

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 January 2020

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Jeremiah 3, verses 1 through 32, page 439. Please remain standing with me for the reading of God's Word. Then Eliashiv, 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 Hanan El. And next to him the men of Jericho built.

And next to them Zakur, the son of Imri, built. The sons of Hasana'ah built the fish gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

And next to them Muremoth, the son of Uriah, son of Hakkot, repaired. And next to them Mishulam, the son of Berekiah, son of Meshazav El, repaired.

And next to them Tzadok, the son of Ba'anah, repaired. And next to them the Tekoites, repaired.

But their nobles would not stoop to serve their lord. Yoyadah, the son of Paseyach, and Meshulam, the son of Besodhiyah, repaired the gate of Yishanah.

[1 : 10] They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And next to them repaired Malat-yah, the Gibeonite, and Yadon, the Moron-Nothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mitzpah, the seat of the governor of the province beyond the river.

Next to them Uziel, the son of Harkhiyah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired.

And they restored Jerusalem as far as the broad wall. Next to them Raphayah, the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. Next to them Yudhaya, the son of Hurumaf, repaired opposite his house.

And next to him Hattush, the son of Heshavniah, repaired. Malkiyah, the son of Harim, and Hashuv, the son of Pachath Moab, repaired another section and the tower of the ovens.

Next to him Shalom, the son of Halochesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired he and his daughters. Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoach repaired the valley gate.

[2 : 21] 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. Malkiyah, the son of Rechav, ruler of the district of Beth HaKerem, repaired the dung gate.

He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And Shalom, the son of Ko'choseh, ruler of the district of Mitzpah, 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 Shelach of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David.

After him, Nehemiah, the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Bethzur, 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.

After him, the Levites repaired. Rechum, the son of Bani. Next to him, Cheshaviah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district.

[3 : 28] After him, their brothers repaired. Bauai, the son of Hanadath, ruler of half the district of Keilah. Next to him, Ezer, the son of Yeshua, ruler of Mitzpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent of the armory at the buttress.

After him, Baruch, the son of Zabai, repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashiv, the high priest. After him, Meremoth, the son of Uriah, son of Hakkots, repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashiv to the end of the house of Eliashiv.

After him, the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. After them, Benjamin and

Cheshuv repaired opposite their house. After them, Azariah, the son of Maaseyah, son of Ananiah, repaired beside his own house.

After him, Abinui, the son of Hanadath, repaired another section from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. Palau, 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, Pithayah, the son of Parosh, and the temple servants living on Ophel, repaired to a point opposite the water gate on the east and the projecting tower.

[4 : 51] After him, the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel. Above the horse gate, the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house.

After them, Tzadok, the son of Emer, repaired opposite his own house. After him, Shemaiah, the son of Shekariah, the keeper of the east gate, repaired.

After him, Hananiah, the son of Shelam Yah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Tzalaf, repaired another section. After him, Meshulam, the son of Berekiah, repaired opposite his chamber.

After him, Malkiyah, 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.

And between the upper chamber of the corner and the sheep gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[5 : 49] You may be seated. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

They're placed in the scriptures. We're wondering a bit about Nehemiah and his intention for a reader.

Interestingly, this is the first of what will be five such lists of names in this literature that we're studying.

Lists meant something to him. Lists of names were significant. But what will this list mean for us?

[7 : 30] Let me say what we can say given where we are in the book. We, like Nehemiah, would like to do a great work for God.

He saw the condition of the city with its walls broken down and the gates having been burned. The opening chapter, verses 1 and 2. And God put in his heart a conviction to do something great for God given the state of God's people.

We're like him. And so we're learning from his way. In chapter 1, he prayed to the king of heaven. That was step 1. Nehemiah's prayer to the king of heaven. He sought God before walking out into the world or into the church to make a difference.

[8 : 36] In chapter 2, he moved from his prayer to the king of heaven to a request of the king of Susa. That would actually not only permit his appointment to do something constructive, but would actually materialize that through resources to accomplish the work.

And then he had his own quiet, personal preparation. All these things are responses to a heart desire that wants to be meaningfully engaged in life in ways that restore and rebuild.

Prayers to God, petitions to those in authority, and personal plans of preparation. But throughout, Nehemiah has been the overriding subject of his writing until today.

Nehemiah falls from view, and it is as though he wants to bring before the church a record of names.

Let me put it to you as simply as I can. He is both honoring and demonstrating to you that this list, which perhaps would have hung on his office wall of individuals who joined him in the work with a like-minded pursuit of doing something great for God, would not be forgotten.

