**Let Us Rise Up and Build**

*Nehemiah 2:18*

**Introduction**

1. The book of Nehemiah chronicles the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and repopulation of the city led by the book’s namesake, a Jewish exile who was a cupbearer of the Persian King, Artaxerxes I.
2. Nehemiah is a great character of faith in an important part of Israelite history. By God’s grace, he led the people to accomplish wonderful things for God despite great opposition.
3. The attitudes and actions of Nehemiah and the people he influenced serve as a powerful example of what it takes to overcome odds and opposition, and to do the work of the Lord – **Nehemiah 2:18; 4:6; 6:15**
4. Context of Nehemiah
5. Historical
   1. Captivity – Israel (Assyrian), Judah (Babylonian)
   2. A Remnant Returns
      1. Babylon is conquered by the Medo-Persian empire.
      2. As prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah, at the end of 70 years of Babylonian captivity, Cyrus, king of Persia allows Jews to return to Jerusalem.
   3. Temple Rebuilt
      1. Zerubbabel was among the first exiles to return and led the people in the construction of the temple despite opposition.
      2. The Persian king, Artaxerxes I sent Ezra, a priest and scribe, with a second wave of returning exiles to Jerusalem.
         1. Ezra led the people in an effort of spiritual restoration.
         2. The spiritual leadership of Ezra is highlighted by the putting away of foreign wives/children obtained contrary to the Law of Moses (Ezra 9-10).
   4. Wall Rebuilt
      1. Nehemiah was a royal cupbearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes I.
      2. After receiving news of the state of Jerusalem – the wall being broken and burned – Nehemiah was moved with sorrow and found occasion to petition the king for his return to rebuild the city and her wall.
      3. The book of Nehemiah chronicles this journey of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, and his leadership of the people in the construction of the wall against great opposition.
6. Political
   1. The returning exiles came back to a Jerusalem surrounded by enemies:
      1. Samaritans (North) – Sanballot (Chief opponent of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls)
      2. Ammonites (East) – Tobiah
      3. Arabs (South) – Geshem
      4. Phoenicians (West)
   2. The rebuilding of the temple had been opposed, and suspended for a time before it was finally finished.
   3. The return of Nehemiah, and the rebuilding of the walls was immediately met with opposition by the surrounding people (mockery, physical threat, conspiracy, defamation) – these political opposers would find no success against the providence of God.
7. Religious
   1. In addition to external opposition to the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah discovered internal opposition from the nobles and rulers.
      1. They were oppressing their poor brethren.
      2. Some among them helped the surrounding opposition led by Sanballot and Tobiah.
   2. Nehemiah 8 records the public reading of the law after the conclusion of the building of the wall.
      1. The chapter, as well as the following chapters 9-10 manifests the unstable spiritual state of the people during the time.
      2. They had forgotten much of the law and were moved to repentance upon the reading of it.
      3. They reestablished covenant to walk in God’s law.
   3. After 12 years in Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to Babylon to resume his service as cupbearer to the king. Upon his return sometime later, he found the people in various states of spiritual/religious disorder into which they had regressed, which he had to rectify.
8. ***“the people had a mind to work” (4:6)***
9. Concern
   1. Nehemiah
      1. **Nehemiah 1:1-4** – Nehemiah received information concerning the state of the exiles who had returned, and the city.
         1. **(v. 2)** – he asked – showed an interest himself.
         2. **(v. 3)** – great distress – ultimately because of the state of the wall.
            1. **Note the connection between the people’s emotional state and the state of God’s work/interests/will.**
         3. **(v. 4)** – Nehemiah shared in the distress of great sorrow – shown in fasting, and weeping.
      2. This concern led him to petition God, and then king Artaxerxes to return and encourage the people to rebuild.
         1. **Sincere, godly concern leads to effective action.**
      3. ***“For I was the king’s cupbearer” (Nehemiah 1:11).***
         1. He did not fit one of the three pillars of God’s use in the economy of the Jews – prophet, priest, king.
         2. “He was a citizen, one of themselves, and withal one into whose blood the iron of the captivity had entered, one into whose heart the sorrows of his people’s failures had come.” (Morgan, G. Campbell. The Works of G. Campbell Morgan, Vol 2 (Illustrated). The Analyzed Bible)
