

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

04.26.2026 | It Takes a Community | Nehemiah 3 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to go to Nehemiah chapter 3. I hope that you'll find a Bible maybe in the pew or the chair in front of you, or if you brought one that you would go with us to Nehemiah chapter 3 as we're walking through the book of Nehemiah. We're going through this book and we're considering the work that we are called to do as God's people to be a part of the rebuilding and renewal that He is doing in His people. It's really the theme of the book of Nehemiah. You might remember this story. Nehemiah takes place after the people of God have been in exile in Babylon for a period of time. Now they are returning back to Jerusalem and there is a work of rebuilding that needs to happen. And for the people there, as we'll see in this chapter, a lot of that rebuilding was physical. They're coming back to a place that had been abandoned, that had been destroyed. Now they're having to rebuild. Specifically we'll see in this chapter rebuilding walls and gates in those walls.

But one thing that we see throughout this book is that the rebuilding was not just a physical reconstruction, but the people of God themselves needed to be renewed. There was a spiritual rebuilding and renewal that needed to take place. And that's where this book really connects with us. That we as the people of God need to continue to be rebuilt and renewed by the Spirit of God. So we started two weeks ago in chapter one where Nehemiah begins with prayer. Nehemiah's first action was to go to the Lord, independence upon Him, to seek Him.

His second action, as we saw last week in chapter two, was obedience to the Lord. After Nehemiah spent time praying to God, he then obeyed God. He saw himself as a servant of God. He believed the good hand of God was upon him, and that caused him to risk his job and his life to serve the Lord. That's where I want us to be. I want us to be people, a church who sees ourselves as servants of God, who believes the grace of God is upon us, and so we are obedient to God. So Nehemiah leaves his position as cupbearer to the King of Persia. He travels to Jerusalem. He surveys the destruction, the work that needs to be done. He recruits the people.

Now it's time for the work to begin. Nehemiah chapter three is about this work taking place, this work of rebuilding. One thing that we see in this chapter is that it takes a whole community of God's people to do the work of God. One thing I want you to hear really clearly this morning is that the work of rebuilding and renewal is a community project. God did not create you for you to be alone. He created you for relationships. And God did not save you just so that you could have a kind of private relationship with him. He saved you so that you could be in community. Even as we come to the table this morning, we are reminding ourselves that we're not only brought into communion with God, but also with each other. He has saved us to be a community, and it takes the whole community of God's people to do the work that God has called us to do.

That's really what this chapter is all about. Now Nehemiah chapter three is one of those chapters that when you come to in your Bible reading plan, it can be a difficult one. Because it's a chapter that's just full of names and gates, parts of the city, the wall that were being rebuilt. In fact, if you follow along with us in our Bible reading plan, I know many of you do, Nehemiah chapter three is actually the reading for tomorrow. This is good preparation for you. Now listen, because you're going to read it tomorrow, I'm actually not going to read the whole chapter today. Partly it's because I know you're going to read it tomorrow. Partly is because I don't want you to hear me mess up all the names that are in Nehemiah chapter three. I know you think, here's your pastor, he's well educated, he's smart, he studies the Bible. I can't pronounce these names probably any better than you.

One of the best things you can do if you're ever called upon to read the Bible, and you've got to come upon like names or places that are hard, just say them really confidently and people will just assume that you know what you're talking about. I'm not going to read all of Nehemiah chapter three. For the sake of time, I want to just spend the time helping you see how chapters like this are still very valuable to us. As we go through the book of Nehemiah, there'll be times we come to genealogies or lists of families that have returned. There might be times we don't read through every name. But what I want you to see is that even in these passages, there's something really important God wants to teach us. Even in a passage like this, I won't read a large portion of it as we go throughout and study it, we see that God is teaching us something. All these people mattered in the work that was being done. All these people were the people of God joining

in to do the work of God. This is what I just want us to understand this morning, is that it takes a community to do what we have been called to do. It takes a whole church family to do the work of rebuilding and renewal.

It takes the people of God working together to accomplish the work of God. Specifically, there's three components of this work and how we come together as God's people in this passage that I want to draw out for you as we study Nehemiah chapter three. Three components of what God's people need to do and have to be able to do the work that God has called them to do. So in order to do the work of God, the people of God need mobilized diversity. In order to do the work that God has called us to do, the people of God need mobilized diversity. Here's what I mean when I give you that phrase. What we're going to see in this chapter is a whole bunch of different people from different families and backgrounds and even regions. People from different vocations, careers, part of different guilds, all working together using their diverse gifts, backgrounds to accomplish a work.

