

Nehemiah 3:1-4:23

If you've ever read all of Nehemiah, you know what's coming in chapter three. It's basically a list of people doing work on the gate. You may be thinking, "How's he going to preach that"? Well, I thought the same thing at first. In fact I thought of titling this sermon "Nehemiah 3...no, really." I mean what do you do with this? Why is it there? Why did God breathe this chapter into His word? Do you wrestle with questions like that? You should. ALL Scripture is truly God breathed and Nehemiah chapter three is part of all scripture. So let's dig in!

First we need to look back at the end of chapter two to make any sense of this list. In chapter two we saw the first sign of opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah. We also saw that Nehemiah was gaining courage and trust in his faithful God. After confronting our two antagonists (or enemies) we hear Nehemiah utter these words in the last verse, "The God of heaven will make us [the Jews] prosper, and we his servants will arise and build" And the very next verse (it's kind of too bad they put a chapter break there) God says this,

1 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 Zaccur the son of Imri built.

See it! The people have caught on to God's plan as he works it out through Nehemiah. They don't hesitate; they don't form a committee to see whether or not they have the resources and motivation to do this. (That will become clearer as you read on in the book.) God is on the move and the people are following the leader God has placed in their midst. Let's see who else is building with us. Verse three...

3 The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. 5 And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

I would like you to notice one thing here. What you don't want to be is a Tekoite noble. But sadly, what all of us are at some point or another, is a Tekoite noble. Not willing to stoop and serve. Now they may have been more brash than you or I for Nehemiah clearly points out who they will not serve and that is the Lord! Wow, talk about hubris, or pride! But don't you and I do that? What ministry in this church are you not willing to serve in? Yes, there are clearly things you are not gifted in, but that's not what I mean. I'm talking about the things you won't "stoop" to serve in. I mean listen, we have in this church business owners who take out the garbage and set up chairs, Mom's who clean toilets, scholars and nurses who change diapers, and medical doctors who serve beverages. All of whom see themselves as servants of God. That's it. No better than you or worse, just blood bought saints willing to serve others at the foot of the cross. You must take upon yourselves the mind of Christ and not the mind of a Tekoite noble.

Let's move on to verse six...

6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 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 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. 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

From governors to goldsmiths to perfumers...we have a little bit of everyone working on this wall and we see at the end of verse twelve that it's not just the men. Shallum the son of Hallohesh has brought his girls along to work as well. Now it doesn't say what age his girls are, but let's just assume for a second they are at least teens (of workable stature) and probably not Mom's yet or they wouldn't be mentioned as his daughters. So, young people - men and women, you are an integral part of this body of Christ. Don't miss that! It's not enough to sit around at home and act like a young person. It's time to grow up. How can you do that? By serving others. I know what it's like to be a young person. I was once. Hard to believe I know but really, I was, I have pictures as proof. I remember being all wrapped up in myself. And what I want you get is that the best way to get outside of yourself and grow up/ mature is to serve others. What can you do? Where can you serve? Who can you serve? What are your gifts? You know you have them, right? So get out there. I'm sure these girls weren't doing the same work as their father, but they were working. Working at what they could do at their station in life.

Let's keep going...

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 of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

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.

If you don't feel bad for Malchijah, you need to ask God for more mercy.

On to verse fifteen...

15 And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David. 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. 18 After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22 After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. 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. 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress 25 and to the corner. Palai the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh 26 and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. 27 After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

Don't breeze over these lists when you read them. Like I've said before, let your Bible come to life when you read about these places. Did you notice some of them? Azbuk repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David. Folks these are not little walls. This place was big. These were large, tall walls that would last a lifetime. What kind of shadows did a full moon cast on the tombs of David at night while Azbuk and perhaps his family, rested from a long days work? What did the house of the mighty men look like? Was it bigger than the rest? Was it even there? Or did you just have to imagine what it was like long ago before the captivity?

And did you notice who is still working in the last verse? "the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel." Servants of God going above and beyond for their Lord. May we be like them.

