

“Doing a Great Work” Nehemiah 4:-6:3

INTRODUCTION:

**Chapters 4 – 6 of the Book of Nehemiah
are just too long to read this morning.**

**So, let me tell you what those chapters contain
and we’ll concentrate on the relevance it has for us.**

**First of all,
let me say that the Book of Nehemiah
should be read along with the book of Ezra.**

**In the Jewish tradition,
they are considered one book.**

**Nehemiah was a Jewish layman,
not a priest like Ezra nor a prophet like Malachi.**

**He served in the Persian royal court
as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes –
a very high office in the royal court,
being in charge of serving wine to the King.**

**That position is one of great trust
and it required a reputation above reproach
and apparently it paid very well.**

**Nehemiah had remained behind in Persia
when the Jews were released and allowed to return to their home.
Nevertheless, he was very interested
in the state of affairs in Judah.**

**Word reached Nehemiah that
“the wall of Jerusalem is broken down
and its gates are burned with fire,” (Neh 1:3).**

**Many Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity.
The Temple was still standing
and the people were trying to rebuild Jerusalem.**

**Nehemiah was burdened by the fact
that the city walls were still in shambles.**

**The once-great capital of the promised land
was a depressing rubble heap exposed to her enemies.
there was no protection for either the temple or the city.**

**So, Nehemiah fasted, mourned and prayed
for the rebuilding of the walls of his beloved city.**

**During this time of Nehemiah’s great concern for Jerusalem,
his great grief and concern could no longer be hidden.
The king noticed Nehemiah’s mood
and asked what was so troubling to his servant.**

**Nehemiah responded his beloved city was destroyed and in ruins.
He asked permission to go and help re-build the city.**

**Not only did the king give him permission,
the king gave him the resources he would need
to accomplish the task.**

**The king granted military troops, horsemen,
letters of passage and even building materials.**

So, Nehemiah sets out for Jerusalem.

“BUILDING A WALL”:

**Now, Nehemiah had not told those in Jerusalem
his whole intent for coming to Jerusalem.**

The people assumed he only wanted to visit the Temple.

**One night while everyone was sleeping,
Nehemiah set out quietly to survey the city
and determine everything that was necessary
to do the work of rebuilding the walls.**

**He took with him several leaders and influential men
so they could see for themselves what Nehemiah saw.**

And here is our first lesson.

**When faced with a great task to which God has called us,
it is a wise thing to share the vision with others.**

**First of all,
sharing that vision with others is a good way
to make sure something important
has not been overlooked.**

**Sometimes our zeal to see a project finished
leads us to make rash decisions.
Sometimes it is our ego that gets us in trouble.**

**Sharing our vision with others is good leadership practice.
It has prevented me from making bad decisions in the past.**

**Nehemiah used his leadership skill
to rally a citywide construction crew.**

It is interesting reading, Nehemiah’s plan.

**He basically divided the city into neighborhoods
and assigned each neighborhood – family, clan, group –
a specified piece of the wall to rebuild.**

**As you read through the groups,
you will recognize some of the names of the people
and you will be familiar with some of the groups.**

**Nehemiah sensed that large tasks
should be broken down into smaller, more manageable ones.**

Looking at the wall before the work began seemed daunting.

**Instead of one large project
where Nehemiah tried to control every worker,
he broke the building efforts into groups.**

**Men were put in charge of smaller portions of the wall.
Each family built the portion of the wall
that was closest to their own dwelling.**

The project seemed less overwhelming to them this way.

**There is Godly genius behind Nehemiah's plan
to have each family build the section of the wall
directly in front of their houses.**

**By involving the families in rebuilding the walls,
those working on the wall began to feel an identity
and uniqueness in their part of repairing the walls.**

Here is another great lesson.

**If you're working on a large project,
get the people involved;**

let them invest themselves in the project.

**I had a chance to speak with Dr. Spurgeon yesterday
after the memorial service.**

He commented on what a nice building we have.

