

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

Nehemiah 3

Nehemiah, cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, was heartbroken when he found out about the condition of Jerusalem, the Holy City. The walls were down, the gates burned, and seemingly no one cared.

Jerusalem should have been a place of respect—a city the world looked at and knew God was worshipped there.

Nehemiah began praying about Jerusalem, “Lord something needs to be done.” God answered his prayer, “Nehemiah, you’re right, and you are the one to do it.” Nehemiah said, “Okay Lord.”

Trusting God, Nehemiah asked King Artaxerxes for time off to go to Jerusalem, for the king’s authority, and for permission to use the king’s lumber in the rebuilding of the gates.

When Nehemiah saw the fallen walls of Jerusalem, his heart was broken again. He explained to the people why he was there and what needed to be done.

1. Partners in the work.

Just as 1:4 may be the key to understanding Nehemiah, chapter 3 may be the most exciting chapter—the secret of why the wall was built so quickly. Let’s look at some of these partners:

v. 1—Eliaship the High Priest and his fellow priests are listed first. That’s important! They were setting an example. Jerusalem’s priests wanted to be as good as their message. They committed themselves eagerly to the work

That Nehemiah’s list starts at the Sheep Gate is also very symbolic. The Sheep Gate provided easy access to the temple. It is saying, “Put God first.”

Putting the Sheep Gate at the beginning graphically reminds us of Christ's mandate to "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." The priests dedicate this first section to the glory of God, and in doing so encourage the other partners.

v. 2—The men of Jericho built the adjoining section and the men of Zaccur and his people built next to them.

v. 3—The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate—and look at the names in v. 4. Meremoth, Meshullam, Zadok—all working on their parts, their sections.

v. 5—Folks from Tekoa took care of the next section, even though their nobles didn't support the work.

In v. 7 there were Giveonites and a Meronothites working side by side. In v. 8 goldsmiths and perfumers worked together on the wall. In v. 9, Rephaiah ben Hur repaired the next section.

In v. 12 Shallum and his daughters made repairs—it was a family affair. In v. 13 the residents of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate and 1000 cubits of wall all the way to the Refuse Gate.

In v. 17 the Temple workers, the Levites, did their part. Don't you love v. 20—Baruch, zealously repaired another section. In v. 22 the valley priests got involved making repairs to the wall.

In v. 23 Benjamin and Hasshub worked on the wall in front of their house. Azariah worked on the wall beside his house. In v. 26 the temple servants of Ophel worked. In v. 27 the Tekoites of v. 5 had already started another section.

In v. 29 the gatekeeper of the east gate made repairs. In vv. 31-32 more goldsmiths and businessmen were doing their part. Everyone was doing whatever they could.

This chapter is full of names and positions and we're tempted to skip over it. Yet it is not a dull recital of forgotten names. Nehemiah preserves the story of heroic people who played their part in the story of God.

His list preserves the names of those workers who left the comfort and security of familiar surroundings to share and partner together in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall.

This is one of the most exciting things—gives me goose bumps—God's people working together. We can accomplish great things when we work together.

Over the next several months we are going to have to work together. Not only will each of us need to sacrificially give above our regular tithes, but we will also need to be patient, and to do whatever we can to help in the process.

Soon our worship services will be moved to the Conference Center. This room will be renovated. I believe great ministry opportunities await us through this entire process.

How can we do it? By working together! The entire third chapter of Nehemiah is an object lesson in unity—everyone doing their part. Everyone did something. Why? Because they knew it was...

2. Something greater than themselves.

Say to yourself, “There are more important things than me.” One of the most important lessons we can learn as Christians is that we are part of “something greater” than ourselves.

One thing that will stop a church from being what God wants it to be is to think small. All of us are part of something larger than ourselves. It’s much more than our little corner in Albuquerque.

We are part of the great movement of God taking place in our world. When you accepted Christ as your Savior you signed on to His army. You can be a good soldier or bad. God specifically tells us in Eph. 4:11-12, that in the church He . . .

“. . . gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Every one of us is responsible to build up the Body of Christ—the church. Nehemiah specifically mentions people from a wide variety of different backgrounds, trades and localities working together on the shattered wall.

Many of these were people not accustomed to the physical labor and drudgery involved in building construction. The whole operation would fail if their ranks were disrupted by division and discords.

Over the centuries the work of Christ’s church has been lovingly carried on by a vast army of women and men who were willing to do anything which would further God’s cause.

