

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet
Nehemiah | *A Salvation Story*
North Center | December 19, 2021
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Sermon series method: each Sunday we look at one book together, and we are asking God to help us see:

- *The big picture of the book*
- *How it fits into the storyline that God has written*
- *What it teaches us about ourselves (our history, our hearts...)*
- *What it teaches us about God*
- *And how it points to Jesus.*

If you are joining us for the first time today, then you are jumping in at the end of OT history. You remember that God's people had been **exiles** in Babylon for around 70 years, but then the Word of God comes to the king of Babylon, and the king sets them free!

But God's people didn't all come back at once (and some never came back at all). Those who *did* come back did so in stages:

1. The first stage was led by **Zerubbabel**: he focused on cleaning up the mess and rebuilding the Temple.
2. The second stage was led by **Ezra**: he focused on rebuilding the spiritual condition of the people.
3. The final stage was led by **Nehemiah**: and he focused on rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem in order to save the people from the enemies that were continuing to plunder them.

I wish we could take time to just marinate in this book together. Nehemiah's story has meant a lot to me personally over the years.

Through Nehemiah's story, God has taught me:

- What **compassion** looks like
- How to wait on the Lord in **prayer**
 - I've learned so much about prayer from Nehemiah (e.g., **1:5–11**)
- Characteristics of a strong, godly **leader**.
 - A lot of Christian leadership books use Nehemiah as an example.
- What good **preaching** is all about
 - In **chapter 8–9**, Ezra stands on a platform which they had made for preaching, opens "the book", a number of the other leaders stood next to him, and they preached together "from until midday" (for a quarter of the day), and "all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law" (**9:3**).
 - Implications for a successful sermon:
 - Team preaching
 - Make sure the sermon is at least 4 hours long

- How to **respond** when the Word of God is preached
- How to face **opposition** – especially when it seems to be from every direction
- What God accomplishes when His people to join together with a **unified vision** and work with all their energy for His glory
- What **joy** looks like
- What **obedience** looks like...

I commend Nehemiah's life for your study and for your imitation.¹

This coming Saturday is Christmas! So why are we looking at the book of Nehemiah when almost every other church in the world is looking at the Christmas story today?

I have two answers why Nehemiah is a great book on the Sunday before Christmas:

1. It's the final story in the biblical history of God's people before the Christmas story. **Chronologically**, the next story after the book of Nehemiah is the Christmas story.
2. The life of Nehemiah points us forward to the life of Jesus.

How does the story of Nehemiah point us forward to the advent of Christ?²

FIRST

1. Consider how the story of Nehemiah begins.
 - a. Nehemiah is living **in the presence** of the most powerful king on earth.
 - b. But he hears of the distress of his people (his brothers and sisters) in Jerusalem. He hears about how vulnerable they are to the enemies that surround them because the wall that was broken and burned was never repaired, and his heart is filled with **compassion**.
 - c. And so (with the blessing of king and queen) **he leaves** the kingdom to go be with his people.
 - d. And his mission was to **rebuild the wall** so that the people might be saved from their enemies.
 - e. And he is **praying** every step of the way.

That's what is happening at **the beginning** of the story. Let's read a few verses together.

- **1:1-5; 2:1-4, 11, 17-18**
2. Now consider how the Christmas story begins.
 - a. Jesus is the Word of God dwelling in the presence of God (**John 1:1**)
 - b. And so He comes down from heaven in order to save us (**John 6:38**)
 - c. When He sees the people, the Bible says that "*He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd*" (**Matt. 9:36**).
 - d. And so he trades the glories of heaven and the presence of His Father to come to a dark and broken world to save us.

¹ In **1 Cor 11:1**, the Apostle Paul tells the church in Corinth to "imitate" him as he "imitates" Christ. Nehemiah is another one whose life is worth imitating.

² The whole Bible is pointing forward to Jesus: Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39

Why did Jesus come?

The Bible says that “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” (**John 3:16–17**).

He came to save His people from the enemy that surrounded them on every side:

- Not Rome, not Babylon, not Nineveh, not Egypt... sin.
- He came to save us from the darkness of our sin and from the power of Satan.

The Apostle Paul said, “*This is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners...*” (**1 Tim 1:15**).³

Question: if you look back over the past year, can you think of any times when you have traded comfort, convenience, security in order to care for a brother or sister in need? Can you think of a time when you opened your home or left your home for the sake of bringing hope and joy to someone who you knew needed it?

That’s the story of Nehemiah, and that’s the story of Christmas!

What would it look like for you to trade the comfort and pleasures of conveniences and the illusive sense of security that you currently have (or are currently pursuing) in order to come alongside brothers and sisters in need?

- Inviting somebody into your house for a meal who you know could really use the encouragement. Not just your closest friends and family (the people you feel really comfortable with), but that person or family (who God has placed on your heart) who needs to be reminded of the hope and joy in Christ...
- Giving up that extra bedroom in your house to care for a child through foster care or adoption...
- Giving your spring break to go on a mission trip...
- Giving you Saturday morning to serving at a local soup kitchen...
- Maybe it means canceling your cable subscription so that you have more time and hundreds of more dollars to invest into meaningful relationships in your church family or into those who are serving on the frontlines by taking the gospel of Jesus all across the globe?
 - Maybe you take that extra money and start supporting a missionary?
 - Maybe you take that extra time and consider opening your home for a regular Bible study?