What we as the people of God need is we need a diverse group of people, but we need them to be mobilized. We need our diversity to be at work in our body, in our church, for us to be able to do the work of God. So the people of God need diversity, but they need a mobilized diversity, a diversity that is serving and working together to accomplish the work that God has for us. Let me just show you a few places where we see that in this chapter. You kind of see the diversity of the people all who are working together. Look at verse seven. We'll read a few verses here. Starting in verse seven, it says that next to them repaired Melitiah the Gibeonite and Jaden the Maranothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mispa, the seat of the governor of the province beyond the river. Now remember that phrase, the province beyond the river, it's talking about outside of Jerusalem. So here you have people who live outside of Jerusalem or representing that area coming in and helping rebuild the city and its walls. Verse eight, next to them, Uzziel, the son of Hyrhiah, goldsmiths repaired. Next to him, Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired and they restored Jerusalem as far as the broad wall. So here you have goldsmiths and perfumers. Neither of them, really construction workers, used to working with lumber, but here they are putting in their hands together to work to rebuild the wall and its gates. Verse nine, next to them, Raphiah, the son of Hyrh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. So now you have somebody from Jerusalem, but who's a ruler over a portion of the city joining in on the work.

Go down to verse 12. Next to him, Shalom, the son of Halahesh, ruler of the half district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters. So now you have another ruler of the city of Jerusalem, another portion of the area of Jerusalem, and his whole family's involved and we're drawn attention to even the women of his family. His daughters are working alongside of him. So it's not just men, this is not just certain people, this is the whole community working together. Verse 28, go all the way down towards the end of the chapter, it says, "Above the horse gate, the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house." The chapter begins, we'll go to verse one just a little bit with the high priests working. Now we see the priests involved. You've got goldsmiths and perfumers and priests all working together to do this work. See just one more example as we end the chapter, verse 31. "After him, Malchajiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite of the muster gate, into the upper chamber of the corner, and between the upper chamber of the corner and the sheep gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired."

See how diverse this group of people is. Different careers, different callings, different regions that they live in, different areas of responsibility all coming together to do this work. What the people of God need is a mobilized diversity. We often tell new members that we use the language of membership because we believe that we are called to be and created to be the body of Christ. I believe we have five new members joining us this morning at our quarterly members meeting. I've talked with each one of them about we use that language of membership not to try to say that we are some type of club. You're not joining as a member of a club. We're not trying to be like your gym or like Costco by calling ourselves members of this church. We're saying we are members of a body.

What's really important when you think about the members of your body is diversity. It's really important that your eye and your ear look different, do different things. As Paul says in the Bible, if all the body was an eye, how could we hear? If all the body was an ear, how could we see? How could we perform anything? It's needed within your body diversity. Same thing in the body of Christ. We need diverse members. I love the diversity of our church. I love that we are racially and ethnically diverse. I love that we are generationally diverse and socioeconomically diverse. Sometimes you can find a church where sometimes there's a number of people who are from let's say different ethnicities or races. They look different, but they're actually all the same age, same stage of life, all in the same tax bracket. We have in our church a

very diverse group of people, not just from our backgrounds, from our cultures, from our heritages, not just where we live or what we do for work, but even the ways God has made us. We have people who are extroverts and introverts. We have people who are teachers and people who are gifted administratively. God has made us all very diverse. And what I'm saying is we need a mobilized diversity to do the work that God wants to do in us and through us. In other words, we don't just need people who look different sitting in the pews so that we just feel good about ourselves like, oh, yeah, we're diverse. What we need is we need every person as diverse as you are, whatever background you come from. However God has gifted you, we need you involved in the work that God is doing here.

How are you using your gifts, your experiences, your education to serve the body of Christ? How are you using your diverse perspective to help us to see what God is doing? Help us to see the blind spots that others of us have, but we will see with your perspective being shared. Listen, you're far too valuable to just come here and sit in a pew on Sunday mornings and leave. God has created you for more than that. He has brought you to this church for more than that. We need diverse people coming and serving together. Listen, I know you're busy. I know many of you are already doing a lot in the church. I'm not here trying to put more on your plate, trying to make you feel guilty for you not doing enough. I'm just saying we all need to be a part of this. Each one of us needs to be using the gifts that God has given us to serve the work that he is doing here, both within our church and outside the walls of our church. We need a diverse group of people who are mobilized to do the work that God has called us to do. So how are you doing that? How are you a part of that? How has God gifted you? How has he equipped you? Are you using that to serve the body, to serve his mission? In order to do the work of God, the people of God need mobilized diversity.

