

10-19-25

Hand Me another Stone

Nehemiah 3: 1 - 16

This message is about repairing things. What else could it be about? In the thirty-two verses of Nehemiah 3, the word *"repair"* is used over forty times – and this doesn't include the times the words *"built and rebuilt"* were used!

The phrase *"laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place"* is used six times! In this context, we can safely conclude that repairing something that is broken is the major theme of Nehemiah 3.

It seemed like my dad was always repairing things on the farm. I guess that's the nature of the business. There was always a fence to mend so the cows didn't wind up in the cornfield

inner tubes of tires to patch so that the wagons we used to haul corn, hay and oats were functional

farm implements to fix which always seem to break down when they were needed most - the hay mower, the chopper, the baler, the combine.

I bet if my dad wouldn't have had to make all those repairs, he would've had a lot more time to take me fishing.

My job in all this repairing, was being the "go for". Bill, get me a 9/16th wrench, a ball-peen hammer and rivets, a crow bar, a crescent wrench - whatever.

I prided myself in being able to find just what dad wanted. This was very important to me since my actual skills at fixing things were

practically non-existent. I guess this is what happens when, after many occasions, I tried to fix something but failed.

Usually what would happen is that something would break while I was operating it, and dad would tell me to fix it. Well, I'd try for a while, but then frustration would set in, and I'd typically give up. About this time, dad would return and fix it without too much trouble.

Can you see how this could begin to affect someone psychologically? Dad could fix anything, and I could barely hammer a nail in straight!

Well, you're not psychiatrists and I'm not on the couch, so suffice it to say that some people are just wired in a way that makes them better at repairing things, while others, like myself, are better left to the job of fetching the tools.

But the important truth in this is that it takes all kinds and a concerted effort to get the job done. This was certainly true for Nehemiah's rebuilding project.

At the close of chapter 2, Nehemiah had successfully persuaded the people of Judah to join him in rebuilding the wall. They intended to begin work, in spite of being ridiculed by the neighbors. Nehemiah writes, *"When Saballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. 'What is this you are doing?' they asked. Are you rebelling against the king?"*

(I guess they weren't the friendly type of neighbors like Tim Allan had!)

But not only did Nehemiah motivate the people, he also organized them effectively as demonstrated by the list of builders and their assignments. While the list is not exhaustive, it does offer an overall picture of the work in progress:

The builders came from diverse regions of Judah: For example, the Tekoites in v. 5 and the inhabitants of Zanoah in v. 13.

They come from diverse professions: goldsmiths and perfumers.

Both genders worked on the wall: Shallum and his daughters, v. 12.

Even the spiritual leaders got their hands dirty: the high priest, his fellow priests and the Levites.

Finally, many district leaders also pitched in as recorded in verses 9 and 12. (And I assume they weren't just there for a photo op to say look at me, I helped too!)

In fact, Nehemiah records that *"Malchijah, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem rebuilt the Dung Gate."* This was probably not prime territory to work in – downwind from the city dump? But here's someone of authority, who might have used his influence to gain a better assignment but instead was willing to complete the necessary but possibly disagreeable task.

This reminds me of my uncle Ron. He was a teacher for many years at a trade school, instructing students in the areas of mechanical drafting and blueprint reading. Certainly more intellect than brawn was required.

Many summers he'd visit us on the farm and inevitably find his way up to the hay mow to help us stack hay bales.

What a trooper! If I had allergies like he had, I would have never visited the farm especially during haying season, but he always pitched in even if his eyes were close to swelling shut and he could barely breathe!

Yet according to Nehemiah, not everyone participated.

Note in verse 5 that the Tekoite *“nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.”* The Hebrew language in this text reads literally: *“but their nobles did not put their neck to the service of their lords.”*

In other words, the leading citizens from Tekoa were unwilling to submit to the leadership of Nehemiah. As a result, the common folk from Tekoa had to repair two sections of the wall without any assistance from the nobles – probably not the best way to promote amicable relations.

Quite frankly, it should come as no surprise to us that some people of power and status failed to support Nehemiah. In our offices, schools, and churches we too encounter “nobles” who will not submit to leadership.

When this happens, God’s work is hindered and his reputation is tarnished. The solution?

For starters, all parties need to be reminded of who is ultimately in charge of the church. In describing Jesus, Paul writes in Colossians 1:18 that *“He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”* We work for God’s glory - not to serve our own ego.

Secondly, Christ's plan and prerogative to appoint leaders to run the church also needs to be affirmed: Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11 – 12, *"It is he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to what? Prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..."*

Once these two truths are agreed upon, and this common ground is achieved, cooperation among leaders and followers should be the natural outflow. But if after this, a problem still persists, we can be fairly confident that a worldly and uncooperative spirit exists among us which needs to be confessed and renounced.

