know, I have letters from the king right here, would you like to see them again?” From tears, to fasting, to stepping out in faith, to asking the king, to taking a long journey, Nehemiah wasn’t about to let them stop what God had placed in his heart. G. Campbell Morgan once said: “If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you’re serving in the wrong place.” Looks like Nehemiah is in the right place!

Nehemiah’s response to these men was crucial. He chose to ignore their ridicule and display his trust in God. Nehemiah is constantly giving credit to God for the success he finds. Nehemiah isn’t the only person to ever face opposition. I recently read *Chasing God* by Rodger Huang. After placing his trust in Christ, Rodger was working near the Tenderloin. He saw the oppression people were living in. One day he saw a young man being bullied and it broke his heart. He started in prayer by asking God what he could do and then went into action. He began making

sandwiches with his family and passing them out to young children who he shared Jesus with. But he encountered opposition and became discouraged. In his book he writes about the opposition and how he walked away from the Tenderloin for eight weeks, but God was calling him to work there, so he went back. Today we see God's hand on City Impact and Rodger's unwillingness to quit what God had put in his heart. Through Rodger's unwillingness to quit when faced with oppression City Impact is bringing the hope of Jesus Christ to people whose lives are broken and need rebuilding.

Rodger's story is great but there is an even more impacting story of a person who faced opposition. It's about a man who came to earth just over 2000 years ago. His plan was the greatest rescue mission ever conceived; it's a story of God reconciling man back to Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus encountered opposition throughout His time on earth. He was rejected by the very people He grew up with. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, the world chose to reject Him. He would enter towns and people would flock to Him. Even though Jesus healed the mute, the religious leaders chose to reject Him. Jesus made it a point to keep a vibrant relationship with God; He had never been away from God before. Even though Jesus healed the demon possessed, there were people who didn't want Him near them. Jesus was so despised that a group of Roman soldiers flogged Him and nailed Him to a cross, the worst torture device ever known to humanity. Jesus faced oppression while here on earth but He endured it because He knew what He was here for. ***"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save***

the world through him" (John 3:17). Jesus came to rebuild our broken world!

At the beginning of my sermon I asked you, What is it that Godly leaders do? Nehemiah taught us that Godly leaders stay committed to what God has put in their heart. They are willing to leave everything to follow God. Godly leaders work hard to create a plan. They plan and prepare with diligence to help lead people to a preferable future. Godly leaders also roll up their sleeves to help in the rebuilding process; they aren't "too good" to help out. Finally we saw that Godly leaders stand strong in the face of oppression; they don't quit when things become difficult.

Just as Jerusalem was broken and needed Nehemiah, today we are also in need. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down, but so were the people inhabiting the city. Nehemiah is a welcome reminder of what Godly leadership looks like. Nehemiah is a godly shepherd who led the Israelites to a preferable future. Our world is broken. Sure, we don't have a wall around our city, but lives are broken. Our need is different; we need Jesus. We need Jesus to repair marriages. We need Jesus to reunite families. We need Jesus to calm our anger. We need Jesus to reduce our stress. We need Jesus to set addicts free. We need Jesus to restore our hope so we can rebuild our broken world. Let's start rebuilding!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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