         3. God used a common man, whose heart was moved by the pitiful state of the Lord’s people and place, to do incredible things.
         4. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE SOMEBODY “GREAT” TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS, BUT SIMPLY NEED TO HAVE GREAT CONCERN FOR THE THINGS OF GOD.**
            1. **Psalm 126 – sowing in tears leads to reaping in joy.**
   2. Application
      1. **2 Corinthians 11:28** – among many great trials and afflictions, Paul’s daily weight of concern had to do with God’s purpose and people.
      2. **Acts 20:18-19, 31** – the expression of his sincere, emotional concern for brethren and God’s will to Ephesian elders.
      3. **Philippians 2:19-21** – Timothy shared Paul’s concern.
         1. **Philippians 1:21** – to live is Christ.
         2. I.e. Paul’s (and Timothy’s) life was totally devoted to the things of Christ – His will was the air they breathed, and the purpose for their living.
      4. **If we do not have a true concern for the things of God, we will not make progress of any sort.**
10. Confidence
    1. Nehemiah
       1. **Nehemiah 1:8-11** (after confession of sins) – in a prayer to God, he recalls the promise of God, appealing to God’s faithfulness.
       2. **Nehemiah 2:4-8** – confidence enough to request that the king send him to Jerusalem to rebuild it.
          1. He was sad before the king – king asked why.
          2. **(vv. 4-5)** – immediate prayer, and corresponding confidence.
          3. **(v. 7)** – asks for letters to the governors for safe passage.
          4. **(v. 8)** – asks for timber for the building.
          5. These requests don’t come without confidence in God.
             1. **1:1; 2:1** – from Chislev to Nisan is 3 months
             2. Nehemiah is quickly shown to be a man of prayer and meditation – regardless of why there was a 3-month delay, he gained confidence in it that the Lord would grant his prayer.
             3. ***“according to the good hand of my God upon me”*** – knowing the work was the Lord’s will, and having petitioned God in confidence, Nehemiah acted with the assurance of God’s hand in the situation.
       3. **Nehemiah 2:19-20** – the surrounding enemies mocked him, but his response was one of great confidence.
    2. Application
       1. God has provided us reason for confidence pertaining to His will for us – **1 John 5:14-15**
          1. **Hebrews 4:16; 10:22** – we come boldly to the throne of grace, and draw near with full assurance of faith as God’s children.
       2. There is no room for pessimism in the church – such exposes little faith and leads to neglect – **Numbers 14:1-9** – Israelites rebellion at Kadesh, unwilling to take Canaan.
          1. ***“If the Lord delights in us…”***
          2. ***“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).***
       3. **Does God want us to grow in number? Does God want our weak members to be strengthened? Does God want us to reach maturity? Does God want each of our members to be faithful? Does God want us to be a sound, strong church?**
          1. The answer is yes to each.
          2. It is all possible, as it is God’s will, but we must rely on Him in full confidence to find success.
             1. Our confidence must correspond with God’s will.
             2. **Cf. Matthew 17:20** – disciples asking why they could not cast out a demon – faith as a mustard seed.
          3. This will be shown in doing the difficult things, and rectifying wrongs, and making necessary changes.
       4. **Hebrews 6:9-12** – are we confident of better things? That God’s grace can change us for the better?
          1. **Confidence in God to perform His work in us leads to successful action.**
          2. **Pessimism will only produce inactivity, failure, and complacency.**
11. Consideration
    1. Nehemiah
       1. Nehemiah’s words and actions to this point exude confidence in God – He has prayed, petitioned the king, and made his trek to Jerusalem with intent to build the wall.
       2. However, confidence does not and should not result in blind, random, impetuous action.
       3. **Nehemiah 2:11-16** – he rested 3 days when he arrived, and then looked carefully at the wall.
          1. **(v. 12)** – reason for only taking a few men, and at night, is because he had told none his intentions.
             1. **(v. 10)** – enemies already manifesting their opposition to Nehemiah (though not fully aware of his intentions).
             2. The work will be great.
          2. **(v. 15)** – ***“viewed”*** – *śâḇar* – “to scrutinize” (STRONG); “to inspect, examine” (BDB)
             1. ***“inspected” (NASB, ESV)***
             2. He gave a careful examination of the wall to determine the magnitude and extent of the work to be done.

