

## **Nehemiah 2:11-4:23** **Worshipping at Work**

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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We're going to cover a lot of ground this morning in Nehemiah, and part of that is because Chapter Three is a big long list of names and places – the kind of thing you run into a lot of in the Old Testament. But, as we'll see, there's some really interesting tidbits tucked away in that list – little comments and details that we can learn a lot from. So, we'll skim parts of it, but we'll also drill down deep on some parts as well.

But the big thing I want you to see this morning is how Nehemiah and those around him went about the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem – they did in complete dependence on God. They did work on earth with an eye toward heaven. That was especially important when they faced opposition, but it was their constant attitude. And the question that you and I need to ask is, do we do the same? Do we pray for and about the work God has us doing here on earth, or do we try to keep this unnatural divide between the spiritual and the everyday parts of our lives? We'll talk a LOT about that as we move on, so let's start here in

Neh 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but *there was* no room for the animal under me to pass. (Probably due to all the rubble that had fallen in this area.) 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

If you were with us last week, you remember Nehemiah left Susa with a direction from God – to rebuild the wall of the city, but he didn't have all the details. And we said that's often the way God works in our own lives – when there is something He wants us to be a part of, we often get the general direction, but not the specific details.

Well now that Nehemiah has been faithful to follow God's direction, he begins to discover the details. He's able to get a feel for how bad things really are and how much work will be involved. But he also knows how clearly God has called him to this task, and how much God

has already provided for him, so when he runs into the obstacles we see throughout the rest of this section, he has the confidence and faith in God to press on.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me.  
So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to *this good work*.

Nehemiah has God's favor, and the king's favor; Heaven and Earth are coming together at the same time and place. Nehemiah is exactly where he is supposed to be and most people are excited about the plan. But not everybody,

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *of it*, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What *is* this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"  
20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

These guys, leaders of the surrounding region, also part of the Persian Empire, suggest that Nehemiah is being rebellious, that he's going to spark an insurgency against the king – which of course is not true, he has the king's full blessing to be there doing what he's doing. But I want you to notice how he handles it.

Nehemiah knows his work on earth was assigned by heaven, so he is trusting God to take prosper him. These guys are going to give Nehemiah countless headaches in the coming chapters, but *each time* he responds by relying on God and continuing the work. So he works and he prays, he prays and he works. Both pieces are essential in Nehemiah's eyes – there is no divide between Sunday and the rest of the week.

In fact, look at how he chooses to begin describing the work they did in Chapter Three:

Neh 3:1 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, *and* consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel.

Chapter Three is a roster of who rebuilt what in the city, and it starts off with the priests - this work on earth was an act of worship to God in heaven.

We tend to want to break the two apart, as if, I do my physical work and then I do my spiritual thing, but the two don't always connect. That's not what God wants. God wants us to be working in the physical world **because of** what's going on in the spiritual. And that's true whether you're a construction worker or a pastor.

In a church like ours, there's a lot of physical work that needs to be done – every single week we have to rebuild the walls. So when people ask, “Hey how can I get more involved in ministry? I'll often tell them - come early, help set up – set up the chairs, set up worship equipment, set up children's ministry – help “build the church.” Or stay late and help tear down. You can serve God in heaven by working here on earth. There's no distinction between the spiritual and ‘non-spiritual’ sides of our life. And as we'll see next, that's true no matter who you are:

3 Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, made repairs. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. 5 Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.

Those are the guys you don't want to be, huh? You know whatever excuse they had that seemed so good at the moment felt kind of stupid when the fact that they didn't help out got inked into the Bible for all eternity.

You know how you avoid that? Simple. Don't let your status keep you from joining in the Lord's work. **Nothing done for God is ever beneath you.** I mean, think about it – if you're too busy, or too important, to serve the Lord by joining in His work – just what is it that you're doing? And what's the eternal value of that?

I've said it before, and I'm sure I'll say it for as long as I'm here in this pulpit – *one of the greatest threats to your spiritual health and to the health of your family, or to your ability find a spouse and begin a family, is your job, your position: either the one you have or the one you're hoping to get.*

So keep an eye on your job, serve the Lord in it, but be Nehemiah – the one whose position at work brought him *closer* to what God was doing. Don't be like these nobles whose position kept them *from* what God was doing.

In this church we've had generals setting up chairs and running sound; people who work in the White House serving in the nursery. Some of you help kids color on Sunday and then brief policy makers on Monday. That's encouraging to me, and I hope it's encouraging to the rest of you as well. We have people in this church who believe their service to God is more important than anything else they do. Remember the little rhyme – “Only one life, will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.” No matter how noble you are, when God calls you, put your shoulder to the work of your Lord.

8 Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Also next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and they fortified Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

You find a lot of people mentioned in this project – but none of them are listed as architects or builders – instead you see people like this – goldsmiths and perfumers. People like Nehemiah who hadn't really been trained to do the work God called them to do, but they believed that because they were doing it for God, they could rely on Him to do it, and to do it well. It kind of takes the air out of our reasons for not jumping into God's projects in our lives. If God is calling you to do something for Him, don't rest on the excuse, "I've never done that before" just have a willing heart and jump into the work. Let Him teach you as you go.

