



Sermon Transcript June 25, 2017

Next Step: Service

What God Can Do Through Ordinary You
Nehemiah 3:1-32

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on June 25, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Michael J. Conserva. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Nehemiah 3:1-2

3 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. ² And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them^[a] Zaccur the son of Imri built.

Nehemiah 3:5

⁵ And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.
^[b]

Nehemiah 3:7-10

⁷ And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. ⁸ Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁹ Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of^[d] Jerusalem, repaired. ¹⁰ Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired.

Nehemiah 3:12

¹² Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

Nehemiah 3:13

¹³ Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits^[e] of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

Nehemiah 3:14

¹⁴ Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

Nehemiah 3:16-17

¹⁶ After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. ¹⁷ After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district.

Nehemiah 3:23

²³ After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house.

Nehemiah 3:28-32

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹ After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. ³⁰ After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and

Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber.³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate,^[h] and to the upper chamber of the corner.³² And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

Introduction

Billy Graham was a farm boy from the mountains of North Carolina, Descriptions have him with a big nose and being rather funny looking. This jar of clay, filled with the power of God had preached to millions while meeting with leaders and presidents around the world. He is man Christians and unbelievers' alike respect.

God uses ordinary people. You don't need to be a superstar. You qualify! So be a jar of clay and be filled with extraordinary power and do extraordinary things.

This belief is part of Our Way of Life. Kingdom Now: We live with the conviction that God is at work and Kingdom Come: We Invest ourselves in the work of the God's Kingdom.

God has made each of us as individuals. We are all unique and different. We are all independent. But at the same time, He has made us as interdependent individuals. We are many members, but one body in Christ. He wants us to learn to work together. The model is God Himself is a Trinity. He is one God consisting of three persons, each of which is fully God. The three persons are in perfect unity of being and harmony in working together. God wants His people to reflect His image by working together in unity and harmony. . But that is a lot easier said than done. Because we are all damaged by the effects of sin and we are all works in progress, we need to learn to be gracious with one another. So how do you do it? Nehemiah 3 provides us with an illustrative answer. It's an account of the division of labor in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership.

Why did God include Nehemiah 3 in Scripture? What does He want us to learn from it? I believe that it's here to show us the importance of working together to accomplish God's purpose.

To accomplish God's purpose, we need a common vision, dedicated leaders, and willing workers who do their part.

These ***three elements*** are either explicit or implicit in our text: the common vision to rebuild the wall; Nehemiah as the leader who had instilled that vision; and, all the people who got involved. If we are going to work together as the body of Christ, then we need three elements in order to accomplish the purposes of God for our church.

In order to accomplish God's purpose, the first element we need is...

1. A Common Vision For The Task

The Bible says, Where there is no vision, the people perish. (Prov. 28:18)

You can't work together if everyone is not on the same page or if everyone has a different notion or agenda of what it is we are trying to accomplish.

The people of Nehemiah's day needed to agree on a common vision so they could work together harmoniously.

Their task was specific and it was measurable: to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem to provide a defense against their enemies. And they did indeed complete that task as a body of people.

But the task of the church is not so easily achieved. Our task is to flesh out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Our task is fulfilled by proclaiming the gospel to every people group on earth. But more than just evangelism, that task requires raising up churches in every people group that teach their people to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20). And the supreme goal of God's purpose through His church is that He would be glorified, that His glory would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. That His name would be hallowed on earth as it is in heaven.

Vision of WEFC: *This tells us where we are going.*

To be a church of disciple-makers intentionally multiplying disciples, community groups, leaders and churches throughout the Central Connecticut River Valley.

By 2025 WEFC would like to be a church of community groups with 90% of the church regularly engaged in Christian community and mission.

By 2025 WEFC would like to have a clearly developed pathway for training disciple-makers

By 2025 WEFC would like to multiply either through church planting or multi-site expansion into three other communities along the Central Connecticut River Valley.

Everything/Whatever we do as a church (for the Lord) should have that vision in mind, even though it's not as immediately obvious how every task contributes to the vision. For example, you might have the opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus Christ and they respond to the gospel, we can see were that is obviously related to the vision!

But what about cleaning up the kitchen after a church social? Helping with that task probably won't directly result in many souls being added to the kingdom. But even so, it is a vital task that contributes to the overall cause. If no one chose to do it, it could seriously hinder the well-being of the church! Or, someone could do it with a grumbling spirit, complaining about how insensitive others are who don't get involved. Or, you can do it with joy in your heart because God has saved you and made you a part of His church. He gets the glory and your life radiates the joy of knowing Jesus Christ.