**Nehemiah 6:16** – when finished, the enemies attributed the work to God – speaks to the magnanimity.

**Nehemiah 12:31** – at the dedication of the wall – wide enough to lead a procession upon it.

* + 1. What’s at stake?
       1. Already gone to great lengths to be there.
       2. The task would already be a great one.
       3. He is already aware of enemies that will oppose the task – must not give them occasion for reproach.
       4. These are God’s people, and God’s city – this cannot fail due to inattention and a disorganized, ignorant approach.
  1. Application
     1. Even when it is a requirement, it must be carefully evaluated to prepare for action – **Luke 14:28-30** – count the cost.
     2. We must examine ourselves against the standard – **2 Corinthians 13:5**
        1. What does God require of us? Where are we in relation to that standard? What must we do to measure up?
     3. We must not be aimless – **2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 3:20-21; 4:13** – aim to please God, bring Him glory, to measure up to the stature of Christ.
     4. Our actions of service and love are to include discernment – **Philippians 1:9-11**
        1. Our work in the Lord is to be calculated and intentional.
        2. He requires and deserves the best, but such does not come from disorganized spontaneity.

1. Cooperation
   1. Nehemiah
      1. **Nehemiah 2:16-18** – a public assembly was called (implied) so that all could be informed of Nehemiah’s intentions, and the great need of rebuilding the wall.
         1. **(v. 17a)** – put the problem before them.
         2. **(v. 17b)** – put the solution before them, and the desired result (no longer be a reproach).
         3. **(v. 18a)** – noted the power to accomplish available – God’s grace and providence – gives them reason to act.
         4. **(v. 18b)** – Nehemiah found cooperation among the people.
      2. **Nehemiah 3** – details the sections of the walls and gates being built and repaired by respective parties of builders.
         1. Reveals organization, shared enthusiasm, and particular responsibility (“groups which set to work on their adjacent stretches of wall, some as family units, others by towns, crafts…and callings,” Tyndale Commentary).
         2. **3:12** – one man even put his daughters to work.
         3. **2:16** – ***“the others who did the work”*** makes a distinction – those priors were not actively engaged.
            1. **Nehemiah 3:5** – some of the nobles did not do the work.
            2. The work was beneath none, but the nobles acted as though it was beneath them.
            3. Very seldom do ALL cooperate – those who don’t will be judged by God.
      3. **Nehemiah 4:6** – the people had a mind to work manifested by quick progress.
   2. Application
      1. All parts of the body are there for a reason, and must contribute to the work – **1 Corinthians 12:15-23**
         1. Devaluing self is inappropriate.
         2. Devaluing others is inappropriate.
         3. **Ephesians 4:16** – every part does its share.
      2. We are members of one another – **Romans 12:4-5** – we must realize our responsibility to the greater body, and what we rob of it through indifference and negligence.
      3. Those who do not participate will bear their guilt – **2 Corinthians 2:6** – may imply a few who refused to participate in the action of discipline.
      4. Neglect, or negative action may affect the whole – **Hebrews 12:12-15**
         1. We must share enthusiasm and optimism.
2. Circumspection and Courage
   1. Nehemiah
      1. There were enemies opposed to the work:
         1. Initial disgust and despising – **Nehemiah 2:10, 19**
         2. Escalated irritation and mockery – **Nehemiah 4:1-3**
            1. ***“themselves”*** – ridicule of the people’s strength and ability
            2. ***“offer sacrifices”*** – i.e. in appeal to their God – ridicules God’s strength and ability.
            3. ***“in a day”*** – manifesting his estimation that the work is too much, that the Jews underestimate how long something like this would actually take.
            4. ***“revive the stones”*** – do they even have the materials necessary?
            5. **(v. 3)** – even if they manage to build it the strength will be negligible.
         3. Escalation to conspiracy to attack – **Nehemiah 4:7-8**
         4. Sanballat, and Geshem sent for Nehemiah in pretense, wishing to harm him, and then sent an open letter with false reports about Nehemiah – **Nehemiah 6:1-9** – Nehemiah refused to meet, and had a clear conscience.
      2. Knowing the threat, the people appealed to God, and were cautious:
         1. The threat was not dismissed but taken seriously.
         2. **Nehemiah 4:9** – prayer to God, and a watch set.
         3. **Nehemiah 4:11-15** – warning of enemies’ intentions, and imminent danger, and decisive action which sullied their plans.
