

“Working Together”
Nehemiah 3
Rev. Min J. Chung
(Lord’s Day Service, September 24th, 2017)

Nehemiah 3

¹Then 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. ²And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

³The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁴And 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. ⁵And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

⁶Joiada 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. ⁷And 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. ⁸Next 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. ⁹Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. ¹⁰Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. ¹¹Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹²Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

¹³Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. ¹⁴Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

¹⁵And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David. ¹⁶After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. ¹⁷After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. ¹⁸After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. ¹⁹Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress ²⁰After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of

Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. ²² After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. ²³ After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. ²⁴ After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. ²⁵ Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh ²⁶ and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷ After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹ After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. ³⁰ After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. ³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner. ³² And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

Introduction

This chapter is hard to read, but easy to analyze. It's constructed around the 7 gates of the city. Nehemiah is in Jerusalem, and he's acting as a governor, rebuilding the city and the people of God. God is raising a ruined city through Nehemiah. This construction is one of the most amazing things that happened in redemptive history – in terms of action and doing. It is constructed around 7 gates of the city. 10 might have been named, but seven, moving in a counterclockwise direction, beginning with the Sheep Gate on the north side of the city next to the temple enclosure. The account suggests most of the rebuilding had to do with the gates because enemies assault the gates.

A paragraph or a group of several paragraphs is devoted to the repair of each section. It is one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament in terms of determining the topography of Jerusalem. About 40 key men are named as key players in the reconstruction of about 45 sections.

The first 15 chapters detail the repairing of the northern and western walls. The rest of the chapters are about the construction on the eastern wall. How does building a wall around Jerusalem relate to us? The Old Testament is the visible picture of the New Testament reality that is coming. It's a picture of the Gospel and Jesus. The New Testament helps interpret what happened in the Old Testament for us.

-Hebrews 11:10 *“For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”*

This verse is talking about Abraham, father of our faith. Abraham is representative of all the saints in the Old Testament. God is building a city through the Israelites.

-Hebrews 11:16 *“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”*

The building up of Jerusalem and the Israelites after exile is a picture of the heavenly city that God is building in us and for us in the New Testament. That city is pictured in Revelation 21:14-15.

-Revelation 21:14-15 *“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”*

God is building us as His city – as His dwelling place, a place where He is worshipped. It’s the heavenly city that is coming. Just as God is building Jerusalem, God is building us, the church of Jesus Christ. In this way, all the principles that we see in the book of Nehemiah are applicable to us.

I. Lessons on working as a leader

A leader is important in society and in the Bible. We need to strive to be leaders with right motives, so that we can help people and grow. Today people are desperate for true leaders. In this book nothing was being done in Jerusalem until Nehemiah came on the scene. One leader made a difference in the nation and in history.

A. A leader has to have a vision

-Nehemiah 2:11-13

We know he received a vision in Nehemiah 2:11. King Artaxerxes sent him to Jerusalem, and he spends three days there. What does he do in those three days? He sees God and sees the city. He gets a vision of God and a vision of the work to be done. Verse 12 notes, *“what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.”* He was meditating on his calling. God is instilling and strengthening in his heart what to do for Jerusalem.

Then the vision of the city – Verse 13: *“By night I went out through the Valley Gate [...], examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.”* He had a vision of God and a vision of the problem. He had vision into the Word of God and the world of man. He saw the Bible, and he also saw the news. Through seeing both, he can be the solution to the problems of the world.

Leaders are able to see what ought to be done, so that they can gather the troops to do those things. He sees what no one else sees. A leader has to see God, so he can see what God wants

him to do with the problems of the world. God is the problem solver. But he always redeems the world using people that he chooses by instilling in their hearts what to do for their broken Jerusalems. So we must see God and the world. God will instill in us what he wants do in a city – in a place through us – so that we can lead the redemption of this world.

B. A leader must organize and delegate [2, 4]

Some people are more visionary and then are unable to execute any kind of tangible plan. Some people can organize and take care of logistics but lack vision and cannot see the bigger picture. We need a balance of both. Having multiple leaders can help, but if one person can see the vision and also organize and delegate, that is optimal.

