

Following Through With The Vision

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[0 : 00] A little fun fact about that hymn is that it is very old. I was actually looking up. I always think about it when we sing it.

I know it's an old hymn, so I looked it up. It's dated between the 8th and 10th century of having been written. We are singing an old, old hymn.

How about the old hymns of the faith? Not many that get older than that. It is a tremendous, tremendous song. Praise the Lord for that. If you would please open up to Nehemiah 2.

Nehemiah 2, we're going to pick up verses 11 through 20 today. We got where we left off last week. Over the past few weeks, we've looked at the fact that we must, as a church, build a vision and set goals for the future.

I've said it a couple times. I'm going to say it again. If you aim for nothing, you'll hit it every time. So 100% accuracy rate on one of the worst goals possible. Nothing, right?

[1 : 06] So as we've seen the last few weeks, as it relates to developing a vision, we've seen first that you must have the Word of God as your standard and seek to put it to work in your own life.

It's only the faithful individual that can be expected to contribute to a faithful church body. We cannot corporately as a church be faithful unless we are first individually faithful to God.

Second, we saw that you must observe and evaluate the current situation. As we saw in Nehemiah 1, we reflect on what has been done.

We pray about what still needs to be done. We thank God for the way He has worked and what He has done in the life of a church, in the existence of a church. And we pray for clear guidance and direction as we move forward.

We also saw that you must realize that God, last week, God will provide the opportunity for you to boldly pursue the vision. Remember Nehemiah before the king?

[2 : 15] He was giving him his drink, his wine. He's the cupbearer of the king. And the king noticed that, hey, you're not well. What's going on? And so God thrust Nehemiah just about four or six months after he had what happens in chapter 1 comes about what happens in chapter 2 before the king.

And God thrusts him into the opportunity to talk about what's going on in Judah and in Jerusalem and what God has put on Nehemiah's heart.

And as we saw last week, as you are boldly pursuing the vision and as God provides the opportunities for you to carry it out, you can expect bumps in the road.

And we saw that in, I'm going to reread Nehemiah 2, 9 and 10. He says, So you can imagine, Sanballat and Tobiah play a big part in the remainder of Nehemiah.

We will not be covering the entire book of Nehemiah in this mini-series on vision, but know that Sanballat and Tobiah, they play an important role and one that we can certainly learn from as well.

[3 : 49] So we pick up in Nehemiah 2. We observe Nehemiah following through with the vision. God's given it to him. God's provided the opportunity to pursue it.

And now he is following through with it. So let's read Nehemiah 2, verses 11 through 20 and see what we can learn, what principles we can take from this excellent Old Testament book.

Nehemiah 2, verse 11. So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me, and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the valley gate to the dragon's spring and to the dung gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

Then I went on to the fountain gate and to the king's pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned

back and entered by the valley gate and so returned.

[5 : 07] And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

Then I said to them, You see the trouble we are in? How Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned? Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer suffer derision.

And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

But when Senballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, the Ammonite servant, and Geshem, the Arab, heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king? Then I replied to them, The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build.

[6 : 12] But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. The Lord, please help us to understand this text and apply it where we're at.

Amen. So we see in verses 11 through 16, so we're going to kind of follow what Nehemiah does in pursuing the work on the vision here, following through with the vision.

First, in verses 11 through 16, he's surveying the need. He's surveying what needs to be done to the walls in Jerusalem. And in itself, his experience is actually quite fascinating because he's going about it alone.

He's got his animal that he's riding, and he's just going around the walls, and he's checking things out. He's not telling anybody what God is putting on his heart. He's not telling anybody what he's doing.

He's just going and doing it. He's making preparation. He's noticing things before he brings it to the people. So in verse 11, one thing that we learn that we must learn and know is that there must be time put into the process.

[7 : 33] It says that Nehemiah came, and for three days he took this tour around Jerusalem, inspecting the gates and devising a plan of action. Now, I would suspect, knowing Nehemiah's character, knowing him from chapter 1, that during this time he was probably in prayer.

We know that he was alone. Not likely he's talking to the donkey. I'm sure he learned from Balaam's mistake, right? Well, the mistake was not listening to the donkey, right?

But anyway, I'm sure he wasn't talking to whatever animal he was riding on. He was probably in prayer to God. I suspect he was seeking God's wisdom and direction of what to do.

And we see actually in verse 12 that he said, I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. So we know that he is open to God's leading and direction in his life, and he's probably praying for wisdom and discernment.

And the takeaway from that is that it's of great importance that we spend time seeking the Lord and evaluating the work that lies ahead.

