

Sermon Notes

“To the Work”

Nehemiah 3:5 (Scripture readings: Nehemiah 2:11-20, 3:5, 6:15-16)

September 10, 2006

A. Introduction

1. the “Small Woman” was
2. Nehemiah’s task was
3. This work was done

B. Nehemiah took His Burden to God (Nehemiah 1 and 2)

1. the burden he had was
2. how did Nehemiah respond to Hanani’s news?
3. was Nehemiah the only one concerned about this?
4. what was Nehemiah’s relationship to king Artaxerxes?
5. what did Nehemiah do when the king asked what was his request?
6. 2 Corinthians 3:5, when we serve God, what should we remember?

C. Nehemiah Evaluated the Task

1. how did Nehemiah evaluate the scope of the task before him?
2. what do we learn from this about the obstacles facing our service?

D. Nehemiah Shared His Vision and the Task

1. Nehemiah 2:18; how did he share His vision?
2. How did he share the task?
3. What encouragement could those working take?
4. What encouragement could later generations take?
5. What lessons can we take from this ...
  - a. ... in how we serve the Lord (Ephesians 6:6)?
  - b. ... in terms of encouragement?

E. Nehemiah Overcame Opposition by Faith

1. When opposition came from Israel’s enemies, how did Nehemiah ...
  - a. respond to the enemies (e.g., Nehemiah 2:20)?
  - b. respond to Israel (e.g., Nehemiah 4:14)?
  - c. respond to God (e.g., Nehemiah 6:9)?

F. What truth have I learned that will help me to serve God?

A. Introduction

1. Gladys Aylward, ‘The Small Woman’ —{2}.

- a. was missionary to China up until the second world war, but she was forced to flee China when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led more than a hundred orphans over the mountains toward Free China.
- b. During Gladys’s harrowing journey out of war-torn Yangcheng ... she grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13-year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.
- c. “But I am not Moses,” Gladys cried in desperation.
- d. “Of course you aren’t,” the girl said, “but Jehovah is still God.”

2. Today we are looking at the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls

- a. that took place under the direction of Nehemiah
- b. not because we are interested in the architectural details
- c. nor to know the names of all the gates along the wall – interesting though that may be to some
- d. but because Nehemiah was faced with a tremendous and daunting task of getting the walls rebuilt
- e. one for which he undoubtedly at times felt inadequate
- f. and because we, too, as we face the tasks to be done in the various programs that are starting up again
- g. and will undoubtedly at times feel inadequate
- h. we need a reminder how Nehemiah overcame discouraging events by looking to Jehovah
- i. and recognize that ‘Jehovah is still God!’

3. Scripture reading, Nehemiah 2:11–20, 3:5, 6:15–16

4. I have taken a bit out of its context, as you have no doubt noticed, our text for today which is ‘To the Work’
- a. so, to repair that situation, let us first put Nehemiah into his historical context: which is to be found in the books of history of the Old Testament, Kings and Chronicles

- (A) in the 400 years following David's becoming king
  - (B) Israel had wandered further and further from God
  - (C) so that first the kingdom was divided into two
  - (D) and first the northern kingdom went into exile
  - (E) and finally the southern kingdom, Judah, was invaded, Jerusalem destroyed and the people exiled
  - (F) so that for 70 years the Jews were in captivity
  - (G) living in Babylon and its provinces
  - (H) until as Isaiah prophesied, Cyrus, king of Persia gave the order for the rebuilding of God's house, the temple
- b. this brings us to the book of Ezra–Nehemiah (originally in the Hebrew this appeared to be one book) where we find
- (A) some of the exiles returned to Jerusalem and Judah under Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David
  - (B) who began the work of restoring the temple
  - (C) and was followed by Ezra who restored the worship
  - (D) and then by Nehemiah who had a burden for, and led the people in, restoring the walls