**He then said that Mrs. Walton had done both a good thing
and a not so good thing.**

**By providing the funds for the building,
she had inadvertently prevented the people
from becoming invested in the church.**

**I reminded Dr. Spurgeon that we were invested in the church,
we had added on to the church and carried a mortgage.**

**You see, to a pastor,
a church without a huge project or a lot of debt
is a church that is on the road to complacency.**

**Growth only occurs when people are meeting resistance.
That's why people lift weights to build muscle
and walk or jog to increase heart strength.**

**So Nehemiah was making sure that the people
had the opportunity to be part of the project –
- to invest themselves in rebuilding the walls.**

**Meanwhile,
news of Nehemiah's return
and his intent to rebuild the walls
became known to the enemies of Israel.**

Sanbalat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite,

**and Geshem the Arabian vowed to stop Nehemiah
and the Jews from rebuilding the city.**

**And according to scripture,
they tried every trick in the book.**

**Sanballat tried ridiculing them, saying they were feeble:
“Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of
rubble? . . . Can they do it in a day?”**

**Tobiah said:
“ . . . if even a fox climbed up on the walls, he would break
down their wall of stones.”**

Here is another lesson.

**Whenever we are called by God to undertake a big task,
there are going to be those who will ridicule us;
those who will be quick to tell us
what is wrong with our plan;
those who will stand around doing nothing more
than finding fault.**

**Unfortunately, that kind of behavior is not limited to the world,
it happens in our churches, as well.**

**Gathering the support of others –
- which is what Nehemiah did when he showed others his plans
helps us weather the storms of naysayers
and those who would block our progress.**

**Under Nehemiah’s leadership,
the Jews of Jerusalem withstood the opposition
and came together to accomplish their task of rebuilding.**

**That was no easy task,
Sanballat and his gang kept up their verbal abuse.
And even threatened to attack the city.**

**Instead of caving in to the pressure,
Nehemiah came up with a great strategic plan.**

Nehemiah 4:13, 16

¹³Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. . . ¹⁶From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah ¹⁷who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, ¹⁸and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

**Nehemiah planned ahead.
He made provision for unsettling contingencies.**

**That's another lesson we can learn.
There's a saying I picked up somewhere:
"Hope for the best; plan for the worst."**

**With God's help and guidance,
Nehemiah leads and directs the project;
each family built the section of the wall
directly in front of their houses.**

**And with hard work and mutual cooperation,
the wall was astonishingly completed within 52 days.
52 days!**

THE LESSONS:

I want you to take two thoughts with you from today's sermon.

**The first thought is that God has placed you where you
are for a specific purpose
and has given you particular gifts
to accomplish that purpose.**

**Ministry is made up of all manner of people
in all manner of places
doing all manner of work.**

**“Ministry” is not confined
to being a minister of Word and Sacrament
any more than Nehemiah not being a priest of prophet.**

**Nehemiah was one of us –
- someone chosen by God for a huge project –
- equipped by God –
- led by God.**

**You are not limited by your vocation.
What could a cupbearer know about building walls?**

**Have this attitude about your work:
“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the
Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father”
(Colossians 3:17).**

CONCLUSION:

Let me offer this as a conclusion.

**If you feel God is calling you to something – some task or project –
that is beyond your abilities, remember this:**

**God does not limit the call to greatness
to those who are already great.**

God calls those who are *willing to become* great.

Want examples?

David was a mere herd boy who became Israel's greatest king.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer,

the Apostles were fishermen and tax collectors.

Paul was a tent maker.

Take these lessons from Nehemiah.

**If you think God is calling you to something huge,
ask a friend what he/she thinks.**

Share your vision with them.

If you determine God *is* calling you,

then break the project down into manageable pieces.

Enlist the help of others.

And when – not if – when the going gets tough,

say to yourself what Nehemiah said to Sanballat:

“I'm building a wall and can't come down!”