Look down at verse twenty-eight...

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, 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.

It's not just a list of names and vocations. These are God's people at work - serving him and serving one another. We see fathers, sons, brothers, daughters, goldsmiths, perfumers, governors, rulers, priests, gate keepers, and merchants. All doing God's work. Nehemiah is showing us that God is faithful right down to the man and his family. All can, and should serve God. He is not faithful only to the rich, powerful, smart or beautiful, he is faithful to all of them and they all serve a crucial role in building the wall.

And as one of your pastors may I encourage you with this, each one of you serves a crucial role in God's kingdom. Serve your God as you serve each other and we will be part of his building his kingdom. We are not just a membership list and jobs that we go to. We are the people of God. Let that sink in. We are the people of God. Here, now, to his work for his glory. He is faithful to work through even me, even you.

Now let's move on to chapter four...

How incredible is God's word that chapter three is all about his faithfulness in using every man in the kingdom and chapter four is going to show us another aspect of his faithfulness. God as the faithful protector. Here we'll be reintroduced to the antagonists, Sanballat and Tobiah

4:1 Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. 2 And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? 2 Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" 3 Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

Oh the enemies of God, how they "jeer". Sanballat, like all cowards, stands with the many he believes will back him up in his feeble attempt at taunting the people of God. Things haven't changed have they? The bully is always tough when he has a gang of friends around him, and Sanballat has that and an army. Notice what he aims his jeering at. He aims at what they believe. They believe they will restore the wall. They believe they will once again sacrifice. They believe they will finish soon. They believe that even these burnt stones can be use by God to build his city. And Sanballat makes his attempt at changing what they believe. Shhh, listen, do you hear the snake in the garden. Along with him comes the trusty and yet not as bright sidekick Tobiah, standing beside and probably a little behind Sanballat at this point and all he can come up with is that there are not building up to code. In fact, a small animal could knock down their wall. Not to mention the army of Samaria.

Nehemiah, the servant of God, is undeterred and he looks to God in verse four. Look what he says...

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

You gotta wonder if he did this right there in front of Sanballat, Tobiah, the brothers, and the army of Samaria. Can you just see it? The guys in the front are thinking, "Hey wait, he just called down God on us" and the guys in the back have no idea what trouble they might be going into, "What did the guy in the middle say? I couldn't hear him. Was it important"?

Notice what doesn't happen. Nehemiah doesn't turn back in doubt to survey his people and the work they have completed so far. Oh no, he goes where he has gone throughout the whole book. He runs to the God of the universe and asks that the enemy be sent into captivity. Something that is very fresh in Nehemiah's mind. He then asks that their guilt and sin not be taken away by God. Why? Not because of the offense to him, but because of the offense to God. They have in essence told God to bring it. And Nehemiah knows he will! And in the mean time what happens? Look down at verse six...

6 So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

They did not fear these men and their jeering. They went on with the work God had given them to do and relied on him to protect them and rid them of their enemies. Oh but it gets worse...look at verse seven...

7But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. 8 And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

When attacking their beliefs didn't work to turn their hearts in fear they turned to plan b. Attack physically. The anger rises and the faces redden as they gather even more enemies to stop this work of God. What are the people of God to do? Should they run? Should they hide? Perhaps this is not God's will for them?

No, God's will is clear and they will not be turned except to their God in prayer. And we see them do just that in verse nine...

9 And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. 10 In Judah it was said,⁴ "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." 11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and

stop the work.” 12 At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.”

What’s this?! The enemy is not the only one taking on the voice of the snake. Now it’s family and friends. Look at the verses we just read again. The enemies are sandwiched in between the friends and family. Friends and family are attempting to introduce more doubt and fear while the enemy is forming a battle plan to attack. Oh goodness! Nehemiah and the builders are taking it from all sides now.

Does this happen to you? Aren’t their times when you can’t figure out who the bad guys are? You see clearly what Scripture says and yet even the good influences in your life are seemingly against God. This is no time for doubt, this is time for courage. Watch as we see courage and an overwhelming trust in God push his people into action. Verse 13...

