

"Understand You are Needed"

Nehemiah 3

Last week we began our yearly theme looking at the list of those who were committed to making David king because 1) it was what God spoke and so His Word must be obeyed; and 2) because the nation was divided and needed to come together under one leader whose heart followed God. We saw the men of Issachar took leadership and responsibility by understanding the need for unity under God and do their part; what they needed to do.

This morning we're going to the book of Nehemiah and we're going to explore a similar situation in Nehemiah's day that also required spiritual understanding and the faith to live it out so that God could be glorified and the people united spiritually. From David's day we now jump about 550 years later. We know from Neh. 1 & 2 it's about 444 BC. The Medes and Persians are the ruling power in the world having defeated Babylon almost 100 years earlier (536 BC) exactly as predicted by God in the book of Daniel. Nehemiah, is king Artaxerxes' cupbearer; essentially his most trusted servant and advisor [notice again like Daniel God has a godly man in politics who has the king's ear and favour]. Nehemiah lived in Susa, the capital of Persia (in the south in modern day Iran). Susa is where the book of Esther takes place, 30 years earlier under Xerxes, Artaxerxes father.

When we open the pages of Nehemiah, Nehemiah's brother Hanani (or possibly a Jewish 'brother') had just returned from Jerusalem and reported that Jerusalem was still in ruins and that the walls and gates of the city were still broken and burnt. Nehemiah is shocked and saddened and goes into fasting and praying asking that God would restore Jerusalem because His Name dwells there. He finishes his prayer in 1:11 with,

¹¹ O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.

"This man", we find out in Ch.2 is King Artaxerxes and Nehemiah prays that God would allow Artaxerxes to give permission for Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem so he can oversee the rebuilding of the walls and the gates. In Ch. 2:8 Nehemiah tells us

"And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

In the latter half of Ch.2 Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem, inspects the gates and walls at night (so as not to attract the attention of some of their neighbours who don't want to see Jerusalem rebuilt) and then gathers the leaders in the morning to tell them his plan. He says in 2:17-18

¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

But the very next verse tells us that three non Jewish governors ridiculed them and will try numerous ways to derail the work on the wall.

When God's people wisely understand the time in which we live and seek to act out our faith we can expect the enemy will do all he can to undermine God's work by demoralizing the people of God with division and negativity. How do we work together and encourage each other to keep the enemy from demoralizing us individually which hurts us as a church?

Ch.3 is a very exciting passage of Scripture, even though most will read this and say 'Why do we have to read this boring list of names and gates?' But when we understand what's here we see a spiritual strategy for keeping us together and growing stronger as local bodies of believers. The first thing we need to understand is that Nehemiah is basically giving us a walking tour around the city walls, starting with the Sheep gate in the northeast corner, travelling south and going counter clockwise around the entire city until he comes back to the Sheep Gate in v.32. He's reporting who worked on what sections of the wall and the gates that were fixed. And by listing each name he's affirming their work and building them up individually and then telling everyone how this was done in 52 days! Considering it has been in ruins for 140 years! Surely many had looked at the disgrace their city was in and said 'Somebody' needs to fix this. But that somebody is always you and me. We just need someone to rally us and encourage us to do our part. How did Nehemiah start?

When we look at lists we look at what's repeated and also what's unique. The first 2 verses show us something that stands out. Who's the first person mentioned? Eliashib the High Priest and his fellow priests. They went to work and rebuilt the sheep Gate and they also "dedicated it".

Nehemiah knows how important this job is in restoring God's Name. In order for the people to take it seriously and help out, who's support does Nehemiah need? The spiritual leaders. To stay encouraged and united ...

Spiritual Leaders Need to Lead by Example **(3:1, 17, 22, 26, 28)**

The High priest and his fellow priests began the work and "dedicated it" as well. The word for dedicated means to make holy. Fixing walls and gates was a holy task. This work was set apart to God. They knew they were in disgrace because God's Name was not being honoured. For over 100 years 3 generations of Israelites had failed to protect themselves. They failed to protect the temple. They failed to look after the city where God chose His Name to dwell.

Under Nehemiah's encouragement and organization the High Priest and the priests understand that getting your hands dirty and calloused is sometimes a holy moment. By not looking after God's city and God's house, God's Name has been disgraced.

Interspersed along the walls we see the Levites mentioned in v.17, more priests mentioned in v.22, temple servants mentioned in v.26 and more priests in v.28. They weren't there just for the ceremonial laying of the first rock; they went to work. Why? Because they understood this was holy; this was set apart for God.

When leaders lead, the people follow. When the leaders show the people that the work is ministry, then the people understand why they are doing it. Everything we do here is holy; is ministry. It's for God. Every ministry is an opportunity to glorify God by helping God's people grow closer to God. If we don't understand that then we won't see it as ministry and then it becomes drudgery. If the people don't see the leaders set the example then they won't see why they need to serve either. Nehemiah is wise. He makes sure the leadership is on board and that they understand their work in holy to God.

Some of our most enjoyable moments as a church family have been when we've gathered together to work. When we've gotten together to set up our Nativity display or clean up the cemetery or put on the addition or made and packed cookies and passed them out or put our VBS together. Those are holy times. When God's Name is on it, its ministry not just work.

Nehemiah was very smart. If you noticed in the passage some people did repairs "next to their house". To help a group of believers stay unified we must help ...