[10 : 21] That was his intention. And he places it here, even before all the work will begin to unfold as a completed action.

It is an origins story. A new beginning. A moment in Israel's past. And these are the names that history should not forget.

Could he have ever imagined. Thousands of years hence. A group of North Americans and urban dwellers from all over the world listening again to the recitation of this record.

I want to simply handle the text in three ways. What is the movement of this list, this chapter, and its relationship to what Christianity would find in fruition with what Jesus does?

What is the relationship of this text and the gospel? And then secondly, what is the relationship of this list and gospel work? And then finally, what might be said from this that would inform us strategically for the gospel work that's facing us?

[11 : 47] The relationship of this text to the gospel, I'll just touch into it early. Notice where it begins. At the sheep gate. It'll also close, verse 32, back at the sheep gate.

The literature is giving you a movement wherein the sheep gate is the entrance of all that materially took place.

And the movement went all the way around from the northeast corner, the sheep gate, which would have come right into that outer temple area, and then the sacrifices.

And it goes all the way down, all the way down to the very bottom of the city where the dung gate was, and then all the way up the other side. Nehemiah's great work was to rebuild this wall.

Interestingly, Jesus, the Nazarene, in John's gospel, will be concerned with the repair and the rebuilding, not only of a place, but of people from this city.

[12:59] And in John 5, he will enter into the sheep gate, and he will see a man that really hasn't been productively engaged in life for 38 years. And he will heal him, and his work of restoration and repair on a spiritual level, which is far like synapses colliding on what Nehemiah does here at a physical level.

And with Jesus telling everyone, my father is still working, and I am working. He is working within the confines of Jerusalem, repairing a people for God.

But there's something more about this text in the gospel than simply some geographical beginning and end point, and Jesus exercising ministry in the same spatial context.

There's a prophetic witness as well. The psalmist, in Psalm 18, which you might want to see, begins, 118.

The psalmist will begin to think about Jerusalem as a city. In other words, the walls of this city, the gates of this city.

[14:19] Look at verse 19. Open to me the gates of righteousness. He's longing for the gates, the city gates to be opened.

But in verse 22, he writes of a stone that is to be rejected. A cornerstone. That there is a cornerstone within the city wall at the gate that is consecrated unto the Lord.

And that stone, according to the New Testament, and we'll look there in a while. According to the New Testament, references none other than Jesus himself, who is a cornerstone rejected, but in and through whom all of God's plans for Jerusalem are finally fulfilled.

So there's this prophetic word from a psalmist that deals with the city and its walls that find some intertextual interpretation in Jesus and what God does.

It's not only the psalms, but the prophetic writers say in Isaiah. Take a look at this as we look not only at the walls of this city and what some would bring it forward to the gospel in Jesus, but the stones that are in this wall as well.

[15:52] Isaiah 28. You know you're again thinking of Jerusalem by verse 14. When he's talking about an ungodly people who are ruling in Jerusalem.

In other words, he's looking at Jerusalem with ungodly leadership, and he's lamenting that God's people in God's place are not able to live under God's rule.

But they're being ruled by others. Then what he says in verse 16 is instructive, and this is prophetic. He says that this is God's voice through Isaiah.

Behold, I am the one who is laid as a foundation in Zion. That's a synonym for Jerusalem. A stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.

Whoever believes will not be in haste. In other words, there's a prophetic word that the day will come that some stone will be reset in Jerusalem city that will undo God's people to be able to live rightly again under his word.

[17:03] This text, too, is taken by New Testament writers and applied to Christ. What is the relationship of Nehemiah 3, then, to the gospel?

It is an early development of what Jesus brings to final and complete fulfillment. And as Nehemiah reconstructed a physical wall, so Jesus will reconstruct all that that wall represented.

What's the relationship of the text to not the gospel, but just gospel work? This is fascinating to me this week.

I began to look back through, and I just want to say two things on this. First of all, there's a relationship to gospel work through the record of names and through the nature of repair.

The record of names. Seventy-two names mentioned here. A list. It reminds me a bit of what the Apostle Paul does in the New Testament when he is writing ordinarily, but he can't help but provide you a list of names that are co-laborers in the cause.

[18 : 35] That's the relationship to gospel work. Gospel work is a co-laboring work. And Nehemiah, who has prayed and made a petition, Nehemiah, who has done a night walk of preparation, is screaming to you and me that it is the people's work.

It's the work of the people. This is good news for anyone who would like to get something done for God.

I've noticed that everyone claims to want to be a part of something great until, that is, they have an opportunity to be a part of something great.

