Working Toward The Vision

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Preacher: Pastor Ken

[0:00] All right, so Nehemiah 2. I'm going to try to focus on the sermon and not think too much about anything else, which admittedly has been very, very difficult the last few days.

So Nehemiah 2. Past couple weeks in this series, we've been focused on the fact that we must, as a church, build a vision and set goals for the future.
The old saying is, if you aim for nothing, you'll hit it every time. 100% accuracy is good in most things, but not as it relates to future goals and expectations.
And I will put a plug in there as well. If you've not been part of our adult Sunday school, I encourage you to come out for it because it goes hand in hand with what we're talking about this morning. And that was not by design.
Well, it was by God's design, not mine. So I'll just put that out there. So a few weeks ago, we started in Isaiah 6. We looked at the prophet's calling, his experience of seeing the Lord high and lifted up, and how he responded to the Lord's desire for a messenger.
[1:12] Whom shall I send? The Lord said. And Isaiah was quick to say, here am I, send me. And so ultimately, in the course of that study, in that time, in the word in Isaiah 6, we took away the need to have the word of God as our standard.

What I titled that sermon was, hear from the Lord. And that's what we need to do. We need to be hearing from the Lord. Personally, individually, we need to be in the word of God.
We need to be reading scripture. But also as a church body, as a whole, as we seek to carry out ministry, as we seek to reach the community, as we seek to reach non-believers for Christ, we need to be hearing from the Lord.
We need to be in the word of God. And we need to seek to be faithful to it. And once we've done that individually, once we are individually faithful to the word of God, to his commands and expectations and his drawing and his leading, then it will naturally flow into our corporate ministry.
We cannot do corporately what we are not willing to do individually. And so we need to take serious our commitment personally to Christ, our commitment to him and to his word.
[2:42] Last week, we took some principles from Nehemiah 1 as it relates to developing a vision. Developing a vision. And first we saw we must observe.

You saw in Nehemiah, you had these people coming back, Hanani and other brothers who are returning from Jerusalem, and they give a report.
And we see from that, we need to observe and evaluate the current situation that we find ourselves in as a church. We need to just get an idea of where we're at, what's happening, what's going on, what are some trends we've seen.
Are there anything concerning that's sticking out? Is there anything that we're doing well? We need to evaluate the whole situation, right? Going through this series, it may sound like, man, I wonder what's, you know, is something bad happening?
Is something wrong going on? No, no, no, no. No, I think it's very good as a church for us to take a time of evaluation, to do a little bit of an inventory of ourselves and how faithful are we to Scripture?
[3:48] What is it we're doing? Ministry leaders? Awana, youth group, Sunday school, you know, whatever. Whatever the ministry is, you know, to evaluate the ministry.

It should happen. I really believe in doing it every year. You know, you should be evaluating, you know, what went well? What could have been improved on? No, why do we do what we do, right? Ultimately, why do we do the ministries we do here at the church? What's our motivation and purpose? So we need to look at all of this and we need to reflect on it.
We need to pray about what needs to be done moving forward. We need to ask and pray and beg for God's leading and discernment and wisdom in all areas.

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So that's the takeaway from last week in Nehemiah 1. We desperately need God to grant wisdom and direction, so pray. You must pray. You need to pray.
[4:45] James 1 verse 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given to him. We need wisdom. You don't feel like you have it?

Seek God. Pray. Beg him for it and he will give it. Proverbs 3 verses 5 and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.
We need God's understanding in all matters, not ours. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Often we want to talk about that individual aspect and certainly you should.
Acknowledge the Lord in all your ways personally. But as the body of Christ, we also need to acknowledge him in all that we do here and he will make straight our paths. He will make clear the path that we need to go on.
So as we return to Nehemiah, we remember that Nehemiah, he was a godly man. He sought to please God with his life and he sought the welfare of his people.
[5:47] So picking up in chapter 2, I want to see how God answers Nehemiah's prayer to do great things on behalf of his people. Nehemiah 2 verses 1 through 10.

In the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king.
Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.
Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, Let the king live forever. Why should not my face be sad when the city, the place of my father's graves, lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?
Then the king said to me, What are you requesting? So I prayed to the God of heaven. Let me pause there for a second.
[6:50] In the midst of conversation, in the midst of a situation, before he says another word, Nehemiah prays to God.

