

Everyone on the Wall

Nehemiah 3

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We are not the first people to stand before a challenge and wonder if it can be done. I'd like to look at one very clear example in Scripture; a daunting task after years of complacency and indifference. Yet what happened goes down as one of the great moments in God's story.

Nehemiah is an Old Testament book. It tells the story of what happened after the Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem and took Jewish captives back to Babylon in 586 BC. After 70 years in captivity, two waves of exiles returned with the goal of reestablishing the Jewish state. Now the Persians were in power and the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes was a Jew named Nehemiah. In chapter 1, Nehemiah hears that even after many years, the returning exiles had not yet rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. A city without a wall was no city at all. He is devastated and God puts it in his heart to use his relationship with the most powerful man on earth to rebuild the wall. In chapter 2 King Artaxerxes not only gave permission, but provided resources and help for the project. Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem, surveys the broken down walls, calls the people together, and says, *"Let us rise up and build."* (Nehemiah 2:18 ESV) The verse goes on to describe the response of the people, *"So they strengthened their hands for the good work."*

Chapter 3 is essentially a description of who built the wall and which section of the wall they worked on. I am going to read the first 10 verses to give you the sense of the chapter.

"Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord. Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired." (Nehemiah 3:1-10)

And on it goes from there. There are lots of interesting human elements including Shallum, who worked on the wall along with his daughters (Nehemiah 3:12). If these were teenage girls, you know this was an act of God. Also interesting is that Nehemiah had everyone work on the portion of the wall in front of their houses. Smart. What section of the wall do you want to be the strongest? Best built? Safest? The one in front of your bedroom. Everyone had "skin in the game."

We won't likely remember their names, but the description as a whole is filled with evidences that this indeed was a work of God. Where the Spirit of God is at work, there is tremendous solidarity and unity of purpose among God's people. Yet, the Spirit of God didn't build the wall; the people did. God's blessing often feels like sweat and sacrifice.

The People Who Built the Wall

The list of names is representative. Many more than are listed labored here. The first person mentioned is Eliashib the High Priest. Why do you suppose he is listed first? Because he is the spiritual leader of Israel and any Jew reading the account would be shocked. *The high priest? Working on the wall? You've got to be kidding me.* This wasn't priestly work; this was the work of the common man. Yet Eliashib set the tone that this effort was worthy of everyone's involvement. When the high priest is cutting stone and putting mortar between the rocks, something big is going on.

There are fascinating combinations of people working side by side. In verse 8, Uzziel the goldsmith is laying bricks. Who is next to him? Hannaniah the perfume maker. Unless things have changed a lot over the years, I don't see goldsmiths hanging out with perfume makers. Yet, they lock arms on the wall and they build. High Priest. Men. Women. Teenagers. Perfume makers. The mission was so important that everyone had a place, everyone's contribution mattered. That's unity.

Lest we be too utopic about this, in verse 5 we read, *"And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord."*

What is going on here? The Tekoites are a clan and most of them worked diligently on the wall. Yet, not everyone. Their nobles would not "stoop" to work on the wall. Has there ever been a work of God where there weren't some Tekoite nobles in the mix? The text indicates that behind their refusal to help was a sense of superiority that kept them from joining in. This is not too hard to imagine. If they were nobles, perhaps they felt like the work was beneath them. *We are nobles, we don't get our hands dirty.* Perhaps they resented the new governor Nehemiah. *Why was he put in charge? Who does he think he is? Why wasn't I asked to do this?* Perhaps they were critical of the plan. *The wall shouldn't be rebuilt here, it should be there. I think the color of the stone should be a softer hue of cream than the one selected. If I was in charge, this whole operation would be running better...No, no, I'll not be personally involved in this.*

It reminds me of the story of D.L. Moody. He was criticized for the way he went about his evangelism. His response to the individual was, "My doing it poorly is better than your not doing it at all."