But at the same time, diversity alone is not just what we need. We don't just need people from all different backgrounds and experiences and giftings. We need something more than that, because a diverse group of people could still be going in diverse ways. And that doesn't help accomplish the work that God wants to do in us. Along with needing mobilized diversity, in order to do the work of God, the people of God need focused unity. This is the second component of this chapter that I want to draw out for you. As diverse as this group of people is, different careers, different giftings, different families, as diverse as they are, they are focused on one task. They are working together to accomplish a work that God has brought them to.

What we need in our church in order to do the work of God is we need a diverse group of people, but we really need, as a diverse group of people, to be focused, to be unified, to work together. It's really what the chapter is all about. We could read the whole chapter and get the sense. I'm just going to read the first couple of verses for you, so that you get a kind of an understanding of both the unity of the people working together and the goal of which they are working towards. Let me unpack that for you as we read verses one and two. It says, "Then Elisha, 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 Hananal." Verse two, "And next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zechar the son of Emre built."

Do you just notice there in verse two how it says, "And next to him, and then next to them." When you read Nehemiah chapter three tomorrow, like I know you will with our Bible reading plan, just notice how many times it says, "And next to." "And next to him worked this group of people." "Next to them worked this group of people." All throughout the chapter you see this kind of next to, next to, next to. And you could read that and you could just think, well, that's just kind of a transition word that Nehemiah is using. Just kind of move from one group of people or one area to the next. But I think there's something deeper being conveyed whenever he keeps speaking about those working next to him and next to them. I think there's this connectedness that Nehemiah is trying to help us to see. Almost the idea of like these people are standing shoulder to shoulder as they all face the same direction and do the same work. They're not just next to each other physically, but there is this unity amongst the people. That as they stand next to each other, as they work next to each other, they together are being the people of God, working together in unity to accomplish the work of God.

You ask any coach of any team, they'll tell you how important it is that a team be unified. Divisions amongst the team can cause a team to break apart. A team must be unified. They must see themselves as a team. Must embrace their other teammates and work together to a common goal. I don't know if you've read the book or seen the movie "The Boys in the Boat." It's a story about the 1936 University of Washington rowing team. They went on to the Olympics in Berlin. Spoiler alert, they won the gold. It's a really inspiring story for a lot of different reasons. One of the themes throughout it

is the importance of the team, what they call finding their swing together. That as they're all rowing together, they can't just be a boat full of individuals, but together as a crew, as a team, they have to find their swing. They all have to row in unison so that they can be most efficient and win the race.

What we see in Nehemiah chapter 3 is a picture of the people of God like finding their swing together. They are working together in unity. There's this cooperation that is happening so that they can do the work of God. Next to them, next to him, they are working together. Let's ask you to do something that might just be a little awkward this morning. Would you just look and see who's sitting next to you? If we read this chapter, we see next to him, next to them. Maybe you've never met this person before and it's awkward to look at them. Maybe you sit by them every Sunday and you never say, "Hey," and it's even more awkward to look at them. Maybe you know him well. This isn't just a person that you are sitting next to. You don't just happen to be sitting by somebody on a Sunday morning. God has brought us together here for a reason. You are next to that person as a teammate, working together to accomplish a goal. And in fact, it's even deeper than just being teammates. That person next to you is a brother or sister in Christ. That person next to you is united with you in faith as they've been united to Jesus.

Again, this is why we come around the table together. This is why we partake of the bread and the cup together. We are reminded that we are brought together as many members into one body. Jesus died on the cross to bring unity amongst his people. You are more than just teammates. You are more than just strangers with the person sitting next to you. You've been brought together as members of the body of Christ. Jesus came and his body was broken and his blood was shed that his people might be unified. We need to live in this unity, to walk in this unity that Jesus has created with his death and resurrection if we're going to do the work that God wants us to do. In the book of Ephesians chapter 4, Paul talks about how this unity has been created by God and by Jesus in the gospel, but then he calls us to be eager to maintain this unity. Jesus has created this unity, but we must maintain it. We must walk together in unity.