Do you think he's sitting there looking at the king? Hold on a second. Lord, help me out. I think he's recognizing the desperate need of the situation for God's words and his wisdom and his direction. And he's praying. Let me see verse 5. And I said to the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it.
And the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, How long will you be gone? And will you return? And when will you return? Excuse me. So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.
And I said to the king, If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province beyond the river, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah. And a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.
[8:10] And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. Then I came to the governors of the province beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters.

Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.
Can I just say before we analyze this text a little bit, I'm amused that this place he's going is a place called Beyond the River. It's no name of a country, it's just, oh, that region Beyond the River, and I need permission to get that.
So, just a small, amusing thing. So, what do we gain from this text? What can we take away as it relates to working toward the vision?
So, you know, last week we saw the steps to developing a vision, now we're seeing kind of steps that lead us as we work toward the vision. First thing we need to take away in verses 1 through 3 is that God will provide the opportunity.
[9:26] God will provide the opportunity. When it comes to goals and direction, the human inclination is to make a plan and to immediately carry it out. Men particularly have a reputation for being fixers.

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When a problem is presented, oftentimes they'll immediately seek a solution and put a plan in action to reach that solution. And unfortunately, that's one thing that leads to communication problems in marriages because maybe the issue that's being brought up by the wife doesn't need a fixing.
It just needs an ear to hear about it. And I am so guilty about this. I am ready to give an answer and like, oh, well this is what you need to do or this is how you...
And like, I completely missed the point. But by the grace of God, I'm getting... I'm beyond square one. Would you say it, Bonnie? Have I moved? Maybe? Okay.
I have reached the go to jail. You know, do not pass go. Do not collect $200. But this is the reputation typically of a lot of men and why there's communication issues in marriages is because men hear something like, gotta fix it.
[10:43] develop a plan, execute the plan, get it taken care of. The wife maybe doesn't need that so much as much as just the ear to hear it and a connection there.

And that's true in every area of our life, not just in marriage and communication. When there's a problem, it needs to be fixed and we need to develop a plan of action and we want to carry that out. That's just human nature. That's our nature to want to make things right, to solve a problem and to bring comfort into an awkward, uncomfortable situation. However, when it comes to ministry, it's most important that wisdom is sought for when to start and how to go about it.
And, you know, patience needs to be exercised in the appropriate time. I got to thinking about this. You know, like we need God's direction as to when we start things, how we go about doing things and all that.
And we need to exercise patience. Think about Noah. Right? God revealed to Noah about the flood coming. And Noah, you know, he had time to build the ark in about 100, it's estimated, about 120 years from the time that God said he was going to send a flood to when he actually did.
[11:58] And it may have taken that time for Noah and his people to build the ark. I have no idea. But, we know there's 120 years God said he was going to flood the earth before he finally did.

Noah had to wait. He knew the direction. He knew what was coming. He was given the vision by God to carry it out. He just needed to wait for it to finally come to fruition.
And he was faithful in the process, by the way. Abraham. This is a fun one. Like, you look at Abraham's life. So, God promised Abraham that he would have a son.
That he would have offspring in his house. He would have an heir born in his own home. He waited 14 years. 14 years. Abe is an old man already.
Right? We're talking 80 something or whatever. What? You're welcome. Hey. She's like, thank you for calling me old.
[12:57] See, this is when pastors put their foot in their mouth. Right? But we're talking about Abraham, not Donna. All right? She's not old. But Abe, no. He had waited 14 years before the promised offspring.

Right? And then when you think about his descendants and the promise of the land that they would occupy, they waited almost 500 years. 500 years before they entered the promised land.
God made a promise to Abraham and to his descendants. And then you had the 430 years from the time of Abraham to the Exodus. Then you had the 40 years of wilderness wandering. She got 470. So almost 500 years. But God gave the vision. He said, look, you're going to go into the promised land. This is where your descendants are going to be. And they had to wait a while before that came about.
Jacob labored 20 years for Laban before he left with his family and possessions. Remember, seven years for one of the sisters, seven years for the other one, and then, what was it, six years for the flock.
[14:01] So, for the sheep and all his possessions. David, when he was anointed king by Samuel, when he was anointed as the next king, he waited nearly 15 years before becoming king over Judah.

Over Judah. Then another seven years before he'd become king over all of Israel, the combined kingdom. The apostle Paul, think about his life. Acts 9, he had to wait three days before he could receive his sight back.
Galatians 1 tells us he was three years in Damascus before meeting the other apostles. Acts 22-28, he was in prison for about five years before being released.

