

Nehemiah 3:1-32

James said, “*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*” James 2:14 Couple vs later he said, “*But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*” James 2:18. And surely the life of Nehemiah illustrates in the practical what James is saying in principle, that faith that saves produces a net effect in my life, a change, a work. I can’t work to *be* saved, but once I am saved I’ll occupy myself with my Father’s business.

Ch 3 of the book of Nehemiah is all about the work, the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. What is it that’s prompting them, that’s provoking them to do the work of rebuilding? Faith, perhaps you recall from last week that the overall thrust of ch 2 was the faith of Nehemiah. We saw patient faith, we saw a pursuing faith, and we saw a provoking faith, and now as we enter into ch 3 we’re stepping into the overflow of that faith, which is works. And what’s the purpose of the work? To bring glory to God, remember as Nehemiah was speaking to the nobles, to the leaders of Jerusalem and he said you guys we’re a disgrace, Jerusalem is a reproach, let’s rise up and build the walls so that we’ll no longer bear the reproach and be that disgrace before the enemies of Israel. The idea there being that they were supposed to be the reflection of the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, 1 true Living God, and yet look at the way His city lie desolate, completely open to enemy onslaught, the walls were in ruin, in rubble, let’s bring dignity back to we as His people, and give glory to Him in the work of rebuilding the walls. And really that’s the purpose of all ministry, to bring glory to God, not the magnification of man, but rather the *exaltation* of God. Those same words that Jesus spoke about His earthly ministry ought to be a motivating factor in *all* ministry, “*I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.*” John 17:4 People, places and organizations will give you all kinds of work to do and you’ll never finish it all, that’s not to be your concern, what has *God* given you to do, be faithful and focused to finish *that*. And as we humbly, yet faithfully, press forward *in* the work, we bring glory to God *through* the work.

Ch 3 of the book of Nehemiah is another one of those ch’s that as we read them on our own we generally quickly pass over. It’s a bit laborious, tedious, and otherwise mundane, but like most other portions of scripture that we’re tempted to pass over if we’ll stop and dig around in there a little bit, there’s generally some incredible gems to be discovered in those ch’s. This one being no different, at 1st glance its just, “So and so did this, the other guy did that, those people took care of the other thing...and on and on it goes.” But in reality their work on the walls in many ways parallels our work in the church today, because kingdom business is kingdom business.

So as we survey this portion of scripture may God really give us eyes to see, and ears to hear those essential aspects of body life that He would have us to glean from this ch. As I thought about it for a while, 4 things came to me as sort of an overall statement regarding what's taking place in this ch. Because it's a monumental, epic task that Nehemiah is up against in the rebuilding of these walls. And here's the deal, he couldn't do it by himself, *no one* can do *everything*, but listen, *everyone* can do *something*.

A British humorist was quoted one time as saying, "I like work, it fascinates me, I can sit and look at it for hours." And unfortunately there are many in the body of Christ who feel the same way he does, they like the work, they're fascinated *by* the work, they could look *at* the work for hours, but they personally have no intention of being *apart of* the work.

But here's the deal, outside of perhaps there being some non-repentant sin in your life, there are no benchwarmers in the body of Christ. It's been said that when it comes to the work of the Lord there's no room for spectators, self-appointed advisors, critics or complainers, but there's always room for workers. And that's true, remember Jesus said that the harvest was plentiful but that the laborers were few, how sad, that so many are so unwilling to work in the fields of ministry. Nehemiah 3 is about the work, and the same principles that applied to them in the rebuilding of the walls, apply to us in the building of the church.

The 4 things that were impressed upon me as an overview to this ch were #1 Nehemiah's Facilitation. As I said this was an epic undertaking, so the facilitation and coordination of the work was off the charts, being able to bring so many people from so many walks of life together for a common purpose and a common goal to join hands and hearts in the work. And really that's what takes place in the church, many different people, from many different walks of life coming together for a common purpose and a common goal to join hands and hearts in the work. Nehemiah was able to facilitate, coordinate, and delegate the work. He was a man who planned his work, and worked his plan. #2 The People's Dedication, Nehemiah's facilitation, coordination, or delegation, would mean nothing apart from the people's dedication. There was no way that he could do it alone, they needed one another. The same is true today in the body of Christ, even in each individual fellowship, my vision, or perhaps skills God has given me in communication, facilitation, delegation or coordination (all of which are very limited) but be that as it may, none of it will count for anything apart from your dedication, I can't do this thing on my own. I need your help, your dedication to the work, your commitment to the common goal. Now God doesn't *need* any of us, but He's chosen to work His plan through us, so by the fact that He uses human instruments He's chosen to in certain ways (though my vernacular fails me now) limit Himself in giving us the choice to be apart of something or not be apart of something. God could've said the word and these walls would've been built and never breached again, but He chose to use human instruments. Which translates to the effect of Nehemiah needed dedicated people of commitment to the task at hand, and they were, they had a mind to work. # 3 Everyone's Cooperation, different people assigned to different tasks yet all getting along to help one another.