In other words, the motivation for our actions or our inactions needs to be regularly assessed:

Are we doing such and such to promote God's kingdom and his church? Or are we trying to push our own agenda in order to fulfill some deep – seated psychological need that we may not even be aware of?

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10 that *"each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light."*

Paul warns us that the reason we do what we do will not be hidden forever. It will be revealed on the day we stand before God when he assesses the work we've done in his kingdom and for his kingdom.

Paul continues: *"his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work."*

We need to continually ask the question, "Are we doing such and such to bolster our own reputation in order to appear righteous before men, or are we performing a task out of a pure and loving heart for Christ and his church?" Only God and a conscience that is honest before the Lord will know for sure.

So first, when it comes to doing the Lord's work, our motivation must be pure.

Second we must acknowledge that the work God calls us to in Christ's name is God's work. The rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall was God's work. God stirred up Nehemiah in chapter 1 and enabled him to be sent to Jerusalem in chapter 2.

To his opponents, Nehemiah stated boldly, *"The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start building."* Later when the wall was completed, Nehemiah commented that, *"this work had been done with the help of our God."*

So though it is true that the work is attributed to God, it is equally true that God works through his people. This basic Biblical principle can never be overstated. Through Nehemiah and the hard-working men and women of Judah, the wall was rebuilt in 52 days!

Nehemiah 3 is a reminder to us that the work of God happens when the people of God work.

Of course, God can do whatever he wishes, but he typically chooses to work through those who belong to him and who respond to his direction. This was true in the days of Nehemiah – and it was true in the New Testament.

Remember the boy with the five loaves and two fish and the seventy-two who were sent out to heal the sick? We can be assured that God still works through his people today.

And knowing that God works through us should encourage us, especially when we labor faithfully without necessarily feeling God's power.

It should also motivate us to get busy with God's business.

Be assured that God wants us to love our neighbors – through us. He wants to bring peace and the hope of salvation to Almont, Lapeer County and Michigan – to all areas on earth through his people who *"do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God."* (Micah 6:8)

Nehemiah 3 also reminds us that the work of God happens most effectively when everyone participates.

Judeans of both genders, from various occupations, diverse locations, and social classes – all joined in the great restoration project. The wall was completed in record time because everybody worked hard.

I'm always impressed when I hear about Amish barn raisings, how each man is assigned a specific task and does his job with proper timing, precision, and efficiency so a high- quality structure is completed rapidly. Even the women play an important role by distributing food and water to the men to help maintain their strength.

It's a spectacle that even Henry Ford, credited for the invention of the assembly line, would have relished.

And if it's the responsibility of God's people to do God's work, then it's the responsibility of our church leaders to help you accomplish that work.

As a pastor, I try to regularly remind you folks of your need to do God's bidding, but I'm increasingly aware that I need to guide and direct you in this process. I'm finding that many of you are willing, but sometimes you don't know where to serve – you're having a difficult time finding your place on the wall.

So here's my two cents in regard to this issue:

- 1 **Pray for God's guidance.** If you pray, "Lord, I'm willing; show me where to serve." He will be faithful and respond. After all, God's design is that he is working out his will for the world through his people.
That's why Paul can write without any hesitation, "*It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*" God delights in our seeking him to understand his will, because in understanding God's will, we get to see the heart of God, which can bring nothing but blessing to us.
- 2 **Look around.** Often God calls us into ministries right where we are. You're section of the wall may be right in front of you.
- 3 **Consult with Christian friends who know you best.**
Discernment of our place in ministry can only happen in the

context of a prayerful community. God can use your friends who are praying for to guide you into his will.

- 4 **Receive guidance from trusted church leaders.** Although church leaders may not be charged with the same authority as the prophet Nehemiah was, they often have a clear sense of God's direction and a keen awareness of specific ministry needs.
- 5 **Follow your heart.** Feelings of passion, compassion, and joy, though not infallible, can guide you to your section of the wall. Recall Paul's proclamation concerning his love for the church of Thessalonica: *"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."*

God intends to work in this world through us – those who desire to see God's name become famous among the nations.

Surely, the church of Christ needs the participation of each member, just as each member needs to experience the joy and fulfillment of contributing to God's work.

We spend so much of our lives on projects that eventually will be destroyed by moth and rust. What a contrast it would be to see our efforts go toward God's great work on earth.

Ultimately, our lives find meaning and significance only in knowing that we have consistently labored – as parents, grand-parents, church workers, protectors of justice, dispensers of mercy, and communicators of God's love, truth, and forgiveness, for these things last forever.

So ...

“As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” ...

Be encouraged!

Because like the wall of Jerusalem which once lay in ruins, you too, are being restored, built up and strengthened to house and *“declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

Amen.