People Understand they Have a Personal Responsibility to Do Their Part **(3:1, 3, 10, 28-32)**

Why did Nehemiah assign the Sheep gate to the high priest and the priests? Because the Sheep Gate was the gate where sheep and goats were brought in for sacrifices at the temple. It was the closest gate to the temple. They have a vested interest in this location. They are going to want to make it look good and functional.

Six times we read that specific people made repairs 'opposite or in front of their house. If you live inside the city walls you would want to protect your own home. Nehemiah assigns locations close to these people's homes which would give them more incentive to work on the wall. It's even practical. It would cut down on time if they wanted to go home for lunch or work a little later.

In v.31 we read that Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths made repairs towards the house of the merchants. As a goldsmith he would have been a merchant. He made repairs close to where he did business.

Often in ministry we get involved in things that we are gifted at or have significant interest in or its part of our ministry. That makes sense. Why get involved in something you really have no interest in or have little talent for or don't see as your ministry?

What interests and talents do you have? How might God use them for ministry opportunities? God made us all unique for the very purpose of gifting us so we can use His talents in us for His purposes. Pray about it

Nehemiah realized people would rally around the places that they had a personal interest or investment in. But he knew it wasn't about someone's home or business. He taught the people

To Work Together to Glorify God

One of the most repeated phrases in the passage are

"Next to him" - 16 times

"Next to them" - 7 times

They worked shoulder-to-shoulder, side by side for 52 days to get the walls and gates repaired. It didn't come without opposition or set backs – that's explained in the next 3 chapters – but in spite of all those the people persevered to work together to bring glory to God's Name.

There is no greater testimony to God than when the community see God's people working together to magnify Him. Our willingness to work together shows a lost world the love of God. Look around you. How many people don't get along at work? How many kids don't get along at school? How many family members don't speak to each other? What about in the church? Are there people you avoid? People you're at odds with? The Bible says to be at peace with all men so much as it depends on you (Rom. 12:18). Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God.' In other words Christlike. We show we're like Christ when we intentionally love and serve those who don't like us. The world takes notice.

These people worked together to glorify God's Name. As we read the list we notice a wide range of occupations. There was the High priest, priests, Levites and temple servants working shoulder to shoulder with political rulers, guards, goldsmiths, women and other merchants.

People came from different towns to help out. Some as far as 20 miles. Some of the town names are: Jericho, Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah, Beth Hakkarim, Beth-zur, Keilah, and Tekoa. Now the men of Tekoa stand out. In v.5 we read that the men of Tekoa came to work but their nobles (politicians) were not willing to submit to Nehemiah. It may have been a safety issue; they didn't want to leave Tekoa unguarded because Israel had enemies. But it may also have been selfish reasons. The men who went may have faced opposition from those that didn't go.

In v.7 we read that men came from Gibeon and Mizpah, places that were under the control of the governors of the Trans-Euphrates, some of whom were against Israel's rebuilding the walls. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were most likely governors of their areas. These people came knowing the cost.

God's People Willingly Sacrificed and Received God's Blessing

Ministry means making sacrifices. All these people endured the ridicule and persecution from political leaders. They gave of their resources. They left their homes and work places. A few did double duty (as we see their name repeated) and they all gave of their time. And time is the most expensive gift we have to give up. Not money. Money is easy to give up. It takes almost no time to give financially and sometimes if we're honest, we give as an excuse not to get involved, convincing ourselves we did our part. And sometimes that is all we can give. But when it's right here in our own backyard, like these people, time is the greatest gift we can give.

And all these people received God's blessing! How? They saw the job until the end. They celebrated together the satisfaction of having done God's will for God's glory and it brought them together. And, they all had their names written for all eternity in the Word of God as those who sacrificed time and energy so that God's Name can be restored! How blessed can one be?

Every time we serve God with a right spirit we are blessed. Listen to Paul's promise in 1 Cor. 15:58:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because we know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

God has called us together to bring glory to his Name through this church and wherever we work, go to school and live. God has gifted us in different ways to serve Him here. Are we doing our part? Are we neglecting serving God while others are doing double-duty? I pray we would see the

need to serve next to each other through the diverse gifts we have, equally in spite of the different responsibilities we have so that God's glory shines through us!

Nehemiah rallied the people of God together by showing them that the work they do together 'next to them' brings glory to God. Each gate was just as important as another. Each place of ministry and each person who serves is integral to the work we do here. It's crucial that we build one another up so that God's purposes are accomplished. Don't let the unspiritual and ungodly people who are around you tell you anything different. They tried hard in Nehemiah, they even had short term success when work was temporarily delayed. But Nehemiah constantly came back to a vision of God's purpose based on His Word and sought to encourage God's people to see it and accomplish it together.

When you read Nehemiah, you continually read about three men named Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, who hated what Nehemiah was doing because they didn't want God's Name and God's people to have any impact on their world. But people like that come and go and eventually die and find out they were wrong. They can't stop God's work. Jesus said the gates of hell will not be victorious over His church/people.

Nehemiah helped the people of God understand what God wanted done in his day and rallied them to a God-glorifying, biblical vision of who God is and what He can do. So we can expect the enemy not to be happy and thwart our efforts. Don't empower the Sanballats, Gehsems and Tobiahs around you to control your life. Don't listen to them who have no ultimate say over you. Know that god's grace and favour is on you and when we seek to obey Him know His gracious hand is upon us and He'll do things we never thought we could do.

* * * * *
If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
at oliviet@rideau.net