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Paul's life in ministry was all about patience and waiting for God to work and move and provide opportunities. Think about Paul and I think I have it coming up later in the sermon while it's on my mind.
Paul desired to go to Rome. That was Paul's desire. He wanted to get to Rome and he kept being thwarted time and time again. And eventually, God seemed to give him that passion for Rome to go there and preach and share the gospel and encourage the saints.
[15:13] And God sent him there eventually as a prisoner. Well, he got there. It just wasn't the way he would have planned, I'm sure. Right? And so God's got to provide the opportunity. He'll give the direction and the means and all that.

Nehemiah, coming to Nehemiah 2, who says the month of Nisan, this is about four to six months after he received the report and after he had prayed that the opportunity was placed before him to talk to the king.
You never know how long God is going to have you wait before he moves you to where he wants you to be. Waiting's hard. Our life may be a vapor.
It may, you know, go just like that as James 4, 14 tells us. But God is eternal and he sees the beginning from the end. And he uses us in his eternal plan.
Our temporary, our temporary time is used ultimately for his glory and our good. And he's playing the long game. I tried to think of an analogy, a game analogy, but I couldn't really bring it up.
[16:19] You know, I'm like, well, chess can be kind of long. Then I got to thinking just now, Axis and Allies. For those of you not familiar with Axis and Allies, it's a big game in our family.

And the very first time I ever played it when I was introduced to it years ago after I married and family, we played, that game was 11 hours. 11 hours.
I think it's the people I played with. They're just really slow. But they're all very methodical. But it's a very long game. It can be a very long game. And I don't know what else, you know, tic-tac-toe compared.
We're tic-tac-toe and God's Axis and Allies and even beyond that, right? He's playing the long game. We're just a part of that. A.W. Tozer says, sometimes I think the church would be better off. I was challenged by this. Not that I want to do it, but listen. He says, sometimes I think the church would be better off if we would call a moratorium on activity for about six weeks and just waited on God to see what He's waiting to do for us.
[17:24] Think about that. I mean, the churches as a whole can be very busy. And he's saying like, hey, maybe it'd be good for a church to just shut down activity for six weeks and see what God's going to do and how He's moving.

People would have a heart attack if we did that. People could not stand waiting that long. People would be like, what are we doing? We're not doing what we should be doing.
But the question ultimately comes back to, what is it that we should be doing? And that's the purpose and intent behind this series on vision is coming to this question of, what is it that God wants us to be doing?
First Baptist Chapel. What is it God wants from us? That's something I've been asking. I've asked the elders. We've been praying. And I'm asking you because we're all part of the body of Christ here.
What is it that God desires from us? I believe there's a lot of answers in Scripture. But maybe it's something you could be thinking about. I had somebody come up to me last week at the end of service and things that they've observed and seen going on.
[18:36] And I'm like, yeah, yeah, that's happening. I see it. What else? What else is going on? What else is a concern? Or how can we be seeking God and His will for us?

And I think one question we need to take away from the fact that God provides the opportunity is are we trying to force an opportunity before God is ready for us to pursue it? That was another thought.
Maybe there is an opportunity. Maybe there is something that, a vision that God is giving us or something that we're looking forward to and we say, yeah, that's a good idea. Are we forcing it if we're not waiting? Are we trying to do it too soon?
Are we willing to wait for God to move and make clear when it's time? Second point, verse 4 through 9, chapter 2, is to boldly pursue the vision.

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It's to boldly pursue the vision. So God provided the opportunity for Nehemiah before the king and Nehemiah is like, I did all I could to not seem sad in the presence of the king but he saw through it. [19:45] Now what? Nehemiah boldly pursues and he tells him. He's saying, why shouldn't I be sad? This is what's going on.

Well, he asks, what are you requesting? A little prayer for some boldness and he goes forward. As he was going to address the opportunity to set the forum, Nehemiah prayed to God first in the midst of the moment and then proceeded to unleash.
Nehemiah had been thinking about what he would say for several months. How do I know that? Because he is a man. And that's just what we do. We plan.
How many times and this is not just men, this is women too. How many times have you known like you know there's a conversation coming up that you need to have and you have while you're driving to the place of meeting you've had the conversation over and over and over again.
People are looking at you at red lights like you're crazy because you're conversing and you're getting animated and you're throwing your hands or whatever and you're having that conversation in your mind.
[20:53] You know how it's going to go and you're preparing yourself for it. That's how I know Nehemiah has already had this conversation. He's already known what he's going to say because he's human and we all do it.