Verse 2-4: “*And next to him, ..and next to him, ... and next to them...*” A vision of God in a leader becomes a plan for people. What does he do after he sees? God’s vision is instilled in him. He sees the city. He organizes people. Nehemiah knew where each person and each group should work. It is obvious from the smooth operation of the entire project outlined in the chapter that Nehemiah had done extensive planning. He puts people from outside the city into places where nobody else is. Usually he puts them in charge around their homes because they’ll be more motivated to protect their people. He had figured out in advance how to go about this huge task. He broke the project down into manageable units. He assigned available workers to various sites.

There is nothing wrong with organization as long as we are flexible enough to adapt. Sometimes people emphasize that the church is a living organism, so you can’t plan and you have to simply trust in God. Well, every living organism is highly organized. God uses our minds and thoughts together and uses our plans.

Nehemiah could not possibly have done all this work by himself. He had to entrust and delegate it to others and give them authority to get the job done. As a leader, it may be easier to do everything yourself, but in the long run when you delegate, you can do a lot more. And in the big picture, you ultimately do more for the next generation. The next generation needs trained people. As the job grows in size, the necessity of delegation grows. Some leaders keep their hands on everything, and they burn out as a result. If God has called you to lead, always ask yourself, “Can someone else do this more effectively than I? Do I need to do this, or can I do something else that only I can do?” By delegating you involve more people and you get more done. More importantly, you train them, so that God’s work doesn’t just add but it multiplies.

A leader must motivate people. The Jews had been back in the land for 90 years, and the wall still hadn’t been built. Nehemiah got everyone excited. They went to work and put the wall up in record time in spite of all types of opposition. The difficult thing about motivating a group of people is that what motivates some turns off others. Still the job of a leader is to motivate everyone.

Leader must also oversee. Delegating does not mean you dump work on people or micromanage. Dumping is telling people to do work without training them in the process.

Micromanaging is telling them how to do it and then giving them 10,000 rules on how to do it – not giving them room to grow and fail so that they can grow through that process.

C. A leader must not seek credit for work that is done together

In terms of work in itself, there is a hierarchy, but in terms of what God sees in the kingdom there's different role. Leading is just one of these roles. Being a leader is not better than others. It's just one of the ways you serve God. A leader must not mind if credit goes to other people. Look at all the names that were recorded in this chapter. Thousands of years later, we are reading them because a leader gave them credit. Out of all the names in this chapter, guess which one is missing. There's no mention of Nehemiah the leader. He did not claim the credit for himself. In the next chapter, we see his thinking:

-Nehemiah 4:6 “... *for the people had a mind to work.*”

He gives credit to the people. We see another leader who does the opposite and takes all the credit in Daniel 4:30-31. King Nebuchadnezzar is the leader of one of the biggest kingdoms in history – the Babylonian kingdom. This is what he says in his high palace looking around the city:

-Daniel 4:30-31 “*and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” 31 While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,”*”

Nebuchadnezzar gets proud and God takes the kingdom away. In Nehemiah 6, we see Nehemiah, in contrast, crediting people and giving all the glory to God.

-Nehemiah 6:16 “...*for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.*”

A good leader always takes a little more than their share of his blame, and a lot less of his share of the credit. He was happy to give others the spot light and kept himself in the background. He put the people in the place of popularity and placed himself in the place of anonymity. He lifted others, encouraged others, and remembered others. Leaders in one sense must give others proper recognition if they need to be recognized. Nehemiah wrote down in detail who was doing what. Nehemiah recognized every worker, but more importantly, by their names being listed in this chapter, we know that God recognized them.

A leader is someone who puts fire into the hearts of people so that they want to do it. They feel they must do it. They can't help but do it. They are so motivated to do it. A leader gets people to that place. The resources and people were all there, but nothing happened until a man with a burden from God came – until someone had the fire of God and lit the city with it. The dead bones were in the midst of ruins, but they start to rise and become God's people when a leader whose heart was on fire lit them on fire for his glory.