Some people are all about business but, “Don’t get in my way I’ll have to run you over,” we don’t see that mentality here, they were getting along, common goal, focus on the objective and lets help one another to achieve that objective. And #4 The Overall Unification, as I mentioned earlier we’ll see all types of people from all different walks of life, profession, and social/political platforms all working side by side in unity, they were diversified perhaps in skill, social status, background information etc etc, but they were unified in the work at hand, all operating on a level playing field. And again that’s exactly what the church is. When Paul wrote to the Romans he said, “*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*” Rom 12:4-5 We all have different things we bring to the table, and God has equipped us all individually and uniquely, but we’re one in our overall purpose as the body of Christ. A mouth is pointless with out the feet to carry it somewhere, but the feet are helpless apart from the legs, of course the legs need a torso to join to, and you get the idea, unity (one body) through diversity, we’re all individually uniquely called and equipped but when we’re all brought together we make one body.

We left off with Nehemiah deflecting some ridicule of the enemy and preparing the people for the work, they’d become satisfied with status quo.

So many in the church today are ok with status quo, the Nehemiahs come along and shake that up, challenge us in our mentality, and that faith provokes us to good works, in this case the work of rebuilding the all.

Vs1-2

Notice, “They built, they built, they built, they built.” There’s work going on here, building and rebuilding the walls, outside of the timber they really weren’t even using new material, it was all, already there all they had to do was dig it out and put it in place. How often the church today is looking for some “new” thing, or new truth to take away our reproach, or give us a sense of dignity before the non-believing world. The reality is that what we need is already here, in the Word of God, it’s a matter of digging it out of the dust and rubble, and establishing it in the proper order of our lives. God has given us everything we need that pertains to life and godliness right here in His Word, it’s just lying in here waiting on us to be tired of status quo and get to work digging it out and putting it in it’s proper place, allowing to be activated and assimilated into our lives.

Outside of that, 2 things I’d have you notice in these vs #1 That it was Eliashib the high priest that was mentioned 1st in the work who rose up along with the other priests and got busy. Why do I point that out? Because this is a good example of a godly leader, he’s 1st to the work, not afraid *of* the work, not too spiritual to be busy *in* the work.

You need to understand that if you’re a leader, or if you aspire to be a leader, people are watching you, scrutinizing you closely. And generally speaking your attitude towards the work is contagious to the people around you.

When this place was coming to its finishing stages and the contractors were pretty much done, and it was down to us doing what we needed to do to get in here, there was a handful of guys that were here every night, every Saturday, and several Sunday evenings. Now I don't claim to be much on the construction end, and I feel like I lead a pretty full time life just like the rest of you, but I made sure that my evenings and weekends (to the best of my ability) were consumed with being here, apart of the work, and available to be directed *in* the work. Why? Because without me it wouldn't get done? Far from it, but because the Lord convicted me of this same principle, if I as the Pastor aren't willing to be here, giving up my evenings and weekends to help get the job done, than why would anyone else care about it? But being interested in the work, excited *about* the work, is contagious. Elders, if you're not interested in being busy about the work, why should anyone else care about the work? Deacons if you're not willing to show up and be apart of things, why would anyone else take interest? If the leaders aren't 1st to the job at hand, that sends a pretty strong signal that apparently it's not a job worth taking. But if the glory of God is at stake, *why wouldn't* we be 1st on the scene? You see excitement, dedication, these things are contagious, but so is discouragement, disinterest and doubt, there's a good reason why Eliashib is mentioned 1st in the work, and then the rest of the ch filled with the names of over 50 people or groups of people that followed his example.

2^{ndly} notice that he was assigned the area specifically related to and revolving around the Sheep Gate. Why, because not only was this the gate that shepherds brought their flocks into the city by, but it was the same gate that the Temple sacrifices were brought through, the lambs to be sacrificed (the same gate we find Jesus Christ the Lamb of God coming through in John ch 5 which is profoundly picturesque). So as the high priest, and the priesthood in general they would have a personal interest in seeing that this portion of the wall was carefully constructed and well fortified. And that's a practical application of leadership that Nehemiah displays here in ch 3.

