

Building Back: Recruit

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Preacher: Richard Marzetti

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Good morning. That was impressive. Thank you so much. And you stopped me from having to do that. So for that, I'm very grateful. So thank you. If you don't know me, I'm the Reverend Richard Marzetti. I'm the Minister of Chatsworth Baptist Church in West Norwood. And as Beatrice said, I'm your moderator, which means I'm walking with you whilst you look for a new minister.

I know we've not been successful so far. We've got to keep praying about this. But we trust that God has got the right person in mind, and they will come in their right time.

So, I received a complaint. Many years ago, I received a complaint from the church's neighbours.

What happened was, is, I don't know if you know Chatsworth Baptist Church, but as you look at it, to the right-hand side of the church, we have a memorial, a war memorial, and it lists all the names of peoples who died during the Great Wars. To the side of that, it's a little bit of a garden, and there are some nice benches for people to come and sit, and I guess it's a peace garden, if you like. Now, what happened is that the, what, for want of a better term, street drinkers, had been hanging out in our peace garden. Now, usually, they, I'm very grateful, they hang out outside St Luke's in West Norwood, which is a much better place for them. But this particular summer, they decided to hang out outside of Chatsworth, and they were drinking away, and they were being a little bit abusive to neighbours. I say a little bit abusive, it probably wasn't a little at all. So the neighbours complained, and they complained to me to me to say, this isn't good, you know, we need to discourage the meeting here, you need to take away your benches. Take away your benches, and they can't, they've got nowhere to sit, and that will be the answer to that problem. So I can't remember, I think I got off the phone thinking, oh goodness, what, you know, what do you do about this? On the one hand, we want to be a good witness to our neighbours. No one should be abusing our neighbours, certainly not on church property. And also the idea that, well, but we want to keep our peace garden, we don't want to take the benches away. I mean, if a church can't be a place where anybody can come, street drinkers or not, anybody should be welcome to come and sit at the church. As it happened, it was the prayer meeting that night. And people came in for the prayer meeting, and I said, we're not praying here tonight, we're going to pray outside. So I took the prayer meeting outside, and we all gathered around the war memorial, and in the garden, where the benches were in the peace garden, and we prayed. We asked for wisdom. I said, Lord, we need wisdom. We don't know what to do about this, but we need wisdom. And we need, Lord, you to answer this. The following day, I can tell you this story, because not all my prayers are answered like this, so that you know, this is the exception.

The following day, I get a phone call from a charity saying, would you like to house a night shelter? And I thought, oh my goodness, wow, what an answer. I just think, there was this thing about, here we are, we've got homeless people outside our church, the neighbours are complaining, and a charity wants us to be part of a night shelter. It seemed an incredible answer to prayer. And I went to the church, I said, this is what's happened, these are complaints I've had, this is the issue we've been having, do we want to house a night shelter?

[3 : 41] And the church were like, yes, that sounds like the right thing. It sounds like an answer to prayer, and this is what we should do. This is before COVID. We did it, it was amazing. We were so blessed to do it, as a church, to welcome people into our building.

I have to make a qualification here as well. The street drinkers weren't part of the people coming into our, it's a different problem. But it happened that from the time we prayed outside, the street drinkers have never been back. We didn't pray that the street drinkers should go. I don't know whether God was preparing us for the phone call the next day, I don't know.

But actually, we saw it as an answer to prayer that actually there is an issue of homelessness and difficulty. And here, this is something that we could do as a church. And so that's what happened. We ran a night shelter, or we were part of this night shelter, a circuit where we hosted one night a week, we cooked people a meal, the people slept in our hall overnight, we provided them breakfast, and they went on their way. Then COVID came, and it stopped.

And Lambeth said, you can't have all these people crowded into the same place at once. It's a it's a danger. It's not. It's health and safety and all that kind of stuff, because of what happened.

Then our heating broke down at church, and we couldn't host it again. And so this year, this January is the first time we've been able to re-host the night shelter again, since before COVID.

[5 : 11] It is an amazing answer to prayer. And this last, not this Wednesday just gone, the Wednesday before is when we started. And there was a moment, there was a moment where I stood and surveyed what was going on around me. To my right, there was a group of people in the kitchen. They were laughing, they were getting the food ready. There was just a really wonderful sense of people here serving at the church. And if you know what our church is like, it's like, if Jesus wants to feed the 5,000, and he wants to tell the disciples to feed the 5,000, Simon Peter today would WhatsApp chats with, you know, because we provide for 5,000. It doesn't matter how many people turn up, there's food for 5,000. Anyway, they're getting all that food ready. It's amazing what's going on there.

I turn around, there's all the people, we have a team of people that come in, especially to set up all the camping beds, because camping beds are provided in the hall. But they're all in a, they're in one of those things where when you get them out, you can never get them back in, you know, those bags, you know. So they're busy getting all the camping beds out of the bags, they're setting up. Everybody has a big bag with a duvet in it and a pillow, they have to make their own beds. But there's a team getting the camp beds out and putting them around the hall.