Everyone has a desire to be part of a movement that is bigger than themselves until, that is, they have to do something that is bigger than themselves.

I don't know if you're going to be here for six months or six years, but the fact that you are here in this city, in this church, within these walls, even if it's for five months, you stand on the cusp of consequential change and an opportunity to be a part of a list that initiates what we trust under God's hand will be a great work for him.

[20 : 08] I've got one list in my office. If my office was burning, and you said go into your office and grab just one or two things, I can tell you one of the things I would grab is a list of 37 names that are the founding members that organized a petition to start a church in 1998 under the name Holy Trinity Church.

The names. You wouldn't know the names. You don't need to know the names. But I'm intent that those names are one of my most prized possessions. Guess what?

Guess what? I've got two more lists in my mind, and your name can be on one of them. On March 15th, we're going to do a pledge drive to help us restore a church building and utilize that building to push us toward restoring ourselves as a people.

And on March 15th, there's an opportunity to say, I'm going to play my part. I'm going to do something while I'm here. I hope there will be 250 names building together.

20 years from now, people go, man, look at all that list of names. Who are those people? Some of them will know. Some of them we don't know. But they will not be forgotten. On May 3rd, on May 3rd, we become, by way of transitional movement, Christ Church Chicago.

[21 : 48] And there's about 130 people, or 40, that are members of Christ Church Chicago. And after everyone here, member and attendee, traveler, or people who want to get engaged, put their name on a list and say, I want to be part of a list that commences and consecrates a work, after the fullness of all people is able to be on, there's going to be another list that's going to go around, and the members are going to sign it, and they're going to basically say, I'm a founding member of Christ Church Chicago.

And that is what this list is for Nehemiah. Now, the relationship of the record of the men and women who were co-laborers with him, it is, I think, you just heard read, one of his prized possessions. Not only the record of names, but what about being informed in gospel work concerning the nature of repair?

I don't know if you noticed it when Drayton was reading, because you were trying to catch all those wonderful pronunciations he laid down for you, which I was a bit surprised you didn't break out in applause. Because you notice, I haven't named one of them yet.

But the word repair continues to come. There are nine verbs in the chapter, 77 occurrences of some kind of action.

[23 : 30] I think 44 of the occurrences over 56 verb usages are repair or rebuild.

That's the nature of gospel work. Gospel work is a repairing work. Who was it? Sean Colvin a while ago had that song, Time for a Few Small Repairs.

That's the state of the church. Always in a state of repair. By what power does one repair?

The word in the Hebrew form here has an element of strengthening. And it also has an element of seizing hold of something.

In other words, this particular word on repair is talking about some kind of strenuous activity. Some kind of arduous work.

[24 : 39] And you can imagine in a material world trying to rebuild a wall that has fallen around you. Just even trying to move one stone or one block and the cost on all the work.

This is hands-on labor. That's the nature of gospel work. Fascinatingly, Peter will pick up on this very word via its translation in the Greek New Testament.

And he will talk about, As you come to Christ, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ.

In other words, he's talking here about being built up. That's just the same idea here of being strengthened. We all need to be re-strengthened again.

The rebar of our life is giving way. Water has come in. Cracks emerge. Cold separates.

[26 : 06] Warmth reduces the roadway of your soul to a disastrous path of travel. And what repairing is, is through the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit who strengthens us, we become a construction site for God.

It's the nature of gospel work. Indeed, it's this sense, though, of all hands on deck. Everyone involved.

So let me just pause for a moment because you might be saying, okay, where is he and where is he going? There's a relationship of this text to the gospel. There's a relationship of this text to the nature of gospel work.

And there are four things I want you to see from this text that might inform our gospel strategy going forward. Notice, first, it's not merely a list of individuals or a record of names or the work of repair. Families are actually engaged. Verse 3, the sons of. Verse 12, he and his daughters.

[27 : 26] Verse 18, the brothers. There is familial engagement in gospel work. I saw this when we did our first work day at a new building when we had dozens and dozens and dozens of people coming to work.

Some of them, I've got a couple pictures of them, some of them three, four, five years old taking things out, throwing it into trash bins with mothers.

I saw mothers with babies on wraps being carried and things that had to be out before we could even consider rebuilding in play.

In other words, it was familial. It was, there were complete families engaged. And it must be that way here. Next week when you come, you will see an activity presented to us that will launch our movement forward through the contribution of our children.

We have always felt that our engagement with families and children is one of our most precious privileges of being a church in the city.

[28 : 46] And what you see in a text like Nehemiah is dads and kids alongside them. Moms and someone on the hip and something is still going on with work.