How long had the walls laid in ruin while the Tekoite nobles were in a position to do something about it? Decades. Yet when Nehemiah leads people to do something about it, they turn into scoffers and mockers. The point? Even when God is working, we can expect a few Tekoites in the mix. Don't be one of them. You don't get the joy of being a part of anything. As Paul Harvey once said, "I've never seen a monument erected to a pessimist."

Lessons for Bethel Church from Nehemiah 3

Great and noble gospel labor requires everyone “on the wall”

We see the spirit of this in Nehemiah 4:6, *So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

How was this done? It was the attitude of the people. Imagine if the list of names was far shorter or if those involved did far less. Is Nehemiah even a book in the Bible? Probably not. Why? Likely the wall would never have been built. The opposition and the threats and the size of the project would have eventually overwhelmed them. It took *all* the people working with *all* their might for the *entire* wall to be done.

It’s amazing what can be done when *everyone is on the wall*. They all thought, *I have a role to play in this*. Do you think they look back at these 52 days of building as a waste or the greatest days of their lives?

How does this relate to moments like our *Mission Them 2.0* fundraiser? Right now, that’s our wall. We will have other “wall” moments. I am personally looking forward to being a part of upcoming work days at our Gary facility. If I know our church and the number of people who will show up, it will go down as the mother of all workdays.

Hobart/Portage will be another wall. But right now, our wall is raising the funds for this. In the church we’ve got Gibeonites and Meronothites, and goldsmiths and perfume makers. We’ve got it all here. In financial terms, we have people who can “build” a large portion of the wall and others who can only build a little. What is needed is *everyone on the wall* and no one acting like a Tekoite noble, who thinks that this is somehow beneath them.

Who are you in the story so far? What a joy it would be to see everyone on the wall doing their part.

Unity is both biblical and beautiful

We tend to think of unity as the absence of conflict, like in marriage. Are we unified? *Well, we didn’t throw anything at each other today*. Unity is not the absence of disunity but the visible expression of love and relationship. It is active. We work together.

We see that in chapter 3. Over 20 times it says, and *next to him built so and so* or *beside him built so and so*. The picture is of a wall seamlessly being built. Each section had to tie in to the next. It had to be built with another person’s work in mind. “Eliashib, how about if I build it to here? We’re thinking that it needs to be 20 feet high at this point. Does that sound good to you?”

“Great. We’ll meet you halfway.” That conversation happened over and over for 52 days. “Can I get some mortar from you?”

“Yeah, you got any rocks with a flat side like this?”

“Yeah. I’m going to get some water. Anyone on your section need any?”

They were working together. This is beautiful and biblical. Paul writes at length that the church is like a body, with many different working parts but only one body. Everyone was serving for the common good. Cooperation. Relationship. Teamwork.

Who are you next to on the wall? Who are you doing cooperative ministry with? Small group? Ministry team? Prayer team? Everyone needs to be next to someone else. They

could be totally different from you. "I'm Mr. Goldsmith and this is my brother in Jesus, Mr. Perfume Maker." That's the beauty of a biblical church; we unite in Christ for one common purpose, to glorify God and enjoy him forever together.

Jesus is on the wall with us

Whenever you read the Old Testament, remember the main theme is Christ. He said as much to the disciples on the Emmaus road in Luke 23. They all speak of him. Where is Jesus in Nehemiah 3?

Christ is Nehemiah, the great leader of his people. Christ is Eliashib, our faithful high priest who didn't come to be served but to serve. Christ is Artaxerxes, the great king providing for our needs. Whatever is admirable here, Christ is the goal of it all. He is our prophet, priest, and king. This is why serving him calls for our greatest effort, even more than whatever it took to build that wall in 52 days. That wall is gone now. The wall we build is the gospel in people—and that wall and the church will never crumble. *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* (Matthew 16:18)

This is our wall and in many ways, Bethel, this is our moment. I have been amazed over and over again at how our church in the past has risen to moments of challenge. We've drawn together. We've pulled together. Look what God has done. This is about the kind of church we are going to be and the unknown lives, perhaps hundreds or thousands, yet to be introduced to our Savior.

Everyone on the wall. Everyone with skin in the game. Let's make this our Nehemiah 3.

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