Again, our overall vision is to spread a passion for God's glory among the nations by proclaiming the gospel and by helping all of His saints to savor the savior.

In order to accomplish God's purpose, the second element we need is...

2. Dedicated Leaders Who Can Help Everyone Work Toward The Common Vision

God accomplishes His purpose through people, but people need leaders to motivate and organize them for the cause. The people listed in Nehemiah 3 had been living there for years. But the wall didn't get built until God raised up Nehemiah to lead the charge. It's interesting that Nehemiah is never mentioned in chapter 3 (3:16 refers to a different man), but his labor is behind the whole chapter. He did at least seven things that good leaders do:

(1) A GOOD LEADER MUST NOT MIND IF SOMEONE ELSE GETS THE CREDIT.

Nehemiah didn't tell anyone. He went out by night to survey the damage. He didn't want anybody to know what he was doing, but he knew what he had to do. This was a vision that was birthed in his heart.

Nehemiah didn't want a huge sign over the main gate or a bronze plaque reading: THE NEHEMIAH MEMORIAL WALL. No, no, Nehemiah was committed to the task. He was happy to empower people. He wanted the wall to be built so that God's name would be exalted in Jerusalem and His people would no longer be a reproach to the surrounding nations. Nehemiah knew that God knew and that God would reward him (13:31).

(2) A GOOD LEADER MUST MOTIVATE PEOPLE.

Up until this time, you have to understand, that the Jews had already been back in the land for 90 years, but the wall hadn't been built. When Nehemiah came along with a clear vision he got everyone excited about the idea. They went to work and put up the wall in record time, in spite of opposition.

The question I get most often is how do you motivate people to serve? Motivation is a key to productivity. How did Nehemiah motivate people? It's brilliant. One wise way that Nehemiah motivated the people was to assign many of them to work on the portion of the wall that they had particular interest in. The priests worked on the Sheep Gate (3:1), where the people would bring sacrifices to the temple. Others repaired the wall in front of their own homes (3:10, 23, 28-30). They had a personal incentive to do a good job!

But at the same time you can't motivate everyone. Even Nehemiah couldn't get the nobles of Tekoa to join the project (3:5).

(3) A GOOD LEADER MUST PLAN AND ORGANIZE.

It is obvious from the smooth operation outlined in chapter 3 that Nehemiah had done some extensive planning and organizing. He had figured out in advance how to go about

this huge task. He broke the project down into manageable units. He assigned the available workers to the various units and worked to coordinate them so that everything fit together. Planning and prayer are not opposed to one another, as long as we don't rely on our plans.

And there is nothing wrong with organization, as long as we are flexible enough to adapt to the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals involved. Sometimes people emphasize that the body of Christ is a living organism, not an organization. While that is true and must not be forgotten, we also should remember that every living organism is highly organized. There is nothing wrong and everything right with organization as long as it furthers the efficient functioning of the organism.

(4) A GOOD LEADER MUST DELEGATE.

Nehemiah couldn't possibly have done all this work by himself. He had to entrust it to the workers and give them the authority to get the job done. Now I'm the type of guy who would find it easier just to do the job myself rather than to delegate it. But as the job grows in size you realize that you can't possibly do everything. It's also recognizing that I do not need to have my hand in everything. I couldn't do that and get done what God has given me to do. If God has called you to lead, always ask yourself, "Can someone else do this as effectively or more effectively than I can?" You see by delegating, you involve more workers and you get more done.

(5) A GOOD LEADER MUST OVERSEE.

Delegating does not mean dumping or dictating! To dump something on someone and walk away from it is not effective leadership. To dictate every detail is not to delegate with proper freedom. While Nehemiah delegated the work, you can be sure that he went around inspecting the progress, talking to his leaders, helping them keep things moving toward the goal. In 3:20, he notes that Baruch *zealously* repaired a section of the wall. Apparently, Nehemiah knew not only who was doing what, but also *how* they were doing it. Baruch did an exceptional job.

(6) A GOOD LEADER MUST GIVE PROPER RECOGNITION.

Apparently Nehemiah wrote down in detail who was doing what on this project (I can't imagine him remembering all these names without writing them down!). Some are mentioned as completing more than one section of the wall (3:4 & 21; 5 & 27). But the important thing was not that *Nehemiah* recognized every worker, but that *God* recognized them by including their names here. I'll be honest that I'm always a little nervous to give recognition by name for fear that I'll forget someone who will get his feelings hurt. But in spite of that, it is proper to give recognition for a job well done.

(7) A GOOD LEADER MUST NOT GET DISTRACTED OR DISCOURAGED BY THOSE WHO ARE NOT COOPERATIVE.