Do you know the person sitting next to you? How can we walk together in unity when we don't even know each other? This is why we have community groups and discipleship groups. This is why we have lunches after church. We want you to know the people around you. We want you to be connected here. We want us to be together in unity. There can be divisions in the church, and that is just as destructive as divisions on a team, probably even more. Are there places of disunity in our body? Is there somebody you need to go and apologize to for something wrong that you have done, that we might be able to maintain this unity that God has created? Is there somebody you need to forgive. so that we might have this unity as the body? Is there somebody you just don't know, you just haven't seen in a while, that's just not connected, that you could just reach out to? You have to find our swing together. We have to work together in cooperation, but we're working together towards a goal. The question is, well, what is the goal that we are working towards? You read Nehemiah chapter 3, and it's pretty clear that their goal seems to be to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, to rebuild all these different gates and the sections around Jerusalem.

You wonder, okay, what does that mean for us as the people of God today? Are we supposed to build walls? Are we supposed to do construction projects? How are we supposed to know what is our goal that we are called to as the people of God? One thing I want to help you see this morning is that the people in Nehemiah chapter 3 are doing something actually greater than just seeking to rebuild a wall around Jerusalem. What they're doing is actually participating in the redemptive work of God. You notice how in verse 1, Nehemiah chapter 3 talked about how the high priests and the priests were first building the sheep gate and they consecrated it, and it talked about specifically their beginning with the Tower of Hundred, and it said the Tower of Hananal. It's interesting, in the Old Testament, there's prophecies about many different things, and one of the prophecies we read about is the New Covenant that God is going to create. I actually brought up the New Covenant a couple of weeks ago, and we talked about how Nehemiah and the people of Israel, they were under the Old Covenant, the Covenant of Moses, but we have been brought into a New Covenant.

And God spoke about this New Covenant through the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 31, God talks about this work that he is going to do to bring about a New Covenant and his people, that he would write the law in their hearts, that they would be his people, and he would be their God, and listen to what he says through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31 verse 38. God says there's one day the city is going to be rebuilt, and he specifically mentions this Tower of Hananal. Do you think it's any coincidence that as Nehemiah chapter 3 begins, and they're talking about the work of God's people in

rebuilding this wall, the first kind of area that's mentioned is this Tower of Hananal. It's not a coincidence at all. What we're seeing in Nehemiah is that the people of God were not just doing a construction project, they weren't just rebuilding a wall, they were participating in God's redemptive work. God had sent his people off into exile as a judgment against their sins, but now he was bringing them back. He was redeeming these people for himself. But even in that work, he was pointing to a greater redemptive work that he was going to do, when he was going to send a Savior, a Messiah, to bring about a new covenant. So we come to the table this morning, we remember that Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." We are people under the new covenant because of the blood of Jesus. All of that is part of the redemptive work of God, and what the people of God here are doing is they are participating in God's redemptive work by rebuilding the city.

You see, this is really helpful for us because it tells us what are we supposed to do as the people of God now. Same thing that the people of Nehemiah were doing, but it's just going to look very different. We are called to participate in the redemptive work of God. But the redemptive work of God in our time and for us as a church doesn't mean building up walls, it actually means building bridges, going to people who are lost and bringing this redemptive work of God to them, the good news of what Jesus has done. The redemptive work of God doesn't look like now getting all people to travel to Jerusalem or to one nation is actually going out to the nations and making disciples of all nations. See, we are called to keep this work going, this redemptive work of God, but it looks very different in our day and age. This is why we're not here going to the book of Nehemiah, talking about what building project are we going to do, what ministry or campaign are we trying to accomplish. It's something greater than that.

God is calling us to participate in the redemptive work that he wants to do in our world, in our city of San Francisco. This is why we say our mission is to lead people to love and live for Jesus. This is the redemptive work that God wants to do. There are people in San Francisco that don't yet know the love of Jesus, but God wants them to know it. He wants us to lead them to love Jesus and to live for him. This is the work that we are called to do. We're not called to just maintain programs and ministries or even just maintain a beautiful building. We are called to something greater. We need to keep this focus. We need to keep this unified vision that as we love each other and work together, we're shoulder to shoulder. We've got to be pointed in the right direction. It is this redemptive work that God is doing, specifically here in San Francisco. How is our church a part of it? How are we a part? How are you a part as a diverse member of this body in leading others to love and live for Jesus, to carry out this redemptive work that God is doing?

The people of God are a diverse group of people, each mobilized, serving in their own way, unified around this common gospel that brings us together in this redemptive work that God is doing. We all need to be playing our part for God's work to be accomplished. This means we all need to own where God has put us. We need to have responsibility for the areas God has placed us with. And this is our last component that we'll just consider this morning. As a diverse group of people who are unified together around the work of God and the calling of God, we need humble responsibility. In order to do the work of God, the people of God need humble responsibility. One of the things that we see throughout this chapter is different people owning their areas, working in specifically a place where God had placed them. I'll just point out a couple to you. Verse 10, DMI chapter 3, it says, "Next to them, Jedidiah, the son of Harumaf," I don't know, see, "repaired the opposite, his house."