They have been teachers, building repairers, fellowship hosts, Lord's Supper preparers, flower arrangers, home visitors, church cleaners, nursery workers, and on and on—scores of other tasks which will never be acclaimed this side of heaven.

But they have been done for God's glory and other people's good, and that was reward enough. Without Nehemiah's list the identity of those who worked on the wall would never be known.

But the surviving record reminds us that individuals matter in the Lord's work. The church across the centuries has been enriched by the unacclaimed ministry of innumerable believers.

To have a fulfilling life in Christ you've got to get in the game. I've gone to several Denver Bronco games.

There were 22 men on the field who were actually in the game. There were thousands in the stands yelling and screaming. But they weren't personally involved.

They don't really know what it is like to be in the game. It is not God's intention that the work of the church is done by a few people—it never was. That's a formula for failure.

A growing church is built by the efforts of a majority of the people, not by the pastor or the paid "professional" staff. You are much more valuable being in the game, than by being armchair quarterbacks.

The church is harmed when you refuse to be in the game—to get involved. I believe every Christian wants to be in the most important undertaking in life—reaching others for Jesus. Be a positive, encouraging and supportive Christian. If you attend Del Norte Baptist, you have a stake in all this.

Don't be a spiritually unemployed Christian. What happens when you are unemployed? No paycheck. Money runs out. Can't buy food or clothing. Bankruptcy.

Spiritual unemployment leads to spiritual bankruptcy. You're hurting yourself. You're dying on the vine. What would have happened if Nehemiah, all excited, had come to the people and said "God wants us to rebuild the walls of the city," and only 20% had responded?

You know what would have happened. The wall wouldn't have been rebuilt. But the real tragedy would be the people remaining in disgrace.

They would never have fulfilled their potential in the Lord. They would have gone through life blaming others for their problems.

God wants the best for us. He's given us the time, resources, and authority. But He's not going to do the work for us. He will bring the increase when we faithfully work at it. Finally, I want you to see one more important thing:

3. Grouches didn't discourage them.

As you enter Portales, NM, from either direction, there is a billboard that says, "Portales, home of 17,000 friendly folks and 3-4 old grouches." Obviously the town of Tekoa had their own grouches. Look at v. 5: The nobles of Tekoa would not work.

They didn't support the effort. (Why bother. It's useless. It's impossible). It seems there are always grouches—those who grumble and complain. Del Norte is their church, but they refuse to get in the game.

When they talk about happenings at the church they always say, "Do you know what they are doing?" Rather than, "Look what we are doing."

They become spectators rather than players, armchair quarterbacks critically evaluating the work of the pastor and staff, yet refuse to be on the team. (Like non-voters)

Their lack of involvement and unwillingness hurts their church. And it is devastating to them personally because they can't grow spiritually. They don't have the fulfilled, abundant life promised by God.

They claim to be lovers of the kingdom, but are unwilling to be cross-bearers: I'm sure that if asked the nobles of Tekoa would have considered themselves to be good Jews.

I believe the only people in life who are truly happy are Christians who have figured out how to serve. Jesus Christ calls us to sacrifice.

He calls us to bear our crosses in His name. To be a Christian means to count the cost, take up our cross daily, and follow Him wherever it might lead.

At the end of life how much you have given, not how much you have gotten is what's going to matter. What did Nehemiah and his partners on the wall do? They went on in spite of the grouches.

Sometimes the real leaders of a church are not those perceived to be the leaders. Real leaders are those willing to be involved. God wants you to see the need, step up to the plate, and get into the game—actively involved—a leader in this church.

The greatest reward for those working on the wall was to work together amicably and to leave something behind which would outlive their days. To succeeding generations those walls were vocal. Their stones cried out with a message evident to all—Glory to God.

Application:

God has given each of us everything we need to accomplish His work. He will not do the work for us. That's our job—working in unity of purpose and spirit. When we are faithful in this way, God will bless us beyond what we can even begin to imagine.

Most of us will not physically help remodel, though some are helping already (baptistery, playground). But all of us can pray for safety for the workers and smoothness in supplies and labor and for the staff as we struggle to make sure everything works.

All of us can give money—always above our tithe; that's important. Months ago, in anticipation of this time, Luaine and I started giving to the Building Fund just for this remodel.

Everyone can be patient and encouraging through the process of worshipping at the Conference Center and Sunday School in our regular classrooms.