

Sermon: Rebuilding Community

Ever had renovations done – kitchen, bathroom, painting, landscaping...

- Starts with discontentment with what currently is, moves forward with a plan for change, finally the plan is put into action.
- Today we are going to explore the rebuilding of the broken and burned wall of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah.
- The last two weeks we have followed the story of Judah during the first 100 years of their return from exile in Babylon.
- Under the leadership of Ezra the scribe, the Judeans were encouraged to focus on two things:
 1. Rebuilding the temple: at first glance brought grief for what had changed, and joy for what was newly experienced; upon second glance they found a renewed understanding of the purpose of worship – spiritual renewal.
 2. Recommitting themselves in covenant relationship to YHWH:
- The principles of this journey that we can apply to our current context are:
 - ✓ The physical aspects of our worship, whether at home or in a church building, come second, compared to the spiritual renewal we experience through worship, by hearing the word of God, and through sharing in the sacraments.
 - ✓ Where there is commitment from the people of God, there is hope for rebuilding the people of God – one way we can recommit ourselves to God is by living out our baptism.
- 3. Today, we continue the journey under the leadership of Nehemiah where the people were encouraged to rebuild the broken and burned wall around Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah was cup bearer to King Artaxerxes, the Persian monarch, when some fellow Judeans arrived and spoke with him:

“While I was in Susa the capital, ² one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and were in Jerusalem. ³ They replied, “The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.” ⁴ When I heard these

words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:1-4)

- Nehemiah was safe and well in Persia. In fact, he was living quite a comfortable, well ordered life in the royal court.
- But when he heard the news that his fellow Judeans were in great trouble and shame because the wall was broken and burned, his heart was stirred, and the discontentment caused him to make a plan, and moved him to action.
- The first thing Nehemiah did was fast and pray and seek the heart of God for wisdom and direction.
- Secondly, he asked the king if he could take leave and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the broken wall.
- The king granted his request and Nehemiah set out for Jerusalem; we will pick the story up from chapter 2:11-13; 17-18

“So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. ¹² Then I got up during the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. ¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon’s Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.” (Nehemiah 2:11-13)

“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace.” ¹⁸ I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us start building!” So they committed themselves to the common good.” (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

- Nehemiah assessed the damage and encouraged the people to commit to a plan to rebuild the wall.
- While the wall was a physical structure that provided safety for the city, it actually meant more to them than that.
- A solid wall around Jerusalem meant that they could be a community again.
- While the wall was broken down, they were unsettled and disjointed.

- But having the wall intact meant that all the people who were still in exile in surrounding nations were able to come home to a clearly defined and safe community.
- There is a lot in this story that speaks into our situation at the present moment.

1. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things:

- Nehemiah was not a king, a priest, or a prophet, but an ordinary citizen. He held a cabinet-level position under Artaxerxes, the Persian monarch, and he became the governor of Judah later.
- Generally, the kings of Israel had failed, the people had ignored the prophets, and the priests were corrupt.
- God searched the earth to find someone who was open and responsive to His call – Nehemiah was the man!
- He arrived in Jerusalem in 444 B.C. and within 52 days had completed the rebuilding of the city walls (Nehemiah 6:15).
- An ordinary man, facilitating an incredible feat of engineering in 52 days. Only God could do that!
- Nehemiah was just an ordinary person who was open and responsive to the heart of God, and God did great things through him.
- I wonder what great things God is wanting to do in this season, and who's heart is open and responsive to His call...

2. God uses people who are willing to experience discomfort for the sake of others:

- Nehemiah left his comfortable, safe job for the sake of his community. He didn't have to leave Persia; he could have stayed where he was and continue being cup bearer to king Artaxerxes.
- But he didn't. He left the comfort of the palace for the sake of rebuilding community.
- Nehemiah's discomfort was both internal and external.
- He was moved by discontentment – internally, to get up and do something to make a difference for the people of God.

- He experienced discomfort externally in leaving his home, enduring persecution and ridicule, and of course, the work involved in rebuilding the structure.
- I wonder if God is wanting to do something in and through us that will require us noticing an internal sense of discontentment and perhaps causing us to step out of our comfort zone for the sake of others...

I believe that the most important principle is this, **God knows the value of community:**

- Not just for His people, Israel and Judah, but for all of humanity.
- We see this all the way through scripture: creation – God made Eve as a companion for Adam because God knew the value of community; God gave the 10 commandments as a way of honouring each other in community; when Jesus healed people He completed their healing by sending them either to the temple, back to their family, or back to their village as a way of restoring them to the community they had been estranged from; most importantly, God is community within God's self – Father, Son and Spirit. Being created in the image of God, we are created for community.
- This is why God established the Church:
- The early believers saw themselves as a special people, united together because they had been called out of the world to belong to God.
- The NT writers referred to the church as a new nation, a body and a temple. None of these images refer to individualism, but have a collective nature and purpose.
- Even though the church transcends spatial and temporal boundaries, according to scripture it is chiefly manifested in a visible, local gathering of believers who are in covenant together to be a local expression of church.
- God's instructions always have been and always will be directed toward and experienced in community.
- In other words, we can never fully live the commandments/instructions of God on our own, we need to be in community in order to be and do all that God has called us to.

- Primarily, our covenant is with God as a personal confession, 'Jesus is Lord'. This personal confession is what makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Therefore, our covenant with each other is to walk together to be the people of God in relationship with each other.
- We who name Jesus as Lord, are a community – regardless of nation, denomination, age, gender...
- The Holy Spirit is the one who brings each of us to confess the Lordship of Jesus, He is the bond that links us as one unified people.
- Just as God used the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem as a way of establishing, creating and sustaining community for the Judeans,
- **God calls us to be church as a way of establishing and sustaining community.**
- So even though at this time we are physically separated we are still community because community is God's idea, not ours; and community is about honouring others and building each other up.
- Therefore, we must protect and uphold being community above all else, even our personal comfort.
- So, when we consider the opportunity to return to be together again, obviously safety is a high priority and must never be compromised in any context for any reason.
- But **being church is about being a community of believers who are committed to God and to each other at all costs – and this is what baptism is.**

BOU (para 7):

Baptism into Christ's body initiates people into Christ's life and mission in the world, so that they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit.

- Church, this is a lot of information for one sermon, but this story creates solid ground for us to stand upon.
 - Other than safety, the highest priorities that inform our movements over the next few weeks and months regarding worship, or any other church activities:
- What helps us experience Spiritual renewal?

- How can we live our Commitment to God?
- How can we develop our Commitment to each other?
- These three priorities trump our personal preferences/comfort, or anything else.
- Because these are the stepping stones that will enable us to rebuild the people of God in this season of isolation.

Songs used by Permission:

“O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing (Lyngham)” CCLI song # 863569
Words & Music by Charles Wesley, Thomas Jarman
©Words & Music: Public Domain
Used by Permission. CCLI Licence # 34738

“Rejoice” CCLI Song# 1338
Words & Music by Graham Kendrick
©1983 Thankyou Music
Used by Permission. CCLI Licence # 34738

Power point Photo by [Perry Grone](#) on [Unsplash](#)
<https://unsplash.com/photos/IbLgFFIADrY>