13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

There is a song by one of my favorite bands about prayer and it basically says this, if you were on a boat and it was sinking should you just sit there and pray. NO! You pray, yes. And while doing so you should be rowing vigorously! Look what God’s word says. Nehemiah and the builders are under attack, so they grab their weapons and take up a defensive stance. Now look at Nehemiah, he stands! This is not what you do when you are under attack. Watch videos on YouTube, people duck and cover when they’re under attack. Nehemiah stands and delivers some glorious directions. Don’t be afraid, set your hearts on God, and fight for your people. Please remember that he is not only addressing the men. This is all of the people we saw in chapter three. There are daughters and moms amongst them - weapons in hand. They don’t sit down in all of their spirituality and pray the baddies away. They pray and they get to work, like they’ve been doing all along. To what result? Look at verse 15...

15 When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. 16 From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, 17 who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. 18 And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. 20 In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

Well, the plan worked and to whom does Nehemiah give the credit in verse fifteen? That's right, "God had frustrated their plan". In all that we do, in all that we build up for God and his kingdom...it is all do to his faithfulness. The people give glory to God for the victory he gave through prayer and work. He is the faithful protector of his people and he uses his people to accomplish that work.

So Nehemiah continues planning and implementing the building of the wall and the protection of the people. And just in case they didn't get it after the near attack he lets them know once again who is ultimately to be trusted for their protection as he calls out among them, "Our God will fight for us".

On to the wrap-up of chapter four in verse twenty-one...

21 So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. 22 I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day." 23 So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

Sometimes doing God's work and protecting God's people requires sacrifice. Many of you serve with great sacrifice the family of God here at Clearcreek chapel. Many of you need to pick up your shovel and get to work. Some of you protect this body with your teaching, guiding, praying and sometimes even physically standing in the way of those who would do harm to your brothers and sisters. God bless you. Do well. Stand up when the attacks come and call on your people to fear nothing, for the Lord God of hosts will fight for us!

Reflect and respond

To the Christian:

1. Do you believe you are an integral part of God's family? You are. You are. And as one of your Pastor's I must tell you that we love you and want you to do well. If you don't know exactly where you fit into this family...come ask. We, all nine of us, would love to have that talk with you.
2. Does fear cause you to run and hide, or does it cause you to run to your shelter and hiding place? Don't let fear and worry rule your life, but call out like Nehemiah to your great and awesome God for strength and courage and guidance. He's listening.

To the unbeliever:

For you who have never repented of your sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ I ask this. Who is your faithful protector? You are indeed in a battle much like the one Nehemiah faced. You sit there building your little kingdom and hoping no one will come and try to take it away. You may even foolishly believe that you can protect your kingdom from the enemy when he comes for you. Listen closely to me, the enemy will not be who you think it will be. Your enemy on that day when your life is required of you will be the God of all gods, the maker of heaven

and earth. You will stand alone in that battle with no protector in sight because you have rejected the only one who could have rescued you from harm and on that day. He will come for you with no mercy, for you have rejected his protection and jeered at his promises, thinking yourself to be something when in reality you are nothing. Standing before the holy God of all creation what weapon will you reach for? What words will you hurl at him that will offer some relief from the crush of condemnation? You will be separated forever from the one who could have protected you from this hell.

But you're not there yet. The good news for you, the enemy of God, is that he has sent a savior Jesus Christ the Lord who sits ready to save you and protect you from the wrath that is to come. Do not be alone on your last battlefield, but stand with the King of the Jews Jesus the Christ who died on that cross so many years ago to take the punishment for your sin should you repent of it and believe in him. Not only that, He was raised on the third day defeating death and hell. And he now sits at the Father's right hand calling you to come. Come, run, don't wait, do not listen to that snake the devil who says you'll have plenty of time to come later. Come, run to the only faithful protector of his people the Lord Jesus Christ and be safe in his arms forever. Come. I beg you, come.