It's this familial engagement. In fact, let me say this. If we are seeking to restore an architecturally significant building in a culturally and educationally important community to be a home for the proclamation of God's word, I don't simply mean for preaching.

I mean everything that goes on in that place from the nursery to funeral services. It will be a place where the word of God is faithfully proclaimed. Then the families have to give themselves to that work.

And we have to give ourselves to families. And this is going to be one of our wonderful joys. not only families should inform in some sense a gospel strategy.

I just want to say in regard to that home, your home, you're a single individual, a professional adult in an unmarried state. According to the New Testament, you are in a supremely advantageous place to be engaged in gospel work.

[30 : 14] And the dignity of your person and the engagement of your life here ought to be building this place up. You as your home. But just as we gather this morning as an assembly of the homes, what takes place in your homes must be rebuilt, must be strengthened, must be repaired.

We will not grow beyond our capacity to be engaged in strong homes where single men, single women living on their own are yet constructing their home in all godliness with all hospitality as part of the family of God.

This is what I mean by family and home. But what about geography? Take a look back at Nehemiah. Not just family informing our strategy, but there's something here about geography.

Look at the number of districts that are mentioned. Verse 9. Someone has evidently been appointed over a district. Verse 12.

Verse 14. 15. 16. 17 and 18. 19. 17. This chapter reveals that Nehemiah's people were already positioned to live life with geographic intentionality.

[31 : 51] Did you notice how many times somebody was doing work just outside their home? Get what needs to be done on your block done. And don't do the block until you get behind your own door and ask God to help you get your own life moving.

But then there's this appointment. There's a geographic appointment. I think, when I think of our future, we've traditionally thought of Woodlawn, Hyde Park, and Kenwood.

And I think what the Lord is doing is he's going to move us with a real concerted need over the next 18 months to strengthen our community groups in ways that have intentional Christian community with geographic specificity so that we can begin to place incoming people in proximity to relationships where it will be easiest for them to grow, develop, train for godliness.

happiness. So what's going to happen and what needs to happen is a strategic appointment of a way of life where we are interconnected with one another in proximity to accomplish the work that is yet before us?

Not only families, not only geography informing how we build, but what about friends that don't even live here? Did you see that in the text?

[33 : 22] That the local church in Jerusalem, they were not the only participants in the reconstruction project. Look at verse 5 and verse 27.

The Tekoites. Now they've got a really cool thing in the text and a very discouraging thing in the text. They got something done and then by verse 27 they wanted more.

They're like, okay, we got that done, what else can we do? In other words, if you're a Tekoite kind of person, you're like, okay, I'm engaged, I'm in, I want to help rebuild us as a people.

I want to help rebuild this place. And then when I'm done with the assignment, do you have something else for me to do? But notice also about those people, their nobles did not stoop to serve their Lord.

Literally, they would not bend their neck, which gives the connotation of they stood off aloof and all of their physical language says, I'm not bending over and getting any stone.

[34 : 29] And notice who it was. Their nobles. Some folk be like, that's just beneath me. I'm not doing that.

But there's a sense here where there are friends of the church in Jerusalem that come alongside this.

In verse 2, you had the men of Jericho. They didn't live in Jerusalem. They were over in Jericho. And they came over to be part of the work. In verse 7, they came all the way up from Gibeon. In verse 7, again, you had inhabitants from other places.

Verse 22, from a surrounding region. A couple of times, all the way through mitzvah, almost as if people are engaged in the process through Egypt. What I'm trying to say is, help came from interconnected persons for the project that Nehemiah was doing that were not even members of that family.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, what can I do as we move toward an entire project that seems to have, in one sense, even increasingly incapable abilities financially to accomplish it?

[35 : 46] But you might know somebody. They don't have to live here. If you know anyone in the country or the world that you know is significantly engaged in gospel work, and they know the importance of Chicago's South Side, and they understand what a church could represent that was faithful to the gospel, given the racial tensions that only increase in our midst, and further, they knew, they knew the significance of the University of Chicago, and they knew that the imprint here and the collision of a church on the corner of 62nd Chicago could have decades-long disproportionate influence for the gospel.

How do we not know whether it would come from Singapore or from Western Europe or from Australia or from your parent or whomever?

So many around the globe are longing, longing, to make a religious investment in the significance of the city in a culturally important context with a world-class university for the faithful proclamation of the word.

And they came because they knew that their welfare and the productivity of gospel life in their midst was going to expand as a result.

It's just fascinating to me. We will need help from all over the world. What about this one?

[37 : 19] Guilds. Don't you love this? There's the mention of goldsmiths, merchants, perfumers, and even this priestly guild.

