

Building for God

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Introduction.

- A. Just a couple of weeks ago, we had our final session of the Sunday evening Bible drill, at least for the time being. We had good turnout that evening, as we did every evening, for which I thank all you parents, but there was one thing that night that didn't go according to expectation. Josh had been expecting me to hand him a presentation on Saul and Jesus, but at the last minute, I handed him one on Nehemiah instead.
- B. Even though this kind of put poor Josh on the spot, I had my reasons for doing what I did. Nehemiah is an important figure of the Old Testament, but he doesn't get the kind of publicity that guys like David and Elijah do. Despite having an entire book to his name, he's something of a forgotten hero. That's a shame, because our little ones have a lot to learn from Nehemiah too. Not only should they want to be like David, who killed a giant for God, but they should want to be like Nehemiah, who patiently built for God.
- C. Naturally, our children aren't the only ones who can learn from this story. Much like us, Nehemiah lived in an era when God didn't work big, flashy miracles to show the people His power. Nehemiah never raised the dead or caused the Red Sea to part. Like us, he lived in a time when God's people were small in number and were confronted by challenges that seemed larger than they were. However, Nehemiah and his countrymen, despite this grim situation, were able to use exactly the same tools that we have today to completely carry out God's will. That tells us, friends, that if we use those tools as Nehemiah did, we too can have success. Let's look at the story of Nehemiah this morning, then, and what it tells us about building for God.

I. Basic Attitudes.

- A. As with so many of the success stories of the Bible, the success story of Nehemiah begins with **PRAYER**. Here's why: Nehemiah had been serving Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in the Persian capitol of Susa, which is in modern-day Iran, hundreds of miles from Canaan. However, he gets word from his brother that God's people there are in sorry shape, and Jerusalem itself is still a ruin. Nehemiah could have reacted to this with indifference, or he could have decided that he himself was going to solve the problem, but he was wiser than that. Instead, he prays about it, and we see the conclusion of this prayer in Nehemiah 1:11. Nehemiah knew that his usefulness would depend on the king allowing him to be useful, so that's what he asked for.
- B. Likewise, friends, we need to learn to care about the fate and the future of God's kingdom here, and we need to pray for opportunities to help. Like Nehemiah, we need to care about people and issues beyond ourselves and our families. It's not enough for us, friends, to grimly cling to our own salvation, yet ignore the challenges that face our church. We cannot succeed as a congregation without the help of everyone here.
- C. That means that each one of us needs to be praying for ways that we can help. Nehemiah knew what had to happen for him to be useful, and he prayed for it. Likewise, friends, we need to pray for usefulness in the things that we can do for the kingdom. Sure, we can get all macho and arrogant and act like we can help without God's help, but that will only lead ourselves and our brethren into failure. It's important for us to understand the needs of the church and care about them, but then we have to turn to God for His aid.
- D. After prayer, the story of Nehemiah next highlights the importance of **LEADERSHIP**. This appears, among many other places, in Nehemiah 2:1-3. As Nehemiah's attitude makes quite clear here, this was not a safe thing for him to do. If the king was in a bad mood and resented Nehemiah's downcast expression, that could have been the end of Nehemiah. However, Nehemiah knew that helping the Jews in Jerusalem was important enough that he was willing to risk his own safety for the chance to take a leading role in the work.
- E. In the same way, friends, our leaders need to be willing to lead today. Many denominations operate under a pastor system, where the preacher is the main man and the main leader. That's not the way that the Lord's church is supposed to operate. Scripturally speaking, the only authority I have is to preach the word. Instead, the real leaders in the church are the elders and deacons. Men, you need to be like Nehemiah. You need to be so filled with concern for God's people and so dedicated to God's work that His service is the first priority in your lives. You need to be willing to go outside your comfort zone, to take risks to make this church stronger and better. It's important for us to get together once a month and talk about hot water heaters and plumbing, but even the men who were called deacons in the Jerusalem did more than just serve tables. Stephen was such a spectacular worker for the gospel that the Sanhedrin killed him. When Philip was driven out of Jerusalem, he won the entire region of Samaria for the Lord. We need to expand our understanding of leadership to match the greatness of the work before us. Let's be spiritual leaders for God.
- F. As important as Nehemiah's leadership skills were, they were matched by the **ZEAL** of those who followed him. Consider the exchange recorded in Nehemiah 2:17-18. The people didn't respond to Nehemiah's plan by talking about their other commitments or simply failing to show up. Instead, once they had been shown the need, they went willingly to the work. They helped Nehemiah do what he could never have done himself.