And we also have that tendency after the conversation and when we're driving back, oh man, what if I'd have said this instead? Right? I mean, we all have these things and Nehemiah is a human. He just lived at a different time. You know, he had this, he had several months to get ready and he was ready to give a detailed accounting of what he would need. He knew he would need the permissions to be granted for him to get beyond the place beyond the river.
Right? He knew that he needed the permissions to, in order to have production, to get the wood from the forest. He knew what he needed because he had several months of planning and preparation and when he was ready, whether he thought he was ready or not, God said, alright, here it is.
Go for it. Are you consumed by the vision that God has given to you? You might say, well, I don't know that God's given me a vision.
[22:13] Then I'm going to encourage you to go back to a few weeks ago and say, well, get in the Word. And hear from the Lord. I've had conversations with people recently. I am excited.

Like, I am so excited about it. I love to accompany people and to help people in their endeavors and what God is doing in their life. I had somebody not long ago come up and talk to me.
We chatted for a bit and they said, you know, Pastor, for several months I have been so convicted but I don't know about what. I don't know what God wants from me.
And so we were able to talk some and I got the idea of things that they're passionate about that God has put in their life. And that's something to take into consideration. What is it you're passionate about doing?
And what is it that you're passionate about doing for the glory of God? Don't underestimate the fact that God gives you passions. He gives you desires. When you're saved, you have a new heart given for Him for new desires that are for His glory.
[23:15] So what is it that you're passionate about? What is it that you want to do? Maybe that's something that God is using to guide and direct you or prepare you.

And sometimes, you know, it might take months of convicting sermons. You know, Lord, I left and I was crying. Great! Cry and pray and wait.
But are you consumed by the vision that God has given you? Is it the fuel that feeds your passion for ministry? A vision is not merely a statement of wishful thinking.
In five years, First Baptist Chapel is going to average 100 on a Sunday morning. It's not a wish, a statement of wishful thinking. It's a proclamation of watchful thinking.
And by the way, that will never be the vision of this church as long as I'm here. In five years, on Sunday morning, we're going to have 100 people in the church. No, that's not even my concern.
[24:18] Right? My concern is souls. Seeing people saved and to see people equipped to go and do the work of ministry. That's it. I don't know how specifically that's going to look.

And it's great to set goals to reach for, but we've got to bring it back to Scripture. When you become convinced of a vision, you keep a watchful eye on when and where to carry it out.

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You know, maybe it's to, you know, maybe as this conversation was with this individual, maybe it's to counsel with grieving people because they recognize that in their own life they went through extreme grief and they've been comforted by God.
And they want to use the 2 Corinthians 1 principle, right, verses 3 through 5, with the comfort which they've been comforted, they want to comfort other people as well. Praise God.
That is a vision that is biblically based in God honor. Go do it. I'll help you as much as I can, but I can't do it for you.
[25:24] Right? And I don't know, maybe you're there, maybe there's something on your heart and your mind that you're thinking of that you've been mulling over and maybe you just want to talk about it. Let's talk. God works in individuals and we in each individual is a member of the body of Christ.

So let's work together. I think of King David. David had a vision to build a house for the Lord. That was a passion of his. He wanted to build a house for God. He realized, he said, man, here I am in this palace and I have this beautiful place, very comfortable and the Lord's, you know, the Lord's place is a tabernacle.
It's a tent that's falling apart and you can't keep up, you know, whatever. I have this beautiful place. I want a place for the Lord too. Now, God didn't allow David to do it, right? Because he was a man of war. But he allowed Solomon to do it.
But what did David do with the passion he had? He led the charge on raising funds for the temple. He couldn't do it himself but he could help prepare the way to get it done.
Paul, I mentioned, had a vision to get to, well, ultimately his vision was to get to Spain by way of Rome. And you see that in Romans 15. If you want to turn there real quick. Romans 15 verses 22 through 28.
[26:37] Or you can write it down and look at it later if you want. Romans comes after Acts. There we go. Acts is a big book in this Bible.