[8 : 56] It is a foolish matter. It is a fool's errand to seek to want to see some type of result in a church.

We desire to see more people, or we want more ministries, or we want this. We want to see more kids, and this, that, and the other. And like we make a declaration, we want this, and then we just kind of blindly pursue it, or we put our human effort as much into it as possible without first consulting with the God of all creation, the sovereign Lord who is in control of everything, and to get his wisdom and discernment on a matter moving forward.

It is a foolish thing to think that an individual, a man in and of themselves, are capable to bring about change, a desired change.

And unfortunately, that happens. We see that happening. I've seen that happening in churches.

What is a big complaint? What is a big concern that people have in churches?

Well, one of them is, well, what about all the young people? Where are they all at? You know, we see them grow up. They go from being a little baby. They grow on up through all the Sunday school classes and the little church programs and la, la, la, la.

[10 : 14] They do it one at the youth group. You know, they go to all the camps, and they do everything, and they memorize all the verses and all that, and then they turn 18, they grow up, they move out, and they never come back.

Well, that's not good. What's happening? How do we keep them from leaving? How do we bring in others? Or maybe there are no children in the church.

And maybe your kids are the only ones, and it's like, well, this doesn't seem right, or this is a burden. We need more children in the church. And so the thought process, humanly speaking, is, well, if we get a young pastor who has children, that's going to be the start of an answer.

And it might be the start of an answer. To get a young family who already has children, that is a start, right? But then the assumption is that, well, this young guy is coming in, and he's going to be the answer.

He's going to, like, that's going to magically attract other young families with young children. Can I tell you something? It doesn't work that way. I think we have done a decent job on our part to provide five, right?

[11:39] You know, and it doesn't just magnetically happen that all of a sudden others are going to come, and, like, you know, somehow there's this super magnet from the church that's sucking all the young families with kids in, right?

It doesn't work that way. You cannot put your confidence in a man to do that. Now, they may have ideas, and God may put a burden on their heart for something, and, you know, God may grow it that way.

But we can't put our trust in man. We can't put our hope in an individual. We were talking about that in a different context this morning, but it's still the same applies.

You know, we look at the country that we live in. We're burdened for the reality that we're seeing, and there are people who believe, well, if we get the right person in office or we get the right, you know, justices on the court and all that, and, like, we're putting our hope in man and not God.

And that's the wrong mindset, and that's the wrong approach. Nehemiah's got it right. I mean, God's put him in a great situation, but he didn't just go to town and say, all right, guys, this is what we're doing.

[12:47] He's taking time, he's evaluating, he's praying, he's contemplating, he's meditating, and he's taking his time. And this is a great example for us.

If you were to be in Luke 6, verses 12 and 13, you can write that down. We see that Jesus spent time on the mountain before choosing the 12 disciples. Listen to this.

Luke 6, verses 12 and 13. In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray, Jesus. And all night, he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them the 12, whom he named apostles.

And then he got the names of who they were. Jesus didn't just pick the 12 willy-nilly. It wasn't like, you know, the first 12 to show up are my apostles. Right? He had disciples, he had followers, and he spent all night in prayer.

And it sounds like what we read in Nehemiah, that's what Nehemiah did. I mean, he was out at night, he was riding around, he was checking things out. I bet he was pretty much most nights in prayer.

[13:58] And if, you know, we see that with Nehemiah, and if the Son of God Himself is doing that, who are we to think we shouldn't do that? Maybe we do need to spend a night in prayer.

Or a day. We don't want people, you know, falling asleep on their way home. So, yeah, we need to pray. And that needs to be first and foremost in our endeavors.

Verse 12, we see that there must be people with a genuine interest. Right? Nehemiah didn't fully go it alone. He did his inspections alone, right?

But then he says in verse 12, then I rose in the night, and I and a few men with me. He had some acquaintances that he confided in and who went along on the journey of observing what work needed to be done.

But Nehemiah didn't tell them what God was showing him or burdening him with. A group effort is needed when it comes to doing a great work for the Lord.

[15:10] There are no, you know, single person, you know, like they're the do-it-all person, right? There is no pastor should run everything and every decision run through him.

I have never been that kind of pastor and I don't think anyone here has ever thought I was and I praise God for that. I don't want that responsibility. That is too much of a burden for me to bear. I don't want to make all the decisions.

I don't want to have all the ideas. I don't want to be the final say on everything. We are a church body. I am a member of it. One part of a whole body in this church.

We are all members of it. We are all contributors to it. We all have different gifts and abilities and I use my gifts and abilities I feel pretty well for the glory of God.