He wasn't about warm body ministries, just taking people and placing people wherever out of sheer desperation regardless of personal interest or anything else. But rather he sought to utilize people in those places that they had personal interest, that way there was a passion about their particular portion of the wall, it wasn't begrudging to them, it was a blessing for them. If I take you and place you where you really don't want to be, the odds of you consistently giving a 1st fruits effort are slim, but if you're where you have a personal passionate interest, you'll seek to excel in the work.

Notice also that they consecrated that gate, being the common entrance to the Temple, and the 1st part of the project completed, perhaps they held a ceremony of sorts of thanksgiving or dedication to the Lord. But it's the "1st fruits" if you will of the wall, so in consecrating the 1st fruits they're in essence dedicating the whole work unto the Lord. And this is a good motivating factor for us in our daily grind, to remember that what we do, we don't do as unto our employer so much, but we do our work unto the Lord. Remember what Paul said, "*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*" Col 3:17

Vs3-5

As you read this ch you'll see the mention of 10 gates, gates being the critical entry and exit points into the city, they seem to be the primary points of contact, a concentrated effort around a gate, and then it would fan out from there between the gates on either side. The Fish gate apparently being near the fish market, where the fish would come in to be bought and sold from the Sea of Galilee.

But notice as to where in the 1st few vs we're seeing the word "Built" over and over, here it's the word, "repairs." And this particular word is used at least 35 times in this ch, and it carries with it the idea of strengthening, or encouraging, or to make secure. The application of this going far beyond a wall around a city, this is what the bible teaches us that we need to be, strengthened, encouraged, made secure or firm in our ability to fight the good fight, or keep the wiles of the wicked one from breaking through and wreaking havoc in the city of our hearts/lives. We read in Eph 4 that one of the reasons for the church is, "...for the *equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,*" Eph 4:12. And the idea behind that word "equipping" is that of a strengthening, we come together as the body of Christ that we might strengthen one another, that we might live for Christ beyond these 4 walls.

There in vs 5 we read where the Tekoites made repairs, but that their nobles wouldn't put their shoulders, or more literally their necks to the work. What's this tell you? That there will always be those affiliated with the body, or apart of the body, who won't function, or be apart of the work because perhaps they think they're too good *for* the work. They're too dignified, or whatever. It says here they wouldn't put their necks to the work, and the thought that's being communicated in the Hebrew is that they wouldn't submit. Submission is real issue here, again whether they just thought they had better things to do, or they didn't agree with Nehemiah's plan, or for whatever reason, they wouldn't do it. The reason is irrelevant, their refusal to be submissive is incredibly relevant and that's what Nehemiah draws our attention to. And notice that all their lack of submission did was frown on them, it didn't stop the work, but it brought shame to them. What does the bible say? "*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*" Heb 13:17. And this is where personal accountability comes in, if the guy next to you thinks he too good, that's his loss, her loss (as the case may be) you do what you need to do before the Lord. We'll see where the Tekoites did more than their fare share in that when they completed their job, they got busy helping others with their jobs, all the more blessing for them.

In vs 6 we see mention of the Old gate, vs 7 more linguistic gymnastics, look at vs 8.

Vs8

What are we seeing here? Professional builders? No, men of varying professions, a goldsmith, a perfumer, (these guys made various spices, embalming ointments, incense for the Temple, things of that nature). The point here is what? That they weren't by any means vocationally qualified for the work, the excuses could've come easy, "Build a wall, I make ointments, I melt down little gold nuggets, what do I know about building a wall." But these guys realized something and that is this. The greatest ability to have is simply *availability*. The person who doesn't have much to offer in the form of talent, or skill but has a passion to see the work of the Lord done, will accomplish infinitesimal amounts more than the individual blessed with skill beyond belief who has little to no desire or drive to do the Lord's work. And I've met those people, incredibly gifted, no desire or drive to serve Jesus, it's a tragedy. But God will use whoever will avail themselves to Him, and the less of you that's qualified, the more of Him that gets the glory when the work is finished.

Notice who was working right next to these guys (vs 9) the leader of ½ the district of Jerusalem. Another true leader, getting right in there and serving, Jesus said, "*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'* But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves." Luke 22:25-26 This guy isn't about having everyone else do it for him, he's getting right in there and getting things done alongside them. And as you go through this list you might note the fact that there are people from all walks of life here, rich, poor, men, women, day laborers, esteemed rulers, all together on the same page, and working on the same level. The bible teaches us that we're all one in Christ, social status, political platform, economic abundance or the lack thereof is all left at the foot of the cross and we become one in Jesus, working side by side for His honor and His glory.