Romans 15 verses 22 through 28. I want to read that. Paul says, this is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.
But now since I no longer have any room for work in these regions and since I have longed for many years to come to you, this is Paul's desire and vision. I want to get to Rome. I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.
Oh, I thought Rome was the spot. Spain is where he wants to go. The room is just a stop he wants to make on the way and to be helped on my journey there by you. Once I've enjoyed your company for a while, at present, however, I'm going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints for Macedonia and Acacia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints of Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.
[27:58] I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Paul had a vision and a desire to get somewhere. He wanted to be somewhere else but he was faithful also with what God had given him to do.

There's no conclusive evidence that he ever made it to Spain but he definitely tried to do so and we know he made it to Rome. So we need to pray that God gives this church a unified vision that we relentlessly pursue.
Faithful in all things but a vision and a desire moving forward. And I'm telling you right now it's not like oh man I wonder what this is Pastor Ken's going to reveal it to us in a few weeks I can't wait to get there.
I don't have anything right now. I'm telling you we need to be praying together conversing together walking together committed together for the cause of Christ and the glory of God and for the good of one another.
So let's converse. Let's pray. I felt the need as I was looking over this sermon last night to throw in the newsboys part of the newsboys song to say I want to live with abandon.
[29:10] Give you all that I am. Every part of my heart Jesus I place in your hands. I want to live with abandon. I just want to live for Christ and let it be known.

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And finally in Nehemiah 2 verse 10 final part yes God will give the opportunity yes we need to boldly pursue the vision but verse 10 we see that we need to expect bumps in the road.
We need to expect bumps in the road. The bumps Nehemiah had were named Sanballat and Tobiah. They were not impressed at all with Nehemiah and subsequently as you read through the book of Nehemiah they would work hard to try and discourage Nehemiah and the others from accomplishing what they had returned to do.
Whatever the passion and the vision there will always be the naysayers and those who want to throw it off course. It can be non-believers as this is the case those who are not Israelites who are appalled that people wanted to come and do good for the people of Israel.
They're like oh this is ridiculous but it could also be other believers in the church. Why are you wasting your time on that? We should be focusing on this.
[30:25] Why do this? Or no that's a waste of time that's a waste of money that's a waste of this that's a waste of that. We've got them everywhere in the church because everybody this is the hardest part about being the body of Christ we're all individuals and we've all got I've used this before I'll say it again like my friend used to say no opinions are like armpits we've all got them and they stink because they don't always all go together but by the grace of God mercy of God as we come unified together to him for direction we will have unity moving forward and Lord willing we won't have these bumps in the road within the body we must resolve now not to allow naysayers to divert us from the vision which God will grant us and empower us to carry out William Carey the famous missionary was a self-educated shoe cobbler in England who had a vision of taking the gospel to

India that was his desire that's the passion God gave to him when he shared that idea with some ministers one seasoned pastor called him a miserable enthusiast and told him that God would reach the heathen in his own way without human aid but Carey persisted and overcame setback after setback he eventually got to India learned and translated the Bible into almost 40 languages founded a university that still exists and saw God make a substantial impact on the Indian subcontinent Carey's motto was expect great things from God attempt great things for God we cannot allow obstacles to stand in our way of serving God people resources opportunities there will always be an excuse of why we can't but knowing God and knowing that God goes with us is the only reason we need to know that we can accomplish what he's called us to
Matthew 28 20 behold I am with you always to the end of the age as we continue our search for a vision for First Baptist Shafley we must keep these important principles in mind God will provide an opportunity to carry it out we must resolve to boldly pursue the vision and we can expect bumps in the road I end with a quote from R.A.
Torrey pray for great things expect great things work for great things but above all pray Lord thank you for your word thank you for the example of Nehemiah thank you for examples through history David and Paul and Noah and Jacob and Abraham of William Carey and others Lord who you have given a vision and a passion for ministry and for your glory for the good of others and Lord we stand here now uncertain fully of what the future holds of this church what you're calling us to what you desire us to accomplish in your name and Lord I pray that above all we would indeed pray we would pray fervently that you would give us clear direction in unity as a body of believers as we move forward help us
Lord not to have selfish worldly ambitions as our desire as our vision moving forward but Lord help whatever it is we see you leading us to to be clear to be honoring to you in your name and to be biblically centered Lord we want to do what's right for your glory for our good for the good of the people in our community and we want to do it because your word has shown us the way and we are being faithful to it in Jesus name amen Lord thank you to live

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