5. let us look at and learn from the events in this book

## B. Nehemiah Took His Burden to God (Chapter 1)

1. As youngsters we used to try the patience of our youth leaders by some of the riddles we posed, usually very bad puns:
- a. what man in the Bible had no father or mother? – Joshua, the son of Nun
  - b. the shortest man in the Bible? – Knee-high-miah
  - c. well, that one suggests a story of the **western rancher who asked the district superintendent to have a pastor assigned to his community**
    - (A) "How big a man do you want?" asked the superintendent
    - (B) "Well, Elder," the wiry, tanned man replied, "we're not overly particular, but when he's on his knees we'd like to have him reach heaven." <sup>—{3}</sup>.
  - d. Nehemiah was a man who on his knees could reach up to heaven – and in this first chapter he had

reason

2. the chapter starts with Nehemiah being told by Hanani
  - a. of the Jews who had outlived the captivity and returned
  - b. and of the sorry state of Jerusalem
    - (A) Psalm 122:3 (we read this last week) says, 'Jerusalem, that is built As a city that is compact together' (NAS)
    - (B) but the walls, that made that city compact
    - (C) the walls that made that city to be a city
    - (D) those walls were broken down and its gates burnt
  - c. so that the people there were in great distress
  - d. and the object of much reproach
  - e. How does Nehemiah respond? Nehemiah 1:4–5a: 'Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, "I beseech Thee, O Lord « {Yahweh, or the more familiar pronunciation, Jehovah} » God of heaven, the great and awesome God, ..."' (NAS)
  - f. I think that you and I would have found Nehemiah a truly likable person: for Nehemiah cared and Nehemiah prayed
  - g. moreover, Nehemiah realized that he was not alone, but that many shared this same burden, Nehemiah 1:11: "'O Lord, I beseech Thee, may Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant and the prayer of Thy servants who delight to revere Thy name, and make Thy servant successful today' and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.' (NAS)
  - h. Nehemiah was so used to turning to God in prayer, that 3–4 months later, when king Artaxerxes asked, 'What is your request?' it was most natural for Nehemiah to pray (2:4b–5a): '... So I prayed to the God of Heaven. And I said to the king, ...' (NAS)
  - i. and 'Jehovah is still God!' and his request to return to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was granted
3. How thankful I am as we look forward to this autumn
  - a. that this church is comprised
  - b. of people who care ... of people who pray

- c. because when it comes to dealing with the difficulties that will face us, of the immensity of the task of reaching this town for Jesus Christ
- d. we are forced to confess with Paul, 'Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God' (2 Cor. 3:5 NAS)
- e. so, as we prepare to go 'To the work'
- f. let us not neglect to go to prayer in that preparation
- g. taking recognition that others are praying for this, too
- h. and that 'Jehovah is still God'

### C. Nehemiah Evaluated the Task

- 1. It is a great temptation when we have been given a burden
  - a. to carry out some task for the Lord
  - b. that upon speaking to others, or having second thoughts, to throw up our hands and so, 'It can't be done'
  - c. and so deliver ourselves from our responsibility
- 2. and Nehemiah, I am sure
  - a. after getting the funding for the materials needed
  - b. having reached Jerusalem
  - c. could have asked the people there – who had lived with these broken walls and burnt gates for years – what they thought of the possibilities to accomplish the task
  - d. and been immediately discouraged from any further action
  - e. but, we read of his midnight ride around the border of the city, taken alone, taken quietly without fanfare
  - f. where he examined the scope the task to be done
  - g. and, given Nehemiah's character, besought God in prayer as he surveyed each obstacle that stood before him
  - h. and concluded from that ride that nothing is impossible for because 'Jehovah is still God!'
- 3. over the years in this church
  - a. men and women have had burdens laid upon their hearts for ministering to this community

- b. including the very formation of the church itself
  - (A) our ladies' meetings
  - (B) our AWANA clubs for children
  - (C) our Sunday Bible and Church schools
  - (D) our men's meetings
  - (E) and so on
- c. which if we had listened to some of the advice given to us
  - (A) even from well-meaning Christians
  - (B) such as, 'You're not growing, you should close down'
  - (C) the task would have been viewed as too daunting
- d. but the people with the burdens for these ministries
  - (A) have looked at the tasks with the eyes of faith
  - (B) and gazed beyond the tasks and obstacles
  - (C) seeing the God for whom nothing is impossible
- e. so if you this morning have on your heart a burden
  - (A) a burden for ministry in some area
  - (B) yet feel daunted about the task
  - (C) and doubtful about sharing it with anybody
  - (D) then be encouraged in meeting that need
  - (E) look beyond the obstacles to the fact that 'Jehovah is still God' – the God who does the impossible

#### D. Nehemiah Shared His Vision and the Task

1. we also read this morning how that Nehemiah
  - a. once he had had his midnight ride
  - b. then came back and shared his vision, his heart, his desire, his burden with the people of Jerusalem and its suburbs
  - c. and in the face of scorn and laughter from the opposition
  - d. set the people to the rebuilding of the wall
2. now, this was done in piece work

