

Introduction: Pg. _____

“52” Nehemiah

The title of today’s sermon is 52! That’s right. It’s not every Sunday you get a number for a title. In case you are wondering: that is not my high school jersey number, nor does it represent how many times I asked Marsha out before she succumbed to my pleadings.

52 is a clue. It is a clue to the spectacular work God did through his people in as they engaged in the work of “Building Again.”

After the people caught the vision for rebuilding the wall, they worked with a sense of urgent devotion, because they were doing work loaded with spiritual significance. Though part of a distinct diversity, each made shared contributions with sacrificial hearts. In spite of intense opposition with threats on their life, they built the wall to half its height.

Now listen carefully as we continue to read about the spectacular work in chapter 6.

Nehemiah 6:1-7:7 (text displayed)

Did you catch that? They rebuilt the wall around the city in 52 days. Not 52 weeks. Not 52 years. 52 days! which included fending off the threat of invading armies.

52 days! That is UNBELIEVABLE!!

But I have a caution as we consider this story! We can focus on the wall AND MISS.... what it took to build it. WHAT they did was AMAZING, BUT... HOW they did it is more amazing!

Here’s the question I want us to consider: What is required to complete the great work God puts in our hearts?

The Point: Great work requires great character.

[The great work of our hands requires the great character of our hearts.]

I want to share 4 heart-level qualities of Nehemiah and the people as they engaged in this spectacular work.

1. Intense Focus (6:1-4).

- Verse 1 tells us the wall was built to that point of having no breaches. In other words, there were no gaps or points of weakness where enemies could quickly breakthrough.
- This led to Sanballat & Geshem to try to distract Nehemiah from the Lord by calling a meeting in the plain of Ono. The end of verse 2 tells us: “They intended to do [him] harm.”
- How does Nehemiah respond? With one of the great statements, not just in Nehemiah, but in the Bible, he says in verse 3: “I AM DOING A GREAT WORK!” You tell them. Tell Sanballat and Geshem [Go ahead and pass word to Tobiah and friends]: “I AM DOING A GREAT WORK (a work “MY GOD PUT INTO MY HEART TO DO FOR JERUSALEM.” (2:12) and I (listen to this) CANNOT COME DOWN.”
- This happens four times, and all four times Nehemiah answers in the same way!

- "I am doing a great work. I will not be distracted.!"
- "Oh, they don't believe me. I am doing a work God deposited in my heart. I will not allow my attention to be divided!"
- One more time, "I am doing a spectacularly GREAT WORK, and one thing I'm not doing is moving off this wall!!!!!"

Thank you, Nehemiah, because *we need this word!* We need it for our hearts, for our homes, yes, for our marriages and friendships and work and engaging in God's love mission. We are engaged in a great work, and we're not going to stop!

We need this word for at least three reasons.

1) We live in an age of distraction. So many things are shouting: "COME. DOWN!! GET OFF THE WALL!"

- For most of us, it's not people scheming against us. It's good things like relationships, work and enjoying God's good gifts, that become consuming things and crowd out our devotion to God.
- We also know, in our technological age, distraction is one grab or click away. The average American spends between 3-5 hours on our phones. I'm not going to get on a hypocritical soapbox. Let's agree to evaluate our time and ask God to lead us to the path of wisdom and LIFE.

2) We live in an age of deception. Has anyone seen Satan working overtime the past two years? No surprise! He attacks when we're tired, vulnerable, & isolated. Marsha made the great point two nights ago... with the pandemic coming to an end, we should expect him to milk it for all it's worth. Be on your guard!

3) We are called to great devotion. We have been invited into the greatest work the world has ever known! We get to participate and compel others to experience and go deeper in the story of God!

If the work is infinitely valuable to us, we will be intensely focused! (Proportionate relationship.)

Jesus lived with an intense focus.

**"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming, when no one can work."
(John 9:4)**

T: That's the kind of focus we see in Nehemiah and his companions. #2.

2. Resilient Dependence (6:5-9).

- In verse 5, they come back for a FIFTH time. This time it is an "open letter" An open letter is letter for all to read! This is what it said...
 - "It's reported (let's stop right there - put a name on it - who reported?)... Nehemiah and the people are planning a rebellion against King Artaxerses. That is why they are building the wall. They have no loyalty, no integrity."
 - "In fact, Nehemiah, 'according to these reports,' wants to become king. He's even preplanned the proclamation. The prophets are ready to declare him king."
 - What is this? Slander. What is slander? Spreading false information to discredit or dishonor someone's reputation.

How must we respond? With Resilient Dependence! Nehemiah's two-directional response.

- First, he responds with honesty & courage. Verse 8: "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind."

- Translation. You're lying. You're creating false narratives for your benefit and our harm.
- Nehemiah knew their motive. Look at verse 9: "For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done."
- The greater work, the greater the target. The greater the work, the greater the schemes of the evil one. As my friend Stephen Mook says, "The intensity of the opposition is because of the enormity of the gospel opportunity."
- Second, Nehemiah does what he always does. He prays! As the headwind comes again and again and again, we might be tempted to think: Wow! Nehemiah! What an unflappable leader. But we see that his vision, wisdom, and strength did not come from him. It came from God. Look at the end of verse 9: "But now, O God, strengthen my hands"

Our entire lives, from beginning to end, are a result of God's grace.

- Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might."
- 2 Timothy 2:1, "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
- Psalm 18:1, "I love you, O Lord, my strength."

We are ONLY strong as we stay connected to God's strength.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." (John 5:19)

Do you want to live a spiritual fruitful life? Do you want to be spiritually effective? It's not complicated. Stay Connected to Jesus. ABIDE. (John 15:5 - "I am the vine... whoever abides...)

T: This is how we display resilient dependence. #3

3. Discerning Conviction (6:10-14).

We discover the hits keep coming for Nehemiah in vv. 10-14. This time from someone who should have most certainly been a trusted source, the prophet Shemaiah.

- Verse 10 tells us Nehemiah visited Shemaiah's home. There the prophet tells him that people are coming to kill him. Not only that, he devises a plan to save Nehemiah by hiding in the temple.
- It is at this point, we see Nehemiah's discernment. He exposes Shemaiah's erroneous counsel with two questions in verse 11:
 - 1) "Should such a man as I run away?" In other words, to run because of a rumor would discredit my leadership and discourage my people. But the more egregious counsel is exposed in Nehemiah's second question.
 - 2) "And what man such as I could go into the temple and live?" Nehemiah knew God only allowed priests to go into the inside the temple. He would be found guilty of a capital offense in the sight of God's law (see Numbers 18:7; 2 Chron 26:16-18).
- Based on his knowledge of God's Word and his conviction to live by it, Nehemiah saw through Shemaiah's scheme and resisted his false prophecy.
 - If someone tells you to do something Scripture forbids, you know God did not send them!
 - This is why we need to surround ourselves with people who know and love God!
- In this moment, Nehemiah discerns that Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him to prophesy against him, in order to shame and taunt him, but look at the strength of Nehemiah's character in verse 14.

- Rather than planning a counterattack, what does he do? Once again, he prays! God, I'm trust you to bring justice and judgment.

What is our greatest help in navigating the challenges of life?

- The voice of God in the Bible and the voice of the Holy Spirit daily leading us to discern God's good steps for us in every situation.
- **And he [Satan] said to him [Jesus], 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."' (Matthew 4:9-10)**

T: Finally, in verse 15 through the end of chapter 7, we see their

4. Empowered Perseverance (6:15-7:73).

- Verse 15 delivers the climactic news: The wall IS FINISHED! That's right... in 52 DAYS! Quicker is not always better, but it is if God is in it!
- The work was so spectacular, it filled the nations and surrounding enemies with fear, because they perceived HOW the work was accomplished.
 - Verse 16: "This work had been accomplished with the help of our God."
 - The POWER OF GOD is with them! They are EMPOWERED people!
 - "God's good hand was upon [them]." (2:8)
 - "God put these things in [their] heart." (2:12)
 - "God will make us prosper." (2:20)
 - "God frustrated the plans of their enemies." (4:15)
 - "God will fight for us." (4:20)

BUT... the opposition keeps coming! This is wild. 17-19

- Tobiah had pre-existing relationships with some of the nobles in Jerusalem.
- He leveraged them to intimidate Nehemiah. Not only did they speak well of Tobiah, these moles told Tobiah what Nehemiah said behind closed doors.
- Here's what is going on: since Tobiah could not keep Nehemiah from building the wall, he changes his tactics to that of political intimidation.
- Tobiah's fear tactics surface for the third time in this short chapter (v. 9, 13 & 19).

We should pause and ask a very important question. Why is Nehemiah still experiencing headwind from Tobiah and Sanballat and Geshem? After all, the wall is finished!

Here's why: the wall is not really about the wall.

The wall dominates the first 6 chapters of the book, but how many chapters are there in Nehemiah? That's right. 13!!!

Chapter 7 is a transition chapter. It shows us how the rebuilding of the wall sets the stage for the rebuilding of the people!!

To do this, Nehemiah needed to appoint leaders with integrity, "faithful," and "God-fearing." They needed to be trustworthy leaders who would protect the city and work for good of people and the glory of God (vv. 1-4).

Verse 5 tells us God put something else into his heart (cf. 2:12). I love this. . . . We don't believe in static vision! We believe in a God who so intimately leads us step by step, day by day, year by year, & decade by decade. We must remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit as he speaks into the life and direction of our church.

What did God put into Nehemiah's heart?

- To take a census of people. But why?
- We don't really discover that until chapter 11. It tells us Nehemiah wanted "to solve the problem of Jerusalem's underpopulation by having [people] relocate to the city. To do that he must first know how many there are and where they are." - Nykolaishen
- Behind this desire was the welfare of the city. If underpopulated, it was still vulnerable to attack. Not only that, if underpopulated, prophecies like Zechariah 8:4-5 would remain unfulfilled: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."
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Conclusion:

Here's what we need understand today: the empowering presence of God enabled Nehemiah to persevere in the work of rebuilding the city full of people who loved and lived for God.

This is our work today!

We are BUILDING AGAIN because we see...

- People loving God with everything they've got because they understand how much they've been LOVED BY GOD!!
- We see... people living like family, helping one another through the headwind of life.
- We see... people generously giving their time and service through spiritual gifts to see more and more people know what we know: Jesus is greater than anything life can give or death can take away.

What is it going to take to "BUILD AGAIN"?

Intense Focus. Resilient Dependence. Discerning Conviction. And Empowered Perseverance.

We are doing a GREAT WORK. By the grace and power of God, let's BUILD AGAIN.