I don’t know how God might lead you in this way, but I do know that we live in culture that prioritizes comfort and convenience and pleasure and health and safety...and all the things that

³ Christmas is the day we celebrate the beginning of our rescue story.

- Jesus is the beginning and end of our salvation.
- Jesus is the story of our salvation, and Christmas is the birthday of that story.

would have kept Nehemiah in Babylon and Jesus in Heaven if they had prioritized the same things.

But they didn't prioritize "*the American dream.*"

They prioritized people. That's why they left everything to come.

That's the story of Christmas.

SECONDLY

1. Consider all the hardships & struggles that Nehemiah endured as he sought to save his people from their enemies.
 - a. There were people who were "deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel" (**2:10**).
 - b. As Nehemiah and the people began to build, people on the outside "laughed" at them and "despised" them (**2:19**).
 - c. There were nobles in Jerusalem who refused to get involved in the work of the Lord (**3:5**)
 - d. The people were mocked and ridiculed (**4:1-3**)
 - e. As the wall was being restored and the gaps were being closed, some of the outsiders "conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion" (**4:7-8**) and ultimately to "kill them" (**4:11; 6:1-4**)
 - f. They made up lies about Nehemiah in order to make the people afraid (**6:5-9**)
 - g. The outsiders tried tempting Nehemiah to sin in order to discredit him (**6:10-11**)
 - h. The people grew tired and discouraged in the work (**4:10**)
 - i. And then there were massive struggles inside Jerusalem as the rich were taking advantage of the poor (**5:3**). It was so bad that families were selling their children into slavery in order to pay their debts to their own Jewish brethren (**5:4-5**). So, there is a sense of betrayal, abuse, injustice, inequality, bitterness, and all sort of other relational dynamics within the people that Nehemiah had to deal with.

2. Now consider all the hardships that Jesus endured on His mission to save His people from their sins.
 - a. Most people assumed his mother was a slut who had become pregnant outside of marriage – including Joseph (**Matthew 1:19**)
 - b. They traveled approximately 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, while Mary was almost in labor. Whether she walked or rode a donkey or sat in a cart, it would have been a most unpleasant journey.
 - c. Jesus is born in a stable (**Luke 2:7**)
 - d. Before Jesus is 3 years old, Herod tries to kill him – and ends up killing many other children in the process (**Matthew 2:16-18**)
 - e. During his ministry: many of his followers leave him (**John 6:66**), the Pharisees try to kill him (**John 11:53**), his brothers don't believe in him (**John 7:5**), his disciples abandon him (**Mark 14:50**), and he is finally crucified as a criminal on a roman cross (**Mark 15:24**) – which was the most horrific and humiliating form of execution that had ever been invented by the Romans, and the Romans were extremely skilled when it came to torture.

Point: the work of salvation (*both from Nehemiah and from Jesus*) came at a very high cost. Nehemiah's story points to Jesus who gave up everything to save us. When you think about the gifts that we give at Christmastime...Jesus gave up everything for you.

The Bible says (**John 15:13**) that there is no greater love than what Jesus displayed on the cross.

- Having loved his own, He loved them to the end (**John 13:1**)
- Even when we were enemies, Christ died for us (**Romans 5:8**)

In **Isaiah 53** the Prophet Isaiah describes Jesus as being:

- despised and rejected by men
- a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
- he was despised, and we didn't care
- wounded, bruised, beaten, whipped...and we turned our back on him
- oppressed, afflicted, like a lamb being led to the slaughter

And all of this in order to save us.

The Biblical authors don't share this so that we will ultimately feel sad, shameful, guilty... They share this so that you might know just how fiercely God loves you (**Eph 3:18-19**)

- At any point, Nehemiah could have called it quits and gone home.
- At any point, Jesus could have called 10,000 angels to set Him free (**Matt 26:53**)

If you ever question whether or not God loves you...Christmas is your answer.

“For God so loved [you] that He gave His only Son...”

THIRDLY

1. Finally, consider how both stories end: with salvation and great joy

Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced,
for God had made them rejoice with great joy;

The women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.
~ **Nehemiah 12:43**

2. Consider the joy that comes from salvation in Christ...
 - a. Angels rejoice (**Luke 15:10**)
 - b. We rejoice with joy inexpressible (**1 Peter 1:8**)
 - c. And only joy awaits (**Psalms 16:11**)

Why? Because Jesus has saved us from the enemy of sin and has made peace between us and God. Not the illusion of peace (**Jeremiah 6:14**), but real and lasting peace.

- God is pleased with you.
- God delights in you.
- God sings over you.
- God is with you.
- God is for you.

Jesus has done it.

PRAY

As our worship team comes forward, we are going to close our service by singing of this peace that has come through the miracle of Christmas.

The **Word of God** has become flesh
Unto us **a child** is born
The **Savior** of this broken world

Oh, hear the angel voices
Sing come let us adore Him
Peace has come
For our King is with us

Jesus came.

He came as the savior of this broken world.

He came to take our sin upon Himself and suffer for it on the cross.

And He did this so that there could be peace between us and God, now and forever.

So sing!

Come let us adore Him.

Peace has come.