Are you using your gifts and abilities for the glory of God in this church, in this area? Or are you holding back? Are you choosing not to?

[16:13] I don't want to do that. I don't want too much on me. I don't want to be looked at too heavily or whatever. Use what God has given you and do what God has put on your heart to do.

And when we're all doing that, it's a group effort and a lot can be done. Think of the book of Acts. Paul had Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and others as teammates in the ministry.

You read his letters and he's referencing Paul, an apostle, and then Timothy, or Silas, or Barnabas, or all the saints with me. And at the end of, what is it, Romans, I think it is, that he lists several other people that were with him.

So-and-so says hi. Hey, he's here. All that. It's like, it's amazing. Paul's always giving credit or always mentioning people that are with him because the ministry that Paul was part of wasn't a Paul ministry.

It's only Paul. It's only Paul plus one. No, no. He had a group that prayed for him, that were with him, that ministered to him and ministered with him. And Daniel.

[17:18] Daniel had Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Right? He had the three. There were four of them. And they did amazing things in Babylon for the glory of God. In Acts 1, verse 14, we're told about 120 followers were devoted to prayer after Christ ascended to heaven.

You had 120 people meeting in prayer. Then afterwards, the Holy Spirit came down. He empowered those followers to boldly proclaim the gospel.

And thousands were saved as we've seen through Acts 1-12, which is what we've covered thus far last year. And we see that these people in prayer together did ministry together and God was glorified and did an amazing work through those faithful individuals.

So Nehemiah, he surveyed the work. He realized there was time that was needed. Prayer was needed. People were needed. Verses 17 and 18, we see that Nehemiah encouraged the people to work.

He says, Then I said to them, You see the trouble we are in? How Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned? Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer suffer derision.

[18:41] He's saying, I see the problem. God has put it on my heart what we need to do. Come along. Let's get it done. Let's work together. And he encouraged the people to work.

He reported to the people's observations, the suggestion of rebuilding the wall. In order to encourage them, he told them of how God had blessed him up to that point.

Right? Verse 18, I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good. He probably told them of, Hey, I was a cupbearer for the king. And I heard this report and I was burdened about it and I prayed about it.

And then several months later, God opened an opportunity and a door and the king was on board with it. And he's given me letters. We got all the supplies we need. We just need to take it to the lumber yard and say, This is what we need.

Send it. God's providing contractors who know what they're doing to do the work. He's providing the laborers to get it done. Let's go and do this. God works out the details.

[19:51] God provides what is needed to fulfill what he desires his people to do for his glory. And we see what was in verse 3 of chapter 1, these negative feelings.

Go back to chapter 1 real quick, verse 3. And they said to me, The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are destroyed by fire.

The people that are there are depressed. They're sad. They're negative. They're not feeling loved by the Lord. They're not feeling like he hears them or sees them.

But yet, Nehemiah's report, the people's negative feelings now become positive and they begin the process of rebuilding the walls. Sometimes people can be so down in the doldrums.

Is that a word? I think. God, down in the dumps. I'll use that one. Thank you. Like, they're so down. They're feeling so overwhelmed with trial and hardship and depression that they cannot see the goodness of God.

[20 : 59] They cannot see the hand of God working. They need somebody to remind them that God loves them, is merciful, and is gracious. God is still working. God is still desiring us to work for him.

Let's get to work. It can be hard. It can be hard to fight the feelings. It can be hard to push out the depression. It can be hard to push out the negative thoughts.

But folks, we have, that's why I give opportunity for people to not just give prayer and praise. I want testimony. I want to know how God is working in your life. What is he doing through you?

What is he giving you to work with? What is he directing you to do and how are you following through with it? And let us see how God is continuing to work in this community.

Because if you go to the media, you go to social media, you go to the news, you go to magazines, you go to newspapers, all you get is one negative thing after another, after another, after another, and how the world is coming to an end.

[21 : 59] And all you're going to get from the world is negative. All you're going to get from the world is depression and hopelessness. And that's why we, as the body of Christ, need to bring the hope and the light into the community.

And it starts in the church as we come together. And that's why people who push away the church, the Christians professing, so-called Christians, who are pushing away the church, no, I don't need that.

No, I don't want that. No, it's boring. It's not interesting and all that. They're there. They're the ones that are low and need to be brought back in. They're the ones who need to be reminded of God's great work.

And that's why God has called us to come together. That's why in Hebrews 10, 23 through 25, he tells us to come together, to encourage each other. The words there are actually provoking one another to good works.