- G. Just like that, those of this congregation who aren't leaders have to get behind those who are. Whenever a man shows a willingness to get out in front, to take on work for God, we need to support that by following, helping, and encouraging him however we can. We don't need to gripe about how this congregation had such better leaders ten years ago. We don't need to act like whatever happens to this church makes no difference to us. Instead, we need to put our effort and our time on the line too, to make sure that our leaders meet with success. The Lord wants workers in His vineyard, brethren, not sit-arounds.

II. Reactions to Adversity.

- A. In contributing to the work, one of the primary things we need is **COURAGE**. Consider the brief description of the courage of the people in Nehemiah 4:11-13. Here's what the problem was: when some of the leaders of the peoples around Judah, especially Tobiah the Ammonite and Sanballat the Horonite, heard of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, they resolved to stop it any way they could, and one of the tactics they tried was the threat of force. The Jews weren't professional soldiers, but they were willing anyway to defend their city.
- B. Like those Jews, we need to be courageous in working for the Lord. This is not just a leader thing; this is a Christian thing. Satan loves to use fear against us, to keep us from obeying God. Whenever we are afraid of job consequences if we talk about Jesus at work, or that our home life will deteriorate if we give too much time to the Lord, those things have Satan's fingerprints all over them. When we feel fear, then, we need to understand it as a sign that the devil doesn't want us to do something, and if he doesn't want us to do something, folks, that's exactly what we must do. Let's overcome our fears and be useful.
- C. Likewise, **OBEDIENCE** is important for all of us. Nehemiah and the Jews ran into problems with this, as described in Nehemiah 5:7-8. Remember, folks, this happened right in the middle of the wall-construction project. Nehemiah had to take time from what was important, had to pull the leaders of the families from what was important, to deal with this moral mess that shouldn't have happened in the first place.
- D. Exactly the same thing can happen today. There are few things that limit the work of a church more than immorality among its members, especially immorality among its leaders. In one of the churches I used to work with, one of the deacons was caught in adultery, and after that whole messy business wound down, it took the congregation a year to get back on its feet. Friends, we need to recognize that when we sin, we are not just endangering our own souls, we are interfering with the work of the church. Let's be obedient instead.
- E. In addition to obedience, we also see the important role of **GENEROSITY** in the work Nehemiah did for God. Look at his own description of this in Nehemiah 5:17-18. As an official of the Persian government, he had the right to demand provisions from the people, and most governors would have. Instead, Nehemiah gave provisions to the people, because he knew that by his generosity, he would please God and further His work.
- F. Generosity in the things of God is every bit as important today. I daresay that none of us has as much of anything as we would like to have: enough time, enough money, enough energy. Nonetheless, we need to be willing to contribute all of those to the Lord's work as much as is required. There are two ways we can look at the challenges that face this church. We can say, "Somebody else will step up and deal with them if I wait long enough," or we can say, "I'm going to do my part to face those challenges and overcome them." For God's work here to be as great as it can be, every one of us needs to invest all we have to give.
- G. As we invest ourselves in this way, we also have great need of **PERSEVERANCE**. We see the record of Nehemiah's perseverance, among other places, in Nehemiah 6:5-6. Sanballat had been sending Nehemiah letters for a while, trying to get him away from the work. Now, he's lying about Nehemiah so that he will stop the work for fear of the Persian king. Nehemiah reacts to that, though, not by giving in to Sanballat and his continual intimidation, but by turning to God for renewed strength to work. Nehemiah wouldn't quit.
- H. Satan does just the same thing today as he did through his servants 2500 years ago. He's always trying to wear us down, to convince us that we don't have enough energy to go to church Sunday evening, that nobody will notice if we don't sign up to teach a class next quarter, that we can stop trying to teach the gospel to our co-workers and it won't make a difference. Satan does that for a reason, and that's because the Christian who keeps plugging away even when things are difficult is deadly dangerous to the forces of evil. We need to have that kind of perseverance. We need to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord's work, and we need to continue in that work until the work is done. Determination like that makes the devil shake in his boots.
- I. Finally, though, we need **HOLINESS** as we work for God. An example of Nehemiah's holiness appears in Nehemiah 6:10-11. Here's what happened: one of Tobiah's toadies tried to get Nehemiah to go into the temple to protect himself, even though Nehemiah was neither a priest nor a Levite. Nehemiah responded by saying that he would rather die than violate God's law in such a way. Holiness was more important than life.
- J. Likewise, friends, in all of our efforts to do God's work, we need to remain true to God's methods and God's ways. Sure, sin often promises an easier path. Like so many in the denominational world, we could get a rock band in here and preach a do-nothing gospel and pack this place every Sunday. The problem is, it would just be a building full of rebels headed for hell. God's way can be harder, but God's way is right.

Conclusion. If we serve God like Nehemiah did, we will find the success that Nehemiah found. Look at the record of Nehemiah 6:15-16. They did God's work and glorified Him. If you want to do the same, join us this morning.