**11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hashub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. 12 And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs.**

Here's a guy who is the leader of half the city, and he brought his whole family into the project. These young ladies got involved in what God was doing even if it meant getting a little dirty and a little sweaty. There are two things to learn here. First, parents, involve your children in ministry whenever you can. It's the best "family-time" you can spend: loving God and serving others, together. I'm thrilled that so many of you do that – you serve together in Children's ministry or at the Mission, or your kids come early and help you set up, even the little girls – the daughters. That's great.

Second, ladies, don't ever tell God you won't go somewhere or do something because you think it'll be dirty or because they won't have clean bathrooms. There's a time to get dolled up, there's a time for looking good with nice hair, heels, and your amazing little black dress, but there's also a time for getting dirty and getting after it for God. Follow Him wherever He leads and trust Him – you can shower later.

**26 Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel made repairs as far as the place in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower. 27 After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel.**

Remember the guys whose nobles wouldn't serve – well the rest of their people were pretty zealous – they finished one area and took on another. At least three of the groups mentioned in this chapter are mentioned more than once. So, if you finish the first thing you're doing for God, look around for what's next.

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There are other lessons we can learn from this list, but we're going press on to Chapter Four instead. The take-away here for you is, don't automatically assume every list is a boring roster – be curious, ask, "Why did God put this in the Bible, and what should I learn from it?"

**Neh 4: 1** But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. **2** And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?”

**3** Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”

These guys really don’t want to see the city rebuilt – so they come out to mock and taunt Nehemiah and the rest of the workers. But how does Nehemiah respond?

**4** Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! **5** Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

**6** So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah calls down the wrath of God, not because he was personally offended, but because they were opposing the work that God had commanded.

As you try to follow and serve God, you’re going to meet opposition too. But don’t let words get under your skin because if you dwell on them, they’ll grow. Instead, just get back to the work God has called you to...after all, did you notice, the wall is already halfway up? Verse 6, “the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.” Set your mind on the work God has called you to.

**7** Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, **8** and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. **9** Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

These guys don’t give up easily. First they tried taunting, now they’re actually plotting. But Nehemiah responds the same way - with prayer and action, this time including guard duty.

I want you to notice too, that things went great for Nehemiah when he spoke to the king about coming out here to do the work. But now that he’s here he’s running into all kinds of opposition *and that doesn’t mean he’s doing the wrong thing*. Doing the right thing isn’t always easy, in fact, it’s rarely easy and it’s quite possible that you will be opposed as you seek to go in the direction God is leading you. And that’s why we need to pray and work, even when we’re opposed.

10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

We need to pray and work, even when we feel weary. We usually start off doing things for God with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm. But at some point, it also begins to feel like a lot of work – because, it is. It's a lot of work to serve in children's ministry. It's a lot of work to show up and help put out chairs. It's a lot of work to keep getting your house ready for home group, or keep selecting songs for worship. It may be work that we're doing for God, but it's still work, and that means that at times we will be tired.

And then, when you're tired, sometimes another wave of discouragement comes rolling in.

11 And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

They've tried taunting, they've tried intimidation, and now they're working on subversion using threats and rumors.

But how does Nehemiah respond? The same as always – with action on earth and a reminder of God.

We've talked about this before – you can either look at God through your problems, or you can look at your problems through God. Which is going to seem bigger to you – your problem, or your God? It doesn't mean your problems aren't real, it doesn't mean you won't have to take real actions in the real world – but are you looking at things through the lens of the God who made the world and everything in it? Have you forgotten God in the midst of the "what ifs?" that are pounding inside your head? Is that keeping you from the work God called you to? Maybe it's time to remember all that is at stake and get back after it.

15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the

builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

Once again, this constant reminder – we’re doing the work, we’re taking practical steps, but “God will fight for us.”

Notice – this is what it felt like to be in God’s will. They were doing the right things, and this was the response! They got dirty, they grew tired, and they were threatened. That’s not the picture we think of when we imagine Christianity in America, is it? But this real. This is what it is like to really know and serve God, to be busy about our Father’s business on a planet that has rebelled against Him.

Knowing God, and especially serving God, is not always easy – it can be hard, challenging, and exhausting at times. But don’t assume that simply because something is hard that it’s wrong. And don’t give up. Don’t walk away from half-built walls. Remember God and continue the work.

21 So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.” 23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.

They had a wartime mentality as they served God on a construction site.

As we close this morning, let me ask again: what has God called you to build? Who has God called you to build? Is there a people, a place, or a project that God is trying to send you to? And who/what are the enemies in your life – what is keeping you from serving that group of people, that place or completing that project? And how does God want you to overcome that opposition by keeping your eyes on Him and your hands at work? Pray, pray, pray, until you know the answer.