We already mentioned the people of Tekoa in Nehemiah 3:5 who refused to join the

project, perhaps out of petty pride. To the nobles' shame, the people of Tekoa built two sections of the wall, and some nobles from other towns rolled up their sleeves and went to work (3:9, 12). But Nehemiah didn't expend any energy on the nobles of Tekoa. Rather, he worked with the many willing workers. Those who didn't get involved were the losers in the long run.

In order to accomplish God's purpose, we need a common vision, dedicated leaders and finally, the last element we need is...

3. Willing Workers Who Do Their Part

Not just willing workers, but workers who are dependable, dutiful, reliable, responsible, solid, tried-and-true, trustworthy, unfaltering, unhesitating, unwavering; determined, intent, resolute; ardent, avid, enthusiastic, fervent, gung ho, impassioned, passionate, serious

The people heard Nehemiah's vision and they responded, "Let's arise and build" (2:18). Working together they accomplished what no one could have accomplished individually. How did they work together in order to accomplish extraordinary things for God? The workers were willing to do four things:

(1) The Workers Were Willing To Cooperate And Coordinate With One Another For The Overall Cause.

Some worked in the front of their homes (3:2, 5, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17). Some worked on the side. Others came from out of town to help. They cooperated with one another beyond any personal benefits, they were willing to work for the overall cause, that the name of the Lord and His people would no longer be a reproach among the nations.

They also coordinated the project so that all the parts fit together. Each knew their task and did it, but they did it in harmony and conjunction with others. It would not have worked if one guy built his section but didn't interlock it with the section of the guy next to him.

It's like working with Lego's. These interlocking blocks, each piece/section must be fitted and locked into the next piece/section for it to work.

So the people building the gates had to coordinate with the guys building the wall. In the church, it is not enough to have a bunch of independent ministries alongside each other. We all should work together in supporting the overall cause of Christ.

(2) The Workers Were Willing To Complement Each Other For The Overall Cause.

Everyone couldn't do the same job. Some worked on the walls. Others worked on the gates. Hanging a large gate is not an easy task! Some were strong enough to carry heavy stones or bricks. Others had to do lighter work. But each worker was important to the cause. As Paul tells us (1 Cor. 12:12-30), the body is not one member, but many. The foot dare not think that it is not a vital part of the body because it is not a hand. And the

hand would be foolish to despise the foot. Each part has a specific and important function to fulfill. Each part depends on the other parts in order for the whole body to function properly. For example, our street to seat ministry.

(3) Some Workers Were Willing To Work Outside Of Their Areas Of Strength.

The priests (including the high priest) got involved building the Sheep Gate and a portion of the wall (3:1). Some of the city officials rolled up their sleeves and joined their people in the work (3:9, 12). They didn't view manual labor as beneath their dignity. Some of the workers were goldsmiths and perfume makers by trade (3:8). They weren't used to this kind of rugged labor. They probably had aches in muscles they never knew that they had before this, but they joined in the work. One man made repairs with his daughters (3:12)!

Sometimes people will say, "I'm not going to work on a cleanup crew because that's not my spiritual gift." Your spiritual gift should help you know where to concentrate your efforts, but there are many jobs where we're all called to pitch in, whether it's our gift or not. The point of Nehemiah 3 is that *everyone* got involved. The New Testament is clear that *if you're a Christian, you are in the ministry* (service) and you will give an account of your ministry to the Master someday (Matt. 25:14-30). The danger is that the "one-talent" Christian will think that his part is insignificant or ordinary and he won't use it for the Master. But the Master expects you to take even the "one-talent" and invest it in the Bank or the Kingdom.

(4) Some Workers Were Willing To Do The Less Glamorous Or Desirable Jobs.

Malchijah (3:14) repaired the Refuse (or Dung) Gate. It was at the south of the city, and opened to the Kidron Valley where the people brought all their trash to burn. If he is the same Malchijah mentioned in 3:31, he was a goldsmith by trade, and he also helped out with repairs on another part of the wall. There were probably a lot more volunteers to repair the Fountain Gate than there were for the Refuse Gate! But Malchijah realized that the job needed to get done, and he was willing to do it for the cause.

Conclusion

Some of you attend services here, but you aren't serving in any part of the cause. I'm so glad that you come, and I hope that you're learning and growing. Maybe you're just taking a much-needed rest, and that's okay. If you know Christ, if the gospel has transformed your life then you are a vital part of the body of Christ. At some point, the Lord wants you to get involved in the cause. Here's how 1 Peter 4:10-11 puts it:

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

So, What Is Your Next Step?