- a. so that attached each and every stretch of wall
    - (A) they were not working alone, not in isolation
    - (B) but they could look left and right to the fellowship of others employed in the same task
  - b. there would be the names of those who would work on it
  - c. it is interesting was that the Tekoites, people from Tekoa,
    - (A) remember? that was Amos' home town
    - (B) one of the poorer towns in the area
    - (C) took the responsibility for rebuilding two sections
    - (D) while the so-called nobles
    - (E) possibly thought it beneath their dignity to get their hands dirty with this work
    - (F) even though they had agreed with everyone else in Nehemiah 2: 18: *'And I told them how the hand of my God had been favourable to me, and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.'* (NAS)
    - (G) (and that is a subject for another day: those who agree to do a job but never show up when the time comes)
  - d. so the people arose, and had a will to work, and even though at one point they had have a sword in one hand and work with the other, yet they continued on
  - e. and in the third chapter of Nehemiah, which we recounted in only a summary fashion, there are listed the various families, and in some cases, individuals who worked on each part of the wall
    - (A) so that the results of their efforts, be they good or bad, would stand as a testimony to their workmanship, for all time to come
    - (B) what an incentive to do a good job!
    - (C) but also, these were just everyday people without any special aptitude, but what an encouragement to those that followed after – that they could look at a piece of the wall and say 'my grandfather worked on that' and take from that the knowledge that they, too, could serve God in similar fashion
    - (D) they could serve in like manner, 'Jehovah is still God!'
3. when you who are worshipping here this morning
- (A) when are serving in some fashion in God's ministry

- (B) whether that be in one of very visible service
- (C) or whether it be in a back room
- (D) be it acknowledged or unacknowledged
- (E) your name is being put beside the task that your are doing, being recorded, as is the manner in which you are carrying it out – faithfully or otherwise
- (F) what an encouragement to serve, '[... not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.](#)' (Ephesians 6:6 NAS)
- b. yet, there is another encouragement in the service you do
  - (A) your are part of a chain of God's servants
  - (B) you are continuing the work
    - (1) of someone going ahead of you, serving in the past
    - (2) another believer, another person just like you, having similar strengths and weaknesses
    - (3) used by the God's grace, by the power of the Spirit to accomplish what has been done in the past
    - (4) by whom this ministry now exists
    - (5) be it men's, ladies', children's, AWANA ministries etc., work to which they have put their name
  - (C) so in like manner,
    - (1) God does not call you to complete your task all alone: neither now, nor in the future
    - (2) God has those who will work beside and after you to fulfill the work in accordance with His plan
  - (D) so the final outcome of your service does not rest with you alone, but on the Lord who will call those to serve as He sees fit; and 'Jehovah is still God!'

## E. Nehemiah Overcame Opposition by Faith

1. as you read through Nehemiah
  - a. you come across the repeated opposition
  - b. this was not new
  - c. it had been going on since the return under Zerubbabel
  - d. continuing throughout the restoration of the temple
  - e. delaying, even stopping the work at times
  - f. so Nehemiah was stepping into a swarm of wasps that was already busy buzzing and poised to sting

- g. central to whom were Sanballat and Tobiah
- 2. But Nehemiah's response was always one of faith
  - a. to the opposition, his reply followed the tenor of what we read: 'The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build' (2:20, NKJV)
  - b. to the people, '... remember the Lord who is great and awesome ...' (4:14 NAS)
  - c. and to God, his prayer 'Now, O God, strengthen...' (6:9)
- 3. as you serve God, you, too, can be encouraged in the face of the opposition by following Nehemiah's example of faith
  - a. assured that God will prosper your service for Him: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.' (1 Corinthians 15:58 NAS)
  - b. encouraging those serving with you in like manner – we all need to hear words of encouragement from time to time
  - c. seeking strength from God through His abiding Spirit

## F. Conclusion

- 1. Be encouraged this morning as you consider the ministries that God has given to you and the tasks that lie before you as we recommence our programs this autumn
  - a. of how Jehovah, the God of Nehemiah, enabled him to accomplish those daunting tasks in 52 days
  - b. and Jehovah is still God!
- 2. as we conclude by singing, 'Nothing is Impossible'

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. From ‘Leadership’ by Jonathan G. Yandell, quoting “The Hidden Price of Greatness,” Ray Besson and Ranelda Mack – Kerux illustration #3271
3. From a sermon by Rev. Adrian Dieleman, ‘Get Tall – Fall on Your Knees’ – Kerux sermon #9419