Then there's a group, there's a team who said, we'd like to welcome people when they come in. We're prepared to chat to people, we need people to welcome them, they know where they can get their bed in, where their bed could be, that they can get tea and a coffee, what time the meal is, if they've got a particular issue. We're not there to solve people's problems, but we're just making sure they feel comfortable when they come in. So we've got a team of people doing that.

At the same time, the woman who is looking after the breakfast in the morning is texting me saying, make sure they know that breakfast is in the other room. And, you know, just at that moment, I was thinking, this is amazing, isn't it? This is the church coming together and everyone is doing their bit. There's people in the kitchen, there's people doing the beds, there's people doing the welcoming, there's people doing the breakfast. And you just, as a minister, to see your church acting in this way. And there was laughter, there was love. And it was just this perfect picture.

I can tell you since then, lots of people come back to me with niggles about people said this and did that. And, you know, so it's not perfect. But at that moment, at that moment, because I'm sure when they came to do this, when Nehemiah, and we read all this amazing thing, we've heard all their names mentioned. There were niggles. Of course, there were niggles that, you know, people working side by side, everything's going on. But it is a beautiful picture, isn't it, of people working together to do God's will. And I think that's what it was when I, when I stood there in the church, and I saw this, and I thought, wow, you know, there's something special about that. And it really blessed my heart to see the church acting in this way. And I'm sure when Nehemiah went around, and he inspected, and he followed everything around, it was extraordinary to see all these, all these people, these different families. And it was a great sense of different people doing their thing. There were priests, there were ordinary people, there were jewelers and perfume makers, there were families and daughters, there were people from Jericho and elsewhere. They were all part of this and doing something, working side by side. And I think this isn't a time for personal agendas. Everybody had to do their own thing. You couldn't say, well, we want our wall to be a little bit higher outside our house. Or we'd like to use a slightly different stone, or, you know, because everything had to match up. You could do your bit, but it had to interlock with your neighbour's bit as well. So you might think, oh, I want to do something special, but it had to fit with next door. You had to work with your neighbour. You couldn't, you could sense that they all did their own bit, but they all had to work on the connectors, on the connections. So they all had to work with their neighbour. They all had to do something. But not everyone. Nehemiah lists in verse 5 that some people weren't willing to do this. Verse 5 says, the next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors. So it's honest, isn't it? It's honest to say we've got this amazing set up, but not everything was perfect. We don't know why. Was it beneath, was the work beneath them?

[10:00] Were they happy to have the deacon's badge, but they weren't willing to serve? I don't know. You know, they didn't get the vision, perhaps. They weren't prepared to do something for others. They weren't prepared to roll up their sleeves, but they weren't prepared to get involved.

Not everybody signs up, do they? You cast a vision, loads of people in, always somebody says, it's not for me. The other sense of all these people working together is, it's an incredible work of administration to have sorted this all out. I mean, it's enough for us to hear all those names and everything that went on, but somebody had to organise it.

You know, when we get to the New Testament and we see the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and we can all get in a little bit of a fuss about speaking in tongues or gifts of prophecy and healing, but amidst all the gifts that are listed is administration.

Administration is a gift of the Holy Spirit. And you think whoever was working on this, Nehemiah or whoever he delegated to sort it out to make sure everybody was working side by side and was doing their bits, that every bit was covered and connected, was full of the Holy Spirit, I think. Somebody had the gift of administration of the Spirit of that time to make sure everything was done properly and in its right place and at its right time. This idea that sometimes we say, well, what happens if the Holy Spirit comes and disrupts our meeting? And, you know, will we all still leave at half past 12 or something or we'll need to carry on?

Sometimes the Holy Spirit is in organisation. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is in preparation and making things run smoothly. After all, the Spirit came to bring order out of chaos. And so we say, well, sometimes when things run well, that is the Holy Spirit's work as well. The Holy Spirit doesn't just need to disrupt us. The Holy Spirit can allow things to run well and it ran well for Nehemiah and as they were doing things here. Now, I don't know when it comes to jobs, whether you have a job that you would prefer. Well, I would prefer to do this. Sometimes at church, and we have this in churches, don't we, that say, people say, well, I don't want to do Sunday school or I don't want to come and speak at the front or I don't want to make tea. I wasn't part of this conversation, but I heard it when someone was asked to make tea. It wasn't at Chatsworth, so you don't judge Chatsworth.

[12 : 32] It was another church. Someone was asked to make tea and the person's response was, I need to go home and pray about it. Sometimes we can be so heavenly minded, can't we? We're no earthly good. Sometimes you just got to roll up your sleeves and get on with it. You know, this was what my mum was like. My mum was the sort of person who'd be quite happy to do the cleaning.

She'd get in early to do the cleaning. She ran a gardening team at her last church where they were remaking an area of the church garden. On a Friday, she cooked for the homeless and they had about 90 people come for a meal and my mum would organise a kitchen and then on Sunday she would preach. She wasn't the preacher, she was just a member of the church. But her mantra was, if it needs doing, I'm willing to do it. I'm willing to roll up my sleeves and do it.

