



## August Message Series: Rebuilding the Wall

### Message #4 - Doing the Best of Things in the Worst of Times

Pre-Sermon Video: **Vision Defined**

#### Getting the Nod

**Welcome to the Father's House!** Man, I agree with the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord!!" I like it because when we come into the Father's House... we can truly find the answers and the reasons for the chaos of mankind. And then on top of that... we can discover the greatest purpose and call on our lives.

**Illustration of the Missionary and the Major Salary to Give His Calling Up:** A gifted and skilled young man with a bright future went to the mission field. He could've been a very wealthy businessman and was sought by many Fortune 500 companies to be hired by them. **He chose the call to missions anyway.** On the mission field his salary was very little. A large company offered him 5 times the salary he was making as a missionary. He refused. They then offered him 10 times the salary but again he refused. They said they would offer even more money... but the young man replied, "**Oh, the salary is clearly big enough - it is the job that is not**".

**The Church is much more than numbers to fill a building and financial bank accounts to build gold plated pulpits and monuments to be proud of. The Church has the greatest job of all... to SERVE OUR GREAT LORD and to IMPACT THIS SINFUL PLANET!!! AND THIS SINFUL PLANET IS SEEING THE WORST OF TIMES!!!**

**Transition: "What would it look like for the people of the church of Jesus Christ to do the best of things in the worst of times?"** In Nehemiah 2, we get a picture of Nehemiah's plan...

#### God's Take on Nehemiah's Story

NKJV | Ne 2:12-17 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work. 17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."

#### The Backdrop for This Wall-Building Story:

- **The Jews were held in captivity for 5 decades... but When Cyrus the Great overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 539BC**, he and subsequent kings released the Jewish people from their 50-year exile in Babylon. So, the Hebrews now return to Palestine, only to find their beloved country in ruins.
- **Now get this picture...** The physical infrastructure has crumbled. The economy is withered. The religious life Jerusalem is dead.
- **The first group returning was led by Zerubbabel.** There was sever sorrow at first but finally they jump-started a recovery by rebuilding the temple and the religious rhythms of the nation.

- **The prophets Zechariah and Haggai helped to fuel a spiritual revival**, and the temple was completed in **515BC**. **In 458BC, another group of Jews** also return to Palestine under the leadership of Ezra.
- **By now, the Jews have intermarried** with pagan peoples and lost their spiritual passion again.

### **Ezra's Revival:**

- Ezra leads another revival and gets the recovery back on track, but it soon stalls again.
- **Finally, in 444BC, the Persian king's Jewish CUPBEARER AND CHIEF OF STAFF, Nehemiah, becomes aware that his homeland is still in dire straits.**
- **Nehemiah leads a task force from the Persian capitol city, Susa, 900 miles** back to Jerusalem. He finds the once-renowned capitol of David and Solomon looking like the Gaza Strip does today.
- **In the space of just under two months, however, Nehemiah leads the people** in the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem to their former strength.
- **In the process, he sets up an administrative structure** that will eventually lead to the restoration of the political and economic vitality of Israel.
- **And, with Ezra's help, Nehemiah restarts the worship life of Israel.** The prophet Malachi also accents the spiritual values that must be at the heart of the nation. For a season, Israel recovers some of its ancient luster again.
- To put it another way: In the year **444BC, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi** did the best of things in the worst of times, and hope was found in the most calamitous of times.

### **Relevance to Our Day:**

- **Am I the only one here who hopes that Washington D.C. becomes familiar with this passage?**
- Yes, governmental action is surely needed to address the issues of today, but there must come a spiritual revival at the grassroots level to truly change things. **That means is must start with us!!**
- **So let me come back to that question I posed at the start: "What would it look like for the people of the church of Jesus Christ to do the best of things in the worst of times?"**
- **Let me lift up just a few thoughts for our consideration...**

### **Listen, Nehemiah knew the value of the temple, the wall, and the value of Jerusalem!**

In the overall story in the Book of Nehemiah, we find five crucial things to remember when we talk about what God has for us and for our future... and here they are...

### **Five Crucial Things for Our Future:**

- 1. Humbling Ourselves Before God. (Nehemiah 1:1-11)**
  - Nehemiah was humbled to tears with this calamity of the temple and the wall!!
- 2. Reaching Out to Those Impacted. (Nehemiah 1,2 and 3)**
  - Nehemiah reached out to God in prayer; reached out to the king for permission and resources; then Nehemiah reached out to those near Jerusalem to help him build this wall!
- 3. Clearing the Rubble. (Nehemiah 4:10)**

- **Look at NLT | Ne 4:10** Then the people of Judah began to complain, “The workers are getting tired, and there is so much rubble to be moved. We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves.”
- **There were things in the way of being able to finish the work of the wall.** They had to clear that rubble to keep from tripping over it! So, they had to stop the work to get this rubble issue taken care of.
- What’s holding us back from reaching new levels? Being married to our traditions? Is it an obedience problem? Is it something that needs to be reconciled with God?
- **Life is full of rubble!** It happens in faith. It happens in marriage. It happens in making the big decisions. And it happens in going the next mile. **It’s time to clear it!!**
- **Have you ever watched the television program “Hoarders”?** Living in that kind of home is not only unimaginable... but the worst of it all is the emotional attachment that keeps them from allowing the clean up process.