In other words, not everybody got involved. Their avenue of on-ramp to the Nehemiah project wasn't through their family. Their avenue of involvement wasn't through their geography or their community group or the way where they lived.

Their element of involvement didn't even come from the fact that they didn't live here somewhere else. Their element of engagement came from a guild, a professional guild of people who had a vocational similar interest.

The only thing I can think of in that regard here would be someone who's an undergraduate student. You're part of a guild in a sense. You're part of the university. It's almost like a professional community in and unto itself.

It's almost as if there are collaborative efforts engaged in Nehemiah 3 where guilds, vocational guilds, are saying, and what will we do?

[38 : 28] It's a fascinating chapter. Let me say one more thing and then I'm done. This text has preparatory significance for the repair that Jesus makes complete.

This text has instructive help on the nature of the work being both everyone involved and repairing. It's interesting. When you and I come to church today, guess what? Everyone wants to know what's my place? Where can this place, where can my skill set fit this future?

Because I like to work, you know, God would have you work in your area of strength. hey, you got a goldsmith moving concrete? He stepped out of his wheelhouse.

You got a perfumer? Mix and mortar? Something's going on. In other words, you and I say, what's the one thing that I can do given who I am?

[39 : 46] And this chapter says, what's the one thing we are all to do? That's a different conception. conception. This chapter turns all of our common conceptions of usefulness in the body of Christ on its head.

It takes us out of particularization, out of specialization, and into generalization, and into complete engagement. And everyone seemed to be engaged. As a result, we're trying to learn as a leadership, how can we do this?

Give me some on-ramps. put me in a church where the leadership understands enough of the vision going forward where I actually know how I can take part.

Let me give you three things to start. There will be more in the coming weeks. You want in? Here's a way in. The session is looking to a point of team of six individuals that would assist Pastor Helm in the planning of our first Christ Church training event to be held on Saturday morning, May 30th.

The theme of the church-wide gathering is vision, a fresh take on our future. In other words, we're going to rent something. I don't know if it would be the South Shore Cultural Center or what, but we want a couple hundred people coming together on a Saturday morning, and we're going to talk for a couple hours about vision, a fresh take on our future.

[41 : 13] We need six people to plan. We want it to be fun, engaging, interactive, compelling. That event will be off-site. It will help us to begin in thinking fresh ways about our life together.

You want to be considered to be appointed to that team, simply email the church on the back of your bulletin at that info level and say, man, I'm an event planner, like you can't believe. I get excited about vision.

I want to be part of something that actually the whole congregation comes around. Let me give you another one. The Deacon Board is looking to appoint a team of two or three individuals to assist Keith Schoonmaker in establishing a comprehensive safety and security plan for our new ministry space in Woodlawn.

The mission of this team will conclude by making a series of recommendations to the Board of Deacons and then the session by November of this calendar year. If you're interested in being appointed to that team, then you can mail that info HTC and go, you know what, I'm really interested in how we use our space, how we make it safe, what it's like to be secure, what kind of policies need to be in place.

Welcome to the wall. Hey, maybe we should get shirts. Welcome to the wall. No, not in this day and age. I'm not doing that shirt. No, no. Too many people won't know what we're talking about.

[42 : 31] Let me give you another one. The session will be appointing up to four church members to our Global Ministry Partners Committee sometime this spring. The mission of the committee is to foster our commitment as a missions church and to oversee our relationship with partners doing church planting in other parts of the world.

The four additional members will serve two year terms and work alongside Randy and Crystal Hendricks who already serve as chair and secretary respectively. If you're interested in global ministry partnerships and how we intend to get the name of Christ to the ends of the earth, it's time to repair.

together, I would envision that over the next 15, 18 months, you're going to hear 15 more teams being established because this is a strategy.

To appoint a team that has an appointed leader with a specific mission with a measurable outcome that ends in ways that secure our future.

all hands on deck. Nehemiah chapter 3, just a long laundry list of names or Nehemiah's prized possession and his desire to say, do you want to know how it really happened?

[44 : 00] Do you really want to know how it happened? Let me show you the names. Let me give you a new origin story.

Let's put the 37 names of 1998 in a drawer and let's hang a founding membership and double or triple that number by name who are early adopters to the welfare of our city through the restoration of a church that would do something, Lord willing, great for God.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the scriptures. most of our thanks is to read these ancient narrative and prophetic texts and to see that you progressively put down in the world in mortar and concrete, in time and in space, things that would be hints for us of what Jesus completes.

So may we walk in him with joy, in whose name we pray, Amen. Amen. Thank you.