            1. Their faith and courage alone after hearing of the enemies’ plans were enough to thwart the plans.
         4. **Nehemiah 4:16-18** – building/working and defending at the same time.
         5. **Nehemiah 4:19-20** – readiness to rally to a point of conflict to assist brethren – communal vigilance.
      3. **NOTE the connection between the appeal to God and corresponding confidence, and the acknowledgment of self-responsibility in taking action:**
         1. **Nehemiah 2:20** – God will prosper us, but also, we will build.
         2. **Nehemiah 4:9** – prayer to God, but then set a watch.
         3. **Nehemiah 4:14** – remember the Lord, but also fight.
         4. **Nehemiah 4:20** – rally there, but God will fight.
         5. **Nehemiah 6:15-16** – with their faithful work, God completed the wall through them in swift time.
   2. Application
      1. **1 Peter 5:8-9** – Devil seeking to devour – individual and congregational.
      2. **Ephesians 6:10-13** – we must realize the battle were involved in, and put on our armor to wage the good warfare.
      3. **Jude 3-4** – it is not enough to have confidence and trust in salvation offered by God, but we must defend it by His grace.
      4. There must be a vigilance, and corresponding action upon seeing a threat by leaders, and all members – **1 Thessalonians 5:12-22**
         1. **(vv. 12-13)** – work of overseers, being esteemed highly.
         2. **(v. 14)** – each member warning, comforting, upholding, being patient.
         3. **(v. 15)** – all pursuing good.
         4. **(vv. 16-18)** – constant activity of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving)
         5. **(vv. 19-22)** – constantly testing by the word of God.
      5. We must have the courage to follow our caution, and do what is right in any given circumstance – **1 Corinthians 16:13-14**
3. Confrontation not Compromise
   1. Nehemiah
      1. Not only was there opposition from without, but also from within.
         1. Secret informers, false prophets, and those doing the enemies’ bidding – **Nehemiah 6:10-14, 17-19** – Nehemiah did not take the bait, and would not be frightened.
         2. Some nobles were oppressing their brethren, so Nehemiah rebuked them – **Nehemiah 5:6-13**
            1. **(v. 7a)** – after serious thought he rebuked – think about the damage such sinful behavior has caused and will cause – such must be stopped!
            2. **(v. 7b)** – called assembly against them – confronted the sin.
            3. **(vv. 8, 10)** – noted the contrast between the nobles’ actions and what had been done before by others for the good of the brethren.
            4. **(v. 9)** – we must be faithful, especially under the current circumstances – how are we to be successful against our enemies if we’re giving them occasion to blaspheme due to our unfaithfulness?
            5. **(vv. 11-13)** – called for them to restore what they had taken, repent of their sins, and held them to it.
      2. **Nehemiah 5:7** – after giving serious thought to what the nobles’ had been doing, compromise or indifference never entered Nehemiah’s mind – he knew the problem had to be dealt with.
   2. Application
      1. Christians cannot have a laissez-faire attitude about the spiritual condition of their brethren, and the church as a whole.
      2. Confrontation is necessary at times:
         1. **Galatians 2:11** – withstood Peter to the face – his actions led others to sin, and such could not be tolerated.
         2. **Titus 1:9-11** – elders at the helm, and any who witness error, must put those teachings to a stop, lest they tear others apart.
         3. **Galatians 6:1-2** – we must help each other bear burdens of sin through confrontation and exhortation to repent.
         4. **Philippians 4:2-3** – we must hold brethren accountable to the unity and brotherly love they’ve been called to by helping them be of one mind.
4. Counsel
   1. Nehemiah
      1. **The activity of hearing God’s word immediately after the wall was finished manifests the reason for their success, as well as the purpose the wall served:**
         1. **Nehemiah 1:10-11** – these are the people who desire to fear your name.
            1. So God brought them success – **Nehemiah 6:16** – even their enemies recognized such.
         2. **The whole purpose of the wall and city was to be devoted to the fear of God – they needed the wall to be a fortified people of God, devoted to His service – the temple and wall were built, and now they needed to hear God’s will for them.**
      2. **Nehemiah 8** – the people manifest a great interest in, and reverence for God’s word.
         1. **(vv. 1-2)** – by the people’s request, and all attended.
         2. **(v. 3)** – they gave attention to the law.
         3. **(v. 4)** – this was a planned action, manifested by the erection of a platform for the reading/preaching.