#### 4. **Challenging the Opposition as We Follow God’s Will. (Nehemiah 2, 4 and 6)**

- Nehemiah and his worker families were ridiculed the whole period they labored! They were harassed and their characters were attacked. Their personhood was mocked! There was anger that arose and intimidation.
- **There will always be opposition to the process and fulfillment to vision.** We just need to trust the Lord... think and pray reasonably... and then follow the lead of the Spirit.

#### 5. **Finishing Strong. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)**

- NLT | Ne 6:15-16 **So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. 16 When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.**
- May it be said of us, that when we have drawn our last breath and have finish our journey, “The great work we were able to accomplish was because of the help of the Lord.”
- **I want to finish strong... and I know you do too!**

**Transition: So, knowing these things... what are the best things we are to do in these worst of times?**

### **But What is Our Response to Our Circumstances?**

#### **The Best of Things:**

1. **Admit the Urgency. (Nehemiah 2:17)**
  - “Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.”
  - To Nehemiah, it was about the reproach of what his nation had become!
  - To us it is the potential of the last days; the devastation of what Satan is doing around us; the decline of attendance and involvement in Church. The fear that is created by this dreaded virus... and the danger of what our country is quickly becoming.
  - **Admit the urgency!!**
2. **Meet with God Prayerfully. (Nehemiah 2:12)**
  - “I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem...”
  - Jeremiah turned to God right after the news of Jerusalem’s devastation. In chapter 2, that prayer has formulated into a plan... that no one knew about except the leader.

- Prayer is and always has been the championed theme for God's answer to our troubles. **CHURCH...He still speaks... and we can know His voice!!!** But prayer must be practiced FERVENTLY!!! PASSIONATELY!!! REGULARLY!!! And to FAST.

### 3. Confess Our Sins Humbly. (Nehemiah 1:6)

- NLT | Ne 1:6 **listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned!**
- **Why is Nehemiah able to lead the recovery of his people?** I think it is partly because he is realistic about the sin in himself that has contributed to the breakdown of his nation. According to the most recent survey, only 1 in 10 of us in church has ever shared the Gospel or even witnessed. And the average praying time is 15 minutes a week!
- If we in the Christian community could admit that, if we could model that kind of realism and repentance, instead of blaming others, we would be doing one of the best of things in the worst of times.

### 4. Serve People Compassionately. (Nehemiah 2:5)

- NLT | Ne 2:5 **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."**
- **One of the best things we might do in the days ahead is come up with a way that our church can connect needs to those who are need-meeters.**
- What if we did that? Some of us are like Artaxerxes or Asaph. We could perhaps help someone network to find a job, or even offer a job to a member of the church who needed it. We have the ability to give to the Benevolence Fund the church uses to help someone cover a crisis bill. Others of us don't have that particular capacity. But we have practical skills that could help someone fix something in their home, or make sense of their finances, or solve a legal matter, or even cover the kids for a few hours so a mom or a couple who don't have the money can get some precious space.

### 5. We Must Take This Task with Unity. (Nehemiah 2:20)

- **In the face of opposition, Nehemiah proclaimed,** NLT | Ne 2:20 **I replied, "The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall.**

## Closing

**Illustration:** I never ran cross country in high school... but it intrigues me. They go out to these golf courses in really rather desolate places and run a couple of miles sometimes across creeks and through wooded areas. If the course is not well marked and if you got far behind from the other runners, there was a chance of getting off the course and never really getting to the finish line. Some people get distracted running the race of life. They start off following the goals and path that God has for them, but something leads them astray. Others seem to give up the race too soon. They throw in the towel when the race isn't over yet.

**I want to encourage each of you to also not be a quitter in your faith.** God has each of you here for a reason. You're in your job for a reason. You're in your school for a reason. You're in your family for a reason. God put you there and He's given you a race to run. So, run it well!!!

**The same goes for churches.** Churches start with momentum and energy and passion... and they grow with gusto. All they can think about is the lost people around them and they celebrate every time someone repents. They have a simplified purpose and goal. Reaching people for Jesus. But then, after a while they start slowing down and joy is replaced with programs; following rules replaces seeking righteousness; and souls fall farther down the totem pole of religion.

**God wants His people excited about the future!! Leaving a legacy of passion and purpose behind for those coming up soon. God give us all a vision of what can be... not just what is.**

**A Prayer of Application:**

- **We admit the urgency and the need to pray.**
- **We confess the sins of our nation... and we are like Nehemiah confessing.**
- **Help us to find our own places of service and pass on the love of Christ.**
- **May unity be our goal!! May Heritage leave a generational legacy.**