In vs 10 you find Jedaiah assigned a portion of the wall in front of his house. Hey this is a great place to start, now practically speaking, this is a wise move on the behalf of Nehemiah. Anyone who had homes by the wall, if they were assigned that portion, again it's the personal interest thing, I'm going to make sure that the portion of the wall by my house is built right and secure. Not only that in case of enemy attack I'm going to feel inclined to stay and fight as opposed to fleeing in fear, plus you don't lose valuable transit time, just step outside and get to work. But for you and me this is a great place to start, if the work of God needs to be done anywhere it's at home. Now sometimes this can be used as an excuse, "Well I'm just needing to be the dad, or the mom God's called me to be 1st, tend to my family," and all of that. And I think that's awesome, I really do, if you're truly serving the Lord at the home, seeking Him, being the priest of the home, or the homemaker He's calling you to be setting that godly precedent and all the rest, teaching the family the word, God's ways and all. But it can easily be used as a covering for really just not wanting to be involved on any other level, so just make sure it's God's leading in those cases, rather than an ez out so that you're not committed in other areas.

In vs 12 you see the leader of the other ½ of Jerusalem at work, but notice that he had his daughters with him. The work of the kingdom isn't a male female thing, it's a co-laboring thing. We realize that the role of Sr. Pastor is a male role biblically, how can the elders of the church be the husband of one wife if they're women? It's just the biblical order, but the ladies here aren't usurping authority over the men, Nehemiah is still the one coordinating, facilitating, delegating and all that, they're working *alongside* the men. But its awesome when your family and your children enter to the work of the Lord with you, it's great to serve the Lord in any capacity, but when you're laboring as a family it's all the better.

In vs 13 you see the Valley Gate, in vs 14 you have another leader repairing the Refuse Gate. No task to base for the godly leader, if it's trash that needs taken out, toilets that need swabbed, whatever, we're to serve the Lord in humility, in whatever capacity He would privilege us with.

Vs 15 another leader working on and repairing the Fountain Gate, and the walls around it. And on and on it goes all the way through the chapter, the whole point being that we need one another, godly order, and structure, to plan a work, and work the plan together as the body of Christ. In vs 26 you'll find the Water Gate, in vs 27 you'll see the Tekoites not content with the significant work they've already done, they got busy on another area of the wall as well. Some people won't do anything, others do more than their fair share.

Vs28-30

This word, "Dwelling" literally means a "cell" or a single room, this guy lived in a one room shack, yet was sold out to the work of the Kingdom. How much better to live in a shack and be sold out to Jesus than to have a palatial estate and be headed for hell, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul, or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Vs31-32

It all ends where it began, the Sheep Gate, that gate that speaks of and foreshadows the work of the cross, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. All the other gates if you noticed had bolts and bars, the Sheep Gate remained open, Jesus said that He was the door to the sheepfold and if *anyone* would enter through Him, he'd find green pastures to graze in, if *any man* thirsts let him come to Me and drink. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, it all ends right where it began, at the Sheep Gate.

Now before we close I want to look again real quick at a few vs where we have mention of men who did the work in front of their homes and consider who they were, and how that speaks to us for our homes. We mentioned in vs 10 a man by the name of Jedaiah, Jedaiah means, "God is Praise," or "Invoker of God," "One who calls on God" And our homes should be a place where God is praised, where He's called upon, a place of prayer. In vs 29 we see Zadok whose name means, "Just" or "Righteous" our homes are to be places of justice and integrity, where righteousness reigns as opposed to compromise and indecency.

And in vs 30 we see Meshullam whose name means, “Reconciled” or “Befriended.” Of course our homes should be reconciled to Christ, godly order and devotion setting the standard, setting the priority.

Ch 3 shows us that as God’s people we have to work together to get things done, and that when we do work together we can get incredible, otherwise impossible things done because with God nothing will be impossible. And God will put us in those positions where we *have* to work together, that we might learn how to lead, how to follow, how to work with one another towards a common goal for His glory. Everyone’s work was equally important, any gaps in the wall weakened the whole project, there was no insignificant task, Fountain Gate, Refuse Gate, it all needed equal attention.

Notice that Nehemiah made each individual accountable for the work, gave them each a portion of personal responsibility and noted their progress or lack thereof. He organized the work for maximum efficiency, and he began by acknowledging the work was 1st and foremost a spiritual work, beginning with the Sheep Gate, the High Priest, consecrating the work from there forward and ending on the same note. From the beginning of the work through to its completion and everything in between it’s all *about*, hinged *on* and point *to*, and for the glory *of*, Jesus Christ

Prayer Points: God give us one heart and one mind in the work You’ve called us to here. May we commit to the work, not for the glory of any man other than the Man Christ Jesus, may we be a people of dedication, cooperation and unity. Diverse in background and capability, but striving together for one goal collectively to give You glory, empower us by Your Spirit.