And I think when, perhaps when the list of jobs came out for sorting out the wall in Nehemiah 3 and it's all listed, people would say, well, I want to volunteer to do the Sheep Gate because the Sheep Gate was right next to the temple. And the Sheep Gate perhaps had a little bit of notoriety to it, perhaps because it was next to the temple, perhaps it was considered a special place.

It's of course where the animals would come into the temple before they were slaughtered. So perhaps it had a place of prestige. But when we read through the passage, we read that somebody did the Dungate. You know, and the clue is in the name, isn't it? The Dungate. Someone did the Dungate.

Someone had to cover their nose and, you know, someone's got to clean the toilets. Someone's got to do the difficult jobs. Someone's got to do the dirty jobs. Somebody, I don't know, were they told or did they volunteer? We don't know. But somebody, somebody did the Dungate and what was around there.

[14 : 31] The perfume maker. And he said in the goldsmith, in my translation, also jewellery maker. Why are they listed? That's a really interesting thing as well. Because I think this idea, when you come to think, well, when we need to do this job, we need certain people. You know, well, we need builders. But in Nehemiah 3, we listed a whole list of families. We listed daughters who were willing to muck in as well. And they wanted to do their bit. And then the author of this account says, no, there was also a jewellery maker and there was a perfume maker. And I think, well, the perfume maker, what's their most important thing? Probably their nose. You know, to be able to judge what's a good smell. How do you make something that's going to smell good? And they're doing building work with all the dust getting up their nostrils and actually could affect their future business. Then you've got the goldsmith or the jewellery maker who presumably needs soft hands to be able to. And here they are being involved with perhaps in a stone quarry and making stones out and banging things and crashing things and building things when actually they need their hands for their work.

But the Raiders definitely wants us to know that they were willing to get involved. That even though perhaps this might affect them in the future, they were willing to think, this is what I want to do. This is part of something I want to be involved with.

And I'm willing to make that sacrifice to come and be part of what I think God is doing. Of course, when we come to scripture and we read much wider, we begin to realise, of course, that God is team. Having seen this team at work and everybody taking part in this incredible administration and all these different people being involved and people being willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved, even if it's not their expertise area. But we understand, don't we, God is three in one. God works as team. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God works in cohesion.

We know that Jesus called 12 disciples to work as a team and some of them had particular roles. I mean, Judas was looked after the kitty. He was the treasurer, wasn't he? Some of the disciples had particular roles. Early in the book of Acts, the disciples are called out as the widows are being neglected. And so the disciples call some people together and they assign people to take on the job of looking after, making sure the widows are fed and looked after. Some people had needed particular roles. There needed to be some proper organisation to make these things work. And other people were found to have a good role to play. Some people were gifted in particular areas.

We know Paul later writes to the church and likens us to a body, each person playing a part and is significant in their own way. And the idea, of course, that if one person doesn't do their role, then it affects everybody else. Everybody is there to play a part. And here it is in our church as well. This is what God calls us to do.

[17 : 42] And then you think, well, it's a lot of names. Why couldn't they have just said, you know what, it would have made it easier for our reader. And then a whole load of people came together and we put the wall together. Why list all the names? You know, it's that idea of when you walk in perhaps into a new hospital wing, it's been named after the benefactor or you walk into the entrance and all the list of all the contractors are there, people who were involved in the project or, I don't know, you've sponsored a penguin at the zoo and you get your name on the wall or you get sent a certificate to say you were involved in something.

And there is that sense, isn't there, that actually the author wants everyone to know who who was there? Who was there? Who was involved? Maybe it was important for families in the future to look back and say, well, yeah, my family was part of this. My family was part of what went on here.

Yeah, we were there right from the very beginning. We were part of that. We did that. But I think it's also a sense, it's a list of names to say, these are the people who responded to the will of God. These are the people who were willing to start up. When we hear about the people that weren't willing, here is a list of the people who were willing. These are the list of the people who were willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved. And when we consider our church and our mission and who we are and where we are and where we're going, and perhaps you're thinking yourself about your church is, where do I fit in? What part do I play? Is there something that needs doing?

Is there somewhere where I really do need to roll up my sleeves and chip in? Have I caught the vision of what I believe this church is here for? Am I willing to be part of it? Am I willing to, for my name to be recorded in what God is doing here? Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you that you don't want us to do things in isolation, that we're not to be lone rangers, that you long for us to take our part, play our part, work with our neighbour.

[20 : 15] And there's tremendous joy in that. Lord, just thinking about what pride they must have felt when they stood back at the end and they saw what had been finished, Lord Jesus, and to think, I was part of that. And Lord, the joy you gave in people and allowing them to be part of this.

And the joy, Lord, you give us for being willing, to be willing and to be invited to be part of your church and your people in your place, to be part of what you're doing in Hearn Hill.

Lord, continue to direct by your Spirit. May your Holy Spirit be in the organisation here in administration. May your Holy Spirit be involved in all the areas of the church that they may fit together. May your Spirit continue to lead this place and this people, Lord, we pray, in what they are building. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.