Like we come together so that we can encourage each other and provoke one another and poke and prod each other to go and do good works for the glory of God. And that builds each other up.

[22 : 59] And that's building up the body of Christ. We cannot negate, we cannot ignore the importance of the coming together for the body of Christ.

And part of it is that we can bring people up who are feeling discouraged and say, no, God's still working. He is not done. And in this world, it can feel like God's done. And in the United States of America, it can feel like God's done.

He's done. Well, I'm telling you, God's not done. You know, God is not blessing America and rightfully so, but it doesn't mean that he's done working here.

And he's got a remnant of people, faithful followers who are ready to do the work or should be.

When it comes to ministry, the evaluation process can be the easy part.

It's the doing that is difficult. Anybody can look at a car and say, oh yeah, that's got a flat tire. That stinks. Well, get to it.

[24 : 00] What are you going to do about it? Jack it up, get that tire off, put the spare on. Right? Like, you can evaluate the situation and see all the negativity all you want and all the bad all you want.

What are you doing to change that situation? How are you working? According to data provided by citydata.com, and I'm telling you, I searched.

I searched for updated information. I couldn't find it. So the information that actually I'm sharing with you, I came across like 10 years ago. I could not get my hands on updated information or at least what I could read a little bit of told me that it hadn't changed very much.

So according to the data provided by citydata.com from 2010, so this is a religious census, right? A census on religion. From 2010 on York County.

You know where York County is, right? I hope so. So in York County, I just took a few bits of statistics from it. According to their survey, approximately 5.7% of the population are mainline Protestants.

[25 : 20] They're mainline Protestants. What's that mean? Well, mainline Protestants, now I'm not saying anything by this, I'm just giving you descriptive terms, all right? Mainline Protestants tend to be more liberal in their approach to social issues and ecumenical and their practices.

They're willing to work with anybody for any social good. What we tend to be mainline Protestants in our area, American Baptist churches in the USA, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church,

Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, those would all be mainline Protestant churches.

They said 3.5% of the population are evangelical Protestants. Evangelical Protestants tend to be more conservative in their practice and theology, and they emphasize the importance of being born again.

They tend to be more conservative politically as well, but that doesn't always follow. But anyway, so 5, let's round up, 6% mainline Protestants, 4% evangelical Protestants, let's lump them all together, that's about 10% of Christians.

Those of the population that identify as neither, either they're atheistic or they have no really religious affiliation, puts it about 72% of the population.

[26 : 43] That's a lot. 70% is a big number, that's 7 out of 10, right? 70 out of 100. Or if you think about Acton, Newfield, Shapley, Springville, and Waterboro, you have about 18,125 people, approximately based on data I could find.

So a little over 18,000 people in our direct area of influence. Acton, Newfield, Shapley, Springville, and Waterboro. I didn't include Sanford, you put another 20,000, 24,000 I think, in on that if you wanted to.

But according to those numbers, 18,000 people, and the statistics that I just shared with you, that tells me that about 13,000 people in our area of influence are not Christian, or not religiously affiliated, not choosing to identify in that regard.

13,000 out of 18,000. That's a lot. That is why doing ministry is so hard, especially in this area, especially in New England, the state of Maine.

Maine, oh, I don't want to pull that out because I don't have the direct information of what it was, but they're talking about the bottom five states as far as religious or Christian in identification.

[28 : 04] Maine was like second to last. Vermont, I think, was 27%, Maine was 32% that were religious. low.

That's hard. I remember when I first came to, so, all right, ad lib, off the script for a second. When I first moved to Maine, when we moved to Maine back in 2010, I did an internship at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Topsis, Maine.

And we were having pizza. It was pizza with pastor. And our family, Bonnie and I, went. Judah wasn't around yet. And so we went to the pastor's house, get to know him, family, and the other church members.

By the way, if we ever did pizza with pastor, who loves pizza? I think that would be a great thing. Love to have you guys over for pizza sometime. Not all of you at once. Anyway, so we were talking and he just wanted to get my opinion and ideas about Maine, do I feel like there's hope for New England, so on and so forth.

And he had mentioned, he said, it's typically referred to as frozen ground. When it comes to the gospel. And it's because of how many people are not religious or are hostile towards Christianity.

[29 : 20] And I understand why people would say that. But the great thing about the gospel is that it can heat the ground, it can soften the soil, and it can bring hope to people.

One person at a time. Right? We can't fight culture and society as a whole. But we can take it, the gospel, and let it transform people one person at a time. And so don't give up.