You see this? Jedidiah is there, and he's got his own backyard, and he says, "This is the area where God has placed me. Here is where I'm going to build." Right opposite his house, he is rebuilding, he is owning his section of the wall. Go down to verse 17, it grows a little bit, "After him, the Levites repaired, Rahim, the son of Bani, next to him, Hashabiah, ruler of the Hasgid district of Kalaiah, repaired for his district." So here's Hashabiah, a whole ruler, and he's repairing for his whole region. He's not a ruler who says, "Well, that kind of work is beneath me." He gets in there with the rest of the people, and he is building. We've seen this with other rulers of Jerusalem or other areas of the province. Leaders getting into the work, taking responsibility for their area, for their district, for their region, and joining in the work of rebuilding. This is why I say a humble responsibility, that we're each willing to take our part and do our part, whatever it may be.

And sadly, not everybody has this humility to carry out this humble responsibility. Verse 5, it says, "Next to them, the Techaites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord." In all this long chapter of all these names of diverse people working together in unity, this one group of nobles is called out, as being too prideful, having too much ego to do a certain type of work. It was beneath them to stoop down and serve their Lord in this way. This attitude, this

mindset, this heart posture, it is dangerous and destructive. It will distract us, it will derail us from the work that God has called us to do. We need a humble responsibility to own where God has placed us, the opportunities God has given us. Seeing a need and responding, not thinking a certain work is beneath us. Listen, we're all tempted to feel this way. I don't speak for just at you, but with you. Pastors, especially, can feel this way, as if certain work is beneath us. Lay members can feel this way. Older generations can feel this way. Younger generations can feel this way. There's this temptation for pride, for ego, to work its way into our hearts, so that we think some type of work is beneath us.

But to fight against that, we have to take humble responsibility. I know I talked about earlier that we all have different giftings. But just the way you're gifted or the way you're wired, it doesn't give you an excuse to not serve somewhere where you see a need. I want you to come to me and say, "Pastor Ben, you know what? I'm just not really gifted to clean the bathrooms. God's just not really wired me to pull the weeds that I see in the parking lot." If that's what you say, it doesn't say so much about your giftings, but probably your heart. God gifted us and wired us in certain ways, but He also called us to just do certain things. We need to be people who don't just point out problems and complain about it, or notice problems and expect someone else to do it, but jump in and serve. Take humble responsibility for what you see, for the opportunities God's given you, for the needs right in front of you, and let's meet those needs.

This only comes with a humility that we just don't have within ourselves. It has to be placed there through the work of the gospel. It will only happen as we keep our eyes on Jesus, the greater Nehemiah. Our youth this school year have been walking through the book of Philippians. Philippians chapter 2, Paul says, "You need this type of humility in your church for you to be the people of God and do the work of God." He says, "The only way to have this humility is to look to Jesus and His humble example, to look to the cross." I mean, how can you look at the cross and not be humbled? How can you think about the fact that you are so sinful that Jesus, Son of God, had to come down from heaven, take on flesh and dwell among us, die a shameful death to save you from your sins? How do we believe that message and still allow there to be an ego?

How do we come to the table this morning, eating bread that reminds us of a body broken for us, blood that was shed for our sins? How do we walk to the table with any pride in our hearts? Paul says, "You've got to keep looking to the cross to have this humility." I don't know, it probably just sounds like I say this every Sunday, and I do, but we've got to keep letting the book of Nehemiah point us to the greater one, to the greater story that Nehemiah is a part of, this greater redemptive work. It's only when we keep our eyes on the cross and Jesus in His work that we will be humble enough to do the work that God calls us to do. It's only when we keep our eyes on the body that was broken for us that we will remember we have been unified as members of one body and we will love each other and work together.

It's only when we remember that Jesus has unified us, that we'll be able to love each other in all of our diversity, see each other's perspectives and care for one another as members of our body, as different as we are. We've got to keep our eyes on the cross, we've got to keep coming to the table, we've got to keep being reminded, this is how we do the work of God. As the people of God, we do the work of God by looking at the work that God has already done in Jesus. When we keep our eyes on what Jesus has already done in His work, He will empower us and He will equip us to do the work as His people today.