II. Lessons on working together

God uses all kinds of people to work together: rulers, priests, government officials, religious workers, men, women, craftsmen, people from inside and outside the city. There was a place for everyone. Everyone has a role in the work of the kingdom of God.

A. We need to learn to work together for a common goal [2, 4]

“Next to him, next to him, ... next to them ...”

Nehemiah is coordinating everything. Everybody had to do their part in order for all the gates to be connected. Every person knew his/her task and did it. They did it in harmony with others. The individuals building the gates had to coordinate with the individuals building the wall.

In the church, it's not enough to have independent ministries, even if there are many. We need to work together in supporting the overall goal of Christ—expanding the kingdom of God. While some work in front of their own home, many others came from distant cities to help. After the project was through, they returned home without any personal benefit. They were willing to work for the overall cause together—that the name of the Lord would no longer be reproached among the nations and that His name would be lifted.

B. We need to learn to contribute our part for a cause [2-3]

v.2” *And next to him the men of Jericho built...*”

v.3 *“...built the Fish Gate”*

‘Built’ is in regards to the building the wall part. Building the Fish Gate is in regards to the gate part. Everyone could not do the same job. Hanging a large gate is not an easy task. Some were strong enough to carry heavy stones and bricks. Others had to do lighter work, but each worker was important to the cause.

-1 Corinthians 12:4-6 *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone”*

These were workers that were willing to complement each other for the sake of the overall cause. Uniformity and unity should not be confused. Unity does not mean uniformity—everyone looking the same. Unity is about sharing the same heart and purpose. To accomplish God's purpose, we need willing workers to do their part.

If a church is dysfunctional, it becomes like a sports arena—30,000 people who themselves need to exercise while watching 20 people working who badly need rest. We all have to participate as much as we can. As we strengthen one another, we go out and share Christ to the world. That's what our church should look like.

C. We need to be willing to do work that we are not gifted at if needed [1, 8-9, 12, 14]

Sometimes we have to do things that are outside of our strengths because there is a need. What would priests, goldsmiths, perfumers, and ruling officials know about building a wall?

v.12 “...*he and his daughters*”

In those days, daughters did not do this type of work (it's different now). They were doing things they were not used to doing. Sometimes people say they're not going to do something because “it's not their gift.” What I would say to that is you should concentrate your efforts toward your strengths, but you should not limit your participation to just your strengths, especially when there are needs around you that you are capable of contributing towards. Sometimes no one else can do it, so you have to do it. The point of Nehemiah 3 is that everyone got involved in whatever they could do, regardless of specialty, gifting, or strengths.

My favorite person in the chapter is Malchijah (Nehemiah 3:14). He repaired the Dung Gate. The Dung Gate was south of the city and opened to the Kidron valley where people brought all their trash to burn. If he's the same Malchijah from verse 31, we know he was a goldsmith by trade. He had already helped out with repairs of another part of the wall. So after he repaired the Dung gate. He not only did it, but after he's done, he went to another city. There are few people that are mentioned twice. Malchijah realized there was a job that needed to get done and was willing to do it for the sake of the cause.

III. Lessons on work

A. Your work matters

Was building this wall in Jerusalem a secular work or a sacred work? Was it for the country or for God's Kingdom? It doesn't matter if you're working inside or outside the church. It doesn't matter if it's church work or work-work or in-the-home-work. According to the Bible, all those things can be God's work. What makes work secular or sacred is the motive, not the context. If you're doing work for yourself, it's secular. If you're doing work for God, it's sacred.

-Colossians 3:23-24 “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

Whether it be at a 9 to 5 job, home, or church, the work you do can serve somebody. When you do things for God, He will give you spiritual power. Your heart becomes a funnel to through which the power of God can flow, enabling you to love others. Remember you are made in the image of God. Whatever you do can picture God if you have a heart to love God. If you are loving God through your work, not only are you picturing him, but the love of Jesus Christ can be transferred through your work. As believers in Jesus Christ, your work matters. Whatever you're doing, it's ultimately going to serve somebody. It becomes valuable.