The work is hard, absolutely, but the opportunity is abundant. Matthew 9, verses 37, 38, Jesus said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. We need to be on our knees begging the Lord to help us be the laborers we need to be to bring in the harvest.

God is like, you know, pray the Lord to send out laborers. It wasn't just, Lord, please bring up, send us people that we can send out, missionaries and all that. No, no.

[30 : 25] You know, pray that the people in the church itself will be bold enough to go out and be a laborer in the field to do the work that needs to be done. Finally, in verses 19 and 20 of Nehemiah 2, you've got Nehemiah's confidence in the Lord despite the critics.

Right? Sambalot, Tobiah, Geshem, they were quick to disparage and ridicule the work that was underway. You know, what is this thing that you're doing?

Are you rebelling against the king? They're trying to discourage them, trying to cast doubt in their mind. You know, God's people, we must expect such opposition when we're attempting to do God's

work.

Can I explain that to you? Or just say that to you without having to explain it to you? When you seek to do the work of God for His glory, you're going to have opposition.

It's going to happen. It should happen. Matthew 5, 11, Jesus said, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[31 : 34] 1 Peter 4, 14, if you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. What can a Christian who is faithful to following the Lord expect in their life?

Reviling, persecution, all kinds of evil being uttered against you, insulted for naming the name of Christ? Christ. So expect it.

Right? Expect opposition and hostility. Expect people not to be on board. Expect people maybe not to like you. Now, let me tell you, it's not like, oh, expect the majority of people not to like you.

That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm not saying everybody hates you. But expect some resistance. Expect some opposition. The difficult matter to accept is that not all opposition comes from outside the body.

that's the hardest thing to accept. In 3 John, verses 9 and 10, John writing, he says, I've written something to the church, but Diotrefes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

[32 : 39] So if I come, I'll bring up what he's doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Diotrefes was a horrible man. He was in the body of Christ and was a major influencer and was a detriment to the work of God being done in that church.

So yes, it does happen. And yes, it can happen. And I'm telling you, be careful who you listen to. Where you're getting your information from online, on YouTube, this pastor, that pastor, this ministry, so on, whatever.

There are a lot of wolves out there in sheep's clothing. And you have to be very discerning with some of them because they look good. They seem to pass the eye test.

But I'm telling you, man, their doctrine and their stance in Scripture are absolutely wretched. So you've got to be very, very, very careful and discerning. That's why I think it's so important to have a local body of Bible-believing Christians that you attend with, that you worship with, that you encourage each other with, that you grow together with, because you know these people.

[33 : 54] You all should know each other. You don't know, you know, Joe Pastor somewhere in Atlanta or Tennessee or wherever, Texas, you know, that's, you know, growing big and spouting and writing a million books and, you know, a billionaire and all this stuff.

You don't know that person. You don't know who they are. You don't know where they're at. You've got to be very discerning and very careful because you don't know that person might be a diatrophies.

So when it comes to putting together a vision for a local assembly of believers, we must approach it like Nehemiah. We need to survey the need. We need to encourage the people to work. We need to have confidence in the Lord despite the critics.

We have an awesome opportunity to impact our area for the gospel. people. We just need to get out there and do it. And we need to let God give us wisdom and discernment and a clear direction to go.

I truly believe that God is not done working. And I truly believe he is capable of saving people. We just need to be the faithful laborers out in the harvest, letting God use us for his glory.

[35 : 15] Now I'll quote William Carey one more time. Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God. We serve a great and mighty and awesome God, sovereign ruler of all creation.

If we truly believe that, there's nothing that he cannot do through us. There's nothing he cannot do through his power and his spirit. And I'm telling you, I've attended two funerals in the last seven days.

Both of those individuals lived 12 years longer than any medical professional said was possible. And they lived those 12 years and they glorified God and pointed people to Jesus.

If literally somebody on their deathbed for 12 years can do that, what about those of us who are still alive and around? Can we do it? You bet.

Dear God, Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you for your spirit. Lord, thank you for your people. Thank you for people like Sierra, like Brett, or people who, though they are looking death in the eye, though they're looking at their life being done sooner than later, did not allow that to affect them.

[36 : 37] Lord, there was no complaint from their mouth. There was no doubt, Lord, in your power, your ability to keep them and take them when you so pleased. But Lord, the impact that they had on so many, because they were faithful followers, they were faithful believers, they were, they prayed.

Lord, they sought you and they sought to bring others along. Lord, we want to do it one person at a time, because we know that's the way you operate.

We want to see you change our society, our culture, our community, and we want to do it one person at a time, because we know that's the way you operate as you bring us in connection with people.

Help us to be unashamed to name Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.