            1. **NOTE: after 52 days of strenuous work on the wall, they gave time tot more work to ensure effective worship, and reverence for God’s word.**
         4. **(vv. 5-6)** – they showed reverence, standing, and participated in the praise of God.
         5. **(vv. 7-8)** – the law was not only read, but its meaning was explained, and the people were attentive to such application.
         6. **(v. 9)** – the people were moved by God’s word.
         7. **(v. 12)** – the understanding of the Lord’s will brought occasion for rejoicing in the people.
   2. Application
      1. God’s people hunger and thirst for righteousness – **Matthew 5:6**
      2. They know His word is the only fulfilment for such – **2 Timothy 3:16-17** (Contrast: **4:1-5** – they want sound doctrine)
      3. They are interested in God’s instructions for them – **1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1** – ***“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me” (7:1***) – there were problems reported to Paul that he dealt with, but also matters they had asked about as they sought to know and do the Lord’s will.
      4. They want to know how to conduct themselves as the pillar and ground of the truth – **1 Timothy 3:14-15**
      5. They continue in the apostles’ doctrine – **Acts 2:42, 46** – continued daily in the temple.
5. Confession, Commitment, and Change
   1. Nehemiah
      1. **Nehemiah 9:1-3** – the reading of the Law that began the month continued, even on the 24th day they had it read, and it was accompanied with confession of sins.
         1. The reading of the law brought them to an understanding of failure or neglect – **Nehemiah 8:9** – they had wept before.
         2. Now they manifested their godly sorrow and confessed their sins.
      2. **Nehemiah 9:4-5 ff** – the Levites called the people to bless God and enumerated the history of the people from the choosing of Abram to the present, consisting of their rebellions and God’s faithfulness.
         1. Such became a covenant of the people to be faithful to God – **Nehemiah 9:32-33, 38**
         2. All the people who had knowledge and understanding made a commitment to walk faithfully – **Nehemiah 10:28-29**
      3. **Nehemiah 8:13-15, 17** – the godly sorrow, confession off sins, and renewed commitment was not without specific action – the people showed their willingness to adapt to God’s law, and make true changes – kept the feast of tabernacles exactly as the Law required for the first time since the days of Joshua.
      4. After 12 years of serving as the governor of Judah, Nehemiah returned to his service as cupbearer to the Persian king. When he returned to Jerusalem, he found disorder once again, and led the people to change – **Nehemiah 13**
         1. **(vv. 4-9)** – house of God desecrated when a priest, Eliashib, who was allied with the enemy Tobiah, allowed him a room in the Temple for personal use.
         2. **(vv. 10-14)** – the portions for the Levites had not been given to them, as the people neglected tithing, and they were forced to abandon their spiritual service to provide for themselves by other means.
         3. **(vv. 15-22)** – the Sabbath day was not being kept.
         4. **(vv. 23-29)** – Jews had married foreign women, corrupting the people.
            1. **(vv. 28-29)** – even the son of the high priest married into the family of their greatest enemy, Sanballat.
      5. **Nehemiah 13:30-31** – Nehemiah took action and cleansed them.
      6. **Thus, the reading and preaching of the Law brough about confession, commitment, and serious change.**
   2. Application
      1. To find spiritual success, God’s people must be willing to humbly come face to face with their failures and sins, and make a dramatic change – **2 Corinthians 7:8-11**
         1. **1 Corinthians 4:18-21** – they were puffed up when Paul wrote to them.
         2. **1 Corinthians 5:1-2** – their pride even led to the harboring of abhorrent sin. (The specific occasion of **2 Corinthians 7:8-11**).
      2. Churches must be willing to make necessary changes:
         1. Ephesus – **Revelation 2:4-5**
         2. Pergamos – **Revelation 2:15-16**
         3. Thyatira – **Revelation 2:20-23**
         4. Sardis – **Revelation 3:1-3**
         5. Laodicea – **Revelation 3:19**
      3. The people of God must be committed to His will, always willing to confess sin, and make necessary changes.

**Conclusion**

1. The people of Nehemiah’s time were far from perfect, but they responded to opportunity to do work for the Lord and saw success by God’s grace.
2. We should learn from the account to be people concerned about God’s will, and cooperative in whatever way God calls us to.
3. We too must have the mind to work (**Nehemiah 4:6**), and say ***“Let us rise up and build” (Nehemiah 2:18***), and set our hands to the good work.