B. Your attitude in your work matters [5, 27]

v.5 *“And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.”*

There are two examples here— one positive and one negative. The nobles had a negative attitude. The Tekoites had a positive attitude— they were one of the groups of people that did more than one job:

v.27 *“After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.”*

The Tekoites had a maximal attitude. They were thinking, “What else can we do?” On the other hand, there are minimal people that want to get by through doing as little as possible. We need to be like the Tekoites. We need to have the kind of attitude that always seeks to do more. When we do, we can become excellent workers— the kind that have credibility, the type that help and don’t hinder work.

-Colossians 3:23-24 *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”*

-1 Corinthians 15:58 *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*

When we image God and love God in and through our work, we serve others in such a way that they can experience the love of God. We need to be these kinds of workers. Then we can build relationships and earn credibility, giving us a platform from which we can show the worth of Jesus Christ.

C. Your faithfulness in your work matters [1-2, 4]

The word “built” is constantly mentioned in this chapter in perfect tense. Hence, we can infer that each individual mentioned in the chapter kept busy and was faithful to his/her task until completion. You have to learn to be faithful until you finish something. Everyone in this chapter was a volunteer. It is the toughest thing to coordinate volunteers. Volunteers are not paid. It’s hard to motivate volunteers. But these volunteers still worked hard and were faithful.

Why is it important to be faithful? When we work, regardless of the type of work, it’s always ultimately for Jesus. We need to be faithful because we need to image God who is faithful. As we love God through our work, we show the value of God. When we serve with Christ-likeness, others can experience the love of Christ through us. That’s what can happen when we go about our work faithfully. That’s why it’s important for us to be faithful in every little thing that we do.

Conclusion

As I was reading Nehemiah, one thing I wondered was where they got the bricks to build the wall. Nehemiah 1 tells us that the wood came from King Artaxerxes, but nothing is said about the source of the bricks. Looking at two words in particular, we can find an answer.

‘Built’ is used 5 times, and ‘repair’ is used 35 times. The word we use in contemporary English is ‘built,’ but the original language implies something closer to the word ‘rebuilt.’ The point is that Nehemiah did not use new stones for the wall. He was using old stones that were amongst the broken down rubble. The original stones were never cast away. Instead, they were cleaned, reshaped, and reused— just like what God does with his people. This is the most encouraging part about this passage. God used ruined bricks— failed ex-slaves from exile. All the necessary materials to build the city were already available amidst the debris from the ruined city. God is never going to cast you away. He’s going to redeem you and rebuild you. And then He’s going to use you. I know some of you constantly fail, but He uses stones from the rubble, and He will use you too.

When you see a city filled with problems or a sinful person, do not cast them away. Have the heart and the eyes of God to see redemptive potential. So many people lay like stones in the dust waiting to be recovered and reused. Who will be their Nehemiah? I pray that every one of us will be Nehemiahs— that God would give us the vision to go forth and be used by God to rebuild others’ lives, broken families, and problem filled cities. God is not going to create new, different people. He’s going to redeem you. He’s going to re-create us.

The other word that is used is ‘repair.’ Repair means to make strong, to grow firm, or to strengthen. Nehemiah was in the business of repairing, meaning he wasn’t interested in a quick fix. Nehemiah strengthened the wall. It wasn’t a patch up job. The individuals in this chapter were building the city for the glory of God, so they did their best. They were redeeming the stones and strengthening the city. That’s what happens in the church. We redeem those who are failures. We want to strengthen and train them so that they will be used to expand the kingdom of God.



In this picture, many hands are being used to form a cross. There are many people showing His beauty and worth. We need to be a community with a burden for others so that we can be restored. We need to be a community of truth so we can rebuild and repair one another. Then our broken city can turn into Jerusalem. A Gospel community needs to first be a healing community— tender and truthful. Tenderness is needed for restoration. Wisely dispensed truth is needed for growth. Then as we rise from our sick beds, the healed community becomes the army of Christ. We need to work together. ‘We’ is always stronger than ‘me.’ We need to build each other up.