



Being into summer now, I want to say Welcome Back to many of you who have been on trips. With so many people in and out over this season, I'm giving a brief recap each week so you're in the loop. Over the past three weeks we've been looking at God's Word from Nehemiah. So far we've seen the following:

» Nehemiah was faced with a problem that broke his heart. The capital city of God—Jerusalem—stood with broken walls and ruined gates. The city was a disgrace and God's reputation was suffering.

» Nehemiah prayed for four months, received a vision from God to go to Jerusalem himself and lead a rebuilding project.

» At the end of Nehemiah 2, the people of Jerusalem agreed to Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the wall.

Today, in Nehemiah 3, we come to a section of scripture that describes **who** is working on the wall and **what** section of the wall they are rebuilding. Our passage of scripture is a difficult passage because it's all names. Whenever we come to places like this in the Bible, we face the choice of skipping over it, skimming it quickly, or reading it thoroughly. What we choose to do reveals how we read the Bible.

Often people think Nehemiah 3 is only about delegation that a great leader uses. While that's certainly true, that's not the point of this section of scripture. If that's all a person gets, this shows a shallow understanding of how to read the Bible. This is like reading the Bible like we would *Aesop's Fables*; we read it and try to come up with the moral of the story.

This doesn't get to the heart of it. Coming to a list of names like this forces us to go back to the basic doctrines of the Bible. It's a human book. We don't believe like Joseph Smith that it was written by angels. We believe that humans put pen to paper and recorded every detail within it. It represents tedious attention to detail. It's a divine book. God wrote it. God guided the human authors to write every word. It is the exact story that God wanted to communicate to humanity. This means it's really just one large story with one main idea and one story arch. Hopefully you saw this as we worked our way through The Story much of this past year.

When we look at the scriptures like this we start to see things like this: The Nehemiah in this book is pointing to the ultimate Nehemiah—Jesus—who left the safety of his palace to lead us. To remind us to forsake our self-centered lives and get about

building His kingdom. To usher us into a new and glorious city. If you think I'm reaching a bit here, take Isaiah 26:1 as an example of how the Old Testament is foreshadowing. *"In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God make salvation its walls and ramparts"* (Isaiah 26:1).

What is Isaiah talking about here? A strong city, God making salvation its walls. He's looking forward to the ultimate, eternal city of God, where there'll be no more crying and no more pain. He's talking about the new heaven and the new earth as described in Revelation 22. This is not talking about a physical city.

In other places of the Old Testament Jerusalem is a sign of something even greater that is coming: Salvation through Jesus and the new heaven and new earth. Keeping all of this foreshadowing in mind will help us understand our passage of scripture for today.

By the way, the most popular book written on Nehemiah was Chuck Swindoll's book, *Hand Me Another Brick*. He doesn't even cover chapter 3 in his book! So we are certainly entering unfamiliar territory today.

Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them.

The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.

The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah—Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth—places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of

the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.

The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Rekab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place.

The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Kol-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David. Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of a half-district of Beth Zur, made repairs up to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Heroes.

Next to him, the repairs were made by the Levites under Rehum son of Bani. Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. Next to him, the repairs were made by their fellow Levites under Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah. Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armory as far as the angle of the wall. Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest. Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.

The repairs next to him were made by the priests from the surrounding region. Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house. Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from Azariah's house to the angle and the corner, and Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the angle and the tower projecting from the upper palace near the court of the guard. Next to him, Pedaiah son of Parosh and the temple

servants living on the hill of Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower. Next to them, the men of Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall of Ophel.

Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shekaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs. Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner; and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs (Nehemiah 3:1-32).

Almost certainly, you've never heard this read before and maybe you never will again.

At first glance, what do we see here? Men and daughters all working together. Clergy and non-clergy side by side: High priests, Levites and merchants. Different trades: goldsmiths, perfume makers, merchants, servants and rulers. Different cities: people from six different cities (Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon and Mizpah, Jerusalem, Zanoah) one place under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates, people from Jerusalem, six different districts are mentioned. One thing that repeats 20 times is the phrase "next to him."

What are we meant to learn? Everyone must join in to complete the work. Most scholars, both liberal and conservative, say that this is part of a march in the Bible from a situation with great major figures to everyone being used to accomplish God's purposes. Major figures of the Bible like David, Moses, Joshua or Solomon, for example. They were called by God, anointed by God, and they did something miraculous for God and most of the people watched them. They didn't have a role.

But now, in Nehemiah 3, things have shifted. The appointed leaders of God can't do this project by themselves with everyone watching. Everyone must join in to complete the work. This is not only significant at that moment in time, it is pointing toward a progression in how God is going to use everyone in His church to do ministry after the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost.

Think about how different this is. When the Israelites had a problem early on, they called a judge to rescue them. "Samson, please go and kill some pesky Philistines." Samson relished his anointed role. He'd go and do battle to bring glory to God and the people would cheer him on.

But the Apostle Paul didn't think of himself as a singular vessel anointed by God to do the work on behalf of God's people. Instead he said, "every single person in the body of Christ is necessary and important. Some of you are a hand, some a finger, some a tongue, some an eye. He went beyond saying everyone must join in to complete the work. He actually said, "All are equally important."

- The person who serves behind the scenes (coffee, set up/tear down, communion prep)
- The person holding babies in the nursery
- The small group leader teaching the 1st–4th grade boys
- The man who's praying for his co-workers
- The student who invites an unsaved friend to the houseboat retreat
- The person who serves dinner to the homeless at Street Church
- The guys running audio and tech
- The guy giving a sermon or leading worship

On and on and on; all are equally important. CS Lewis said it this way, "Christianity thinks of human individuals not as mere members of a group or items in a list, but as organs in a body—different from one another and each contributing what no other could."

This is a significant shift that's occurring in the Bible. In this wall-rebuilding project, God is intentionally giving us a foreshadowing of how his kingdom will eventually work.

Do you see yourself in this way? Do you see yourself as a valued team member of God's church with an important role to play? Your background, your passions, your spiritual gifts are important and needed. We can't do what God wants us to do without you. Jesus says something about you in Matthew 11 that's truly remarkable. He's been talking about John the Baptist and then he compares him to you. ***"Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"*** (Matthew 11:11).

Wow! How much value do you have? This seems to mean that the simplest Christian understands what John the Baptist didn't understand: grace and salvation. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit and John the Baptist didn't. This empowers the work we do for God's Kingdom. Everyone knows the value of good teamwork. The Golden State Warriors have been a great example of a healthy, humble, functioning team. Healthy teamwork is taught in leadership trainings and adopted by companies.

But when the Holy Spirit is involved in His church, He supercharges team dynamics. The body of Christ, all working together, is an unstoppable force. Governments have tried to squash the church. Dictators have tried to do it. They've used oppression and torture.

But the church is still standing because Jesus said the church—all of God's people working together to complete His work—is so powerful that even the gates of hell can't withstand it.

Do you want some more examples? This is why evangelism was so effective in the early church. In the early church everyone shared the good news with people. It wasn't a designated role for only the leaders. The Apostle Paul emphasized this importance by calling the followers of Jesus, "Christ's ambassadors" in 2 Corinthians 5. Jesus emphasized the importance of every person joining the work of spreading God's kingdom by saying that "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Are you doing your part or are you coasting? A high percentage of people in our church are contributing and serving. That's one of the qualities of our church that I'm so proud of. If you aren't doing something, what are you waiting for? Your church needs you. God has set up His church in a way that we are missing something if you aren't in the work.

That's the first thing we're meant to learn from Nehemiah 3: Everyone must join in to complete the work. The second thing we're meant to learn is found in the 20 mentions of "next to him" through this chapter. Whenever you see something repeated in your Bible study, try to figure out what it means. It is not accidental. God did not run out of words. What is God communicating by the repetition of this phrase?

Certainly some of its meaning can be understood by the first point: everyone must join in to complete the work. But there's more meaning here. Commentators say that it is communicating that although we come as individuals into the church, "we are made one" in Jesus Christ. We all serve one Lord. We agree that He is great and we stand on equal ground of needing His grace and forgiveness. We serve next to one another in His mission to bring salvation to the world.

This means that the typical distinctions of the world don't apply in the church. People who live in an Atherton mansion are one with someone who lives in a Redwood City apartment. People with a graduate degree from Stanford are one with someone with a GED. Someone who drives a Tesla is one with someone who rides a bike.

The world equates value according to shallow things like this. Not the church. Maybe a person would say, "this seems really extreme. It seems so lofty, it's unattainable." Maybe someone would even say, "people can't stop looking out for themselves, it's too ingrained in them." I recognize the difficulties here.

But you've got to keep in mind how unique the family of God is. We're **one** in God's family because we're **all** made holy through Jesus Christ. No one enters God's family by anything of so-called personal value.

Martin Lloyd Jones points out that it's interesting in Ephesians 1:15 that Paul says *"ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."* We'd expect faith in Christ to be an indication of conversion but Paul also includes the second idea, "your love for all God's people." Your love for **all** God's people is the second characteristics given for their authentic faith.

When he became a Christian, Martin Lloyd Jones was a physician to Lord Horder in England. He was a leading young doctor. If he'd stayed in his role, he would have become part of the House of Lords. He was going to the top. You couldn't have had a better career path. Then he became a Christian and took a pastorate in a little church in a poor fishing village in Wales. After he got there, he was a young Christian and he was struggling with doubts. Satan would come and accuse him.

Martin Lloyd Jones wrote, "Very often Satan would come and suggest, 'how do you know you're a Christian?'" And he wouldn't know what to say. And then one day, after he'd spent some time in Wales in this little village he said, "I want to know Satan, why would I rather talk about Jesus with the humblest fisherwomen in Wales ... Why would I love doing that more than I love talking about medicine with my peers and other men who've gone to the same schools as me and are of the same social class?" Once he began saying that to Satan, Satan didn't know what to say and left him alone.

Do you see how Lloyd Jones, transformed by the Holy Spirit, exemplified the idea of we are made One in Jesus Christ? You probably see it some, but some of it is lost on Americans. Keep in mind that Great Britain is a very class stratified culture. He was hanging with people four or five levels below him. But he felt a bond with them unlike what he felt with people who were like

him in education, upbringing or sophisticated culture. You're a Christian first and everything else second. We are One through Jesus Christ and we serve next to one another.

The bond of grace, forgiveness and the Holy Spirit transcends everything of the worldly cultures. Next to Him, next to Him, next to Him.

The applications for each of us are quite simple. God is inspiring every single one of us today to reflect on how we are using the minutes of our days. Are we using them to build God's kingdom? Perhaps the Spirit of God has spoken to you today and you need to change your ways. If so, make a change.

Do you have the humble attitude of "next to" with the people in our church? If not, repent of your pride and build a bridge of friendship with that person.

Lastly, this miraculous teamwork and humility we're seeing in Nehemiah 3 didn't just spontaneously happen, and it won't just spontaneously happen in our church either. The action of Nehemiah 3 is the byproduct of Nehemiah's four months of praying and shrewd leadership. And if we want to see a fresh awakening of spiritual activity in our lives, where everyone is serving with their heart and passion and we are experiencing an increased bond of oneness, it will be accompanied by private and corporate prayer and shrewd leadership too.

You can join a group of us who are praying for this